MARKET NOTE

Khoros Engage: Lithium + Spredfast Merger Delivers on Its Promise; Unveils Ambitious Road Map

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EXECUTIVE SNAPSHOT

FIGURE 1

Executive Snapshot: Khoros Engage 2019

This IDC Market Note reviews announcements made at the inaugural Khoros Engage conference. Khoros, created from the September 2018 merger of Lithium + Spredfast, brought together 500+ social, community, and customer care leaders at its first conference under the Khoros name. The focus was on new innovations, expansion, and continued integration of marketing, care, and community, as well as highlighting of an array of new connectors and features, including artificial intelligence (AI). Khoros Engage was held in Austin, Texas, on September 9–11, 2019.

Key Takeaways

- Khoros, the merger of Lithium + Spredfast, is successfully growing and merging features, expanding abilities, and has a very enthusiastic customer base covering a wide array of verticals.

- The road map focuses on improving existing features while adding new features including those reliant on AI and machine learning (ML) across marketing, enterprise communities, and customer care.

- Greater integrations from an increasingly rich API to foster integrations with key IT and marketing applications as seen by customers provide greater demonstratable value to the enterprise with Khoros.

- The customer base, mostly originating from Spredfast and Lithium users, was exceptionally positive about the event and the announcements. Clearly, Khoros has been effectively communicating with them during the transitions, delivering on some key feature enhancements prior to the event.

Source: IDC, 2019

IN THIS MARKET NOTE

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Event Highlights

The event itself may have been the biggest takeaway. The September 2018 merger of Lithium (enterprise communities and social customer care) and Spredfast (social marketing, listening, and customer care) rebranded the combined firms as Khoros earlier this year. Named for the traditional Greek chorus that keeps the audience informed and engaged, Khoros takes that meaning to the digital age.

Khoros is growing and retaining users and cited that its top 25 communities are driving increased views from 550 million unique visitors creating 2.4 million page views and 18 million user posts resulting in 680 million views of accepted solutions.

Its newly unveiled road map focuses on improving existing features while adding new features, including those reliant on artificial intelligence and machine learning (ML). A core vision that Khoros is also executing is to create a conversational dashboard that integrates its communities, marketing, and customer care solutions to fully measure the impact of digital engagements across different platforms.

Key announcements from the event are discussed in the sections that follow.

Marketing

The marketing road map is focused on the planning, organizing, governing, and measuring of social media. This includes improvements in analytics, a unified view of campaign performance across platforms, and improved governance and compliance abilities. Other key announcements include:

- Expanded paid content planning and analytics driving unified campaign performance insights
- Aligning analytics with custom calculations, enabling companies to define measurement consistently across their business
- Deeper governance and compliance capabilities

Recent releases also included:

- LinkedIn updates to video, multiphoto posts, and mentions
- Facebook carousel support
- Instagram video support
- Advanced analytics for Twitter and Instagram Story Chapters

Communities

Road map releases in communities are focused around improved experience for both users and administrators – engagement, management, and embedding community in every customer interaction. Key announcements included:

- Content syndication of community pages to any digital channel (web, ecommerce, chat, social, etc.) to improve click-to-content and highly relevant engagement
- Improved user and content moderation tools and spam management
- In-community messaging
- Improved analytics on content and user activity
- Platform API and SDK enhancements to embed both communities in applications

Recent releases also included:

- Product association (with content/groups)
- Group hubs
- Q&A syndication to other portions of your online properties
- Mobile video uploads
- Real-time virus scanning
- Notification enhancements
- Improved search

Customer Care

Customer care road map themes include engaging customers wherever they are, optimizing agent efficiency through automation, providing deeper and more actionable insights, and protecting your brand (data privacy and regulatory requirements). New announcements included:

- Enhanced structured message support for agents
- Expanded omni-channel CSAT and NPS surveys across multiple social sites, including private messaging
- Proactive messaging/chat capability in addition to branded mobile and reactive messaging
- Deep messaging analytics for determination of digital agent utilization and efficiency
- Metadata enhancements at conversation and post level

