



Connecting the Dots: Hootsuite's Christopher Gora on the Future of Social Media

Interviews and Profiles

Technology, Privacy, and eCommerce





It was a normal day at the office when Christopher Gora, director of legal affairs at the Canadian-based social media company Hootsuite, attended a meeting where a colleague presented a digital map of “the social media universe” — a visual representation of every company operating in some capacity in the industry, with connecting lines and arrows showcasing both integrations and impact.

“What we found was that the chart was completely incomprehensible,” Gora states. “On an 8 x 10, there were probably about 400 names on it. What it shows is how much opportunity lies in the connections we make on new and innovative platforms hitting the market. That’s the future of social media, and why Hootsuite has been so successful.”

Since joining the company in 2014, Gora has played a pivotal role in supporting the company as it maneuvers through an increasingly fluid digital market. Gone are the days when your average social media user solely engages with big name brands like Facebook and Twitter. Globalization has fostered a new age of targeted location- and interest-based platforms, giving rise to more ways than ever for the modern social media consumer to connect — and that number just keeps growing.

Amid this global expansion is Hootsuite, a social media management platform that aggregates all of your company’s accounts into one easy-to-use dashboard. Hootsuite actively engages nearly 16 million users worldwide, showcasing the power of organization in an increasingly diverse social media environment. However, to Gora, what makes the company unique is its intrinsic drive to adapt and evolve.

So when the next Instagram hits the market, the Hootsuite legal team stands ready to advise in the expansion of the company’s portfolio.

“It’s what attracted me to the company. What I learned after starting here is change is a part of our DNA. We’re constantly thinking about how to make our customer experience better, and part of that is anticipating their needs,” he explains.

As any in-house counsel can attest, anticipation is a term most easily associated with risk. However, Gora doesn’t necessarily see it this way. While he concedes that operating in a developing

regulatory space can at times be challenging, he believes in the power of communication to bring the world closer together.

A well-rounded education

When speaking with Gora, you begin to get a sense of his willingness to learn and his eagerness to explore new opportunities. In fact, throughout his career, he has made a number of transitions that have contributed to his diverse perspective: from mechanical engineering to communications, from communications to private practice, from private practice to president, and from president to in-house.

"As a child, I always thought I was headed into either medicine or engineering, but that was the push-pull of my parents," Gora explains. "I realized that I had an interest in the media, and that I wanted to work with risk takers. I guess ironically here I am working for a global digital company like Hootsuite."

After graduating from the University of Windsor, where he studied law, Gora began a decade's long tenure in private practice, first at Lawson Lundell LLP and then later at Vancouver-based Farris, Vaughan, Willis & Murphy LLP. While he enjoyed the varied network of potential clients, Gora wanted a more hands-on working environment. That's when an opportunity arose to serve as president of Clean Power Systems Incorporated. The experience was a deep dive into the world of business management.

"I got some very interesting exposure to running a business, and a direct perspective to the kinds of operations that my clients were engaged in," Gora explains.

So when he moved back to a smaller, more boutique firm, he quickly realized that he craved the more strategic aspects of business operations. He resolved that if the right company came along, offering a position in-house, he would jump at the opportunity.

"Because we're sitting in business meetings, we're able to identify gaps and mitigate risk as we go along.

— *Christopher Gora, Director of Legal Affairs, Hootsuite*

His chance would come in 2014, when Hootsuite Head of Legal Paula Pepin went on maternity leave. "It was the perfect opportunity to experience a different side of the law. As soon as I discovered the complexity of in-house legal operations, especially in a company as innovative as Hootsuite, I knew it was worth pursuing," Gora recalls.

Swiss Army knife

Gora describes Hootsuite as social media's Swiss Army knife — a multi-tool for any company seeking to increase efficiency and strengthen its global presence. However, in an increasingly competitive global market, remaining ahead of the curve is no simple task. To mitigate risk, the legal department must play a strategic role from the early stages of project development through to platform integration. And Gora must remain vigilant to