Recent announcements also include:

- Support for chatbots
- Automation framework for bot orchestration
- New messaging and review channels including Apple Business Chat and Google Business Messages
- Continued post-merger solution integration, including single sign-on (SSO) across all Khoros solutions
- Enhanced application governance

IDC'S POINT OF VIEW

There is a lot of brand love from the Khoros faithful. The name, still less than a year old, has been adopted by its base – something rare in the age of rebranding. Khoros is early to the trend to bring the conversational assets of marketing, enterprise communities, and customer care together into one dashboard. It is supporting API extensions to integrate CRMs and other core systems. This integration delivers exponentially more value to client companies compared with a series of standalone or loosely integrated tools.

Khoros is getting closer to fully accomplishing this but not without a few growing pains. It is under pressure to rapidly integrate Spredfast and Lithium Technologies, add AI, and meet the emerging demands of the base – and not break anything along the way. It is starting to make good in all these areas.

What Khoros lacks is native social listening. Khoros' open APIs make the company's Brandwatch, Synthesio, and NetBase partnerships very appealing with consumer research and audience intelligence, but if there is a shortcoming, this is it.

While Spredfast and Lithium had their own conferences in previous years, this first blended conference was well organized and executed at a venue that despite its large size, simply worked well.

Now a Word on Behalf of the Attendees

A theme heard at Khoros Engage was one IDC has heard at way too many other social and community vendor events: The corporate practitioners of social media and enterprise communities are overworked in high-stress jobs that few in the enterprise understand. ("So, you play with Facebook all day?") In reality, these channels never take a break, running 24 x 7 x 365, and time to respond is critical.

For many attendees, these conferences are both educational and therapeutic, reminding them they are not alone. In addition to the content, hands-on learning, and sharing best practices, this made Engage even more important for the base. Social and community leadership should not be a lifestyle, it should be a sustainable career. Khoros has recognized this, and in fairness, there is only so much AI or any company can do, but conference like Engage help significantly. Companies need to understand the impact of their prospects, partners, and customers in the social channels where they operate and where they need to operate.

Speaking of Good Customer Experience

Customer experience and new ways of measuring experiences are something that permeates Khoros' releases and road map. It has been delivering early on a number of key rollouts across the product line, some mentioned in this document.

Most impressive is the direction of AI. From chatbots that can be agent and end-customer trained to author enrichment features, tagging, and other automations, the road map makes sense. It is also helping drive brand-owned messaging solutions across the brand channels in a way that provides admin teams with granular controls. This includes web chat, application chat, and social channels – all can leverage the same intelligence. This results in strong metrics and potential early warning for issues and successes as all are working from the same base of knowledge.

Syndicated content allows enterprises to "syndicate" their own content in their communities, so you can increase SEO and click-throughs to relevant content.

Khoros' strategic direction is strong, and its "all-ways connected" mantra is starting to emerge as a principal development concept as well as a brand motto.

LEARN MORE

Related Research

- *Social Media, Communities, and Collaboration: The Rise of the Social Enterprise* (IDC #US44662419, September 2019)
- *Worldwide Enterprise Social Network Applications Market Shares, 2018: Growing Need for Collaborative Communities* (IDC #US44663219, July 2019)
- *Worldwide Enterprise Social Network Applications Forecast, 2019-2023: Conversations on Customer's Terms* (IDC #US44663119, July 2019)

Synopsis

This IDC Market Note reviews announcements made at the inaugural Khoros Engage conference. The Khoros Engage conference is the first conference since the merger of Lithium and Spredfast. Over 500 enthusiastic enterprise users saw the new road map covering the development of a conversational enterprise, including marketing, customer care, and communities. The base was very positive around the road map features, especially around AI, deeper integrations with other platforms in the marketing, and IT stack that increases the demonstratable value of Khoros (and communities and social media) to the enterprise.

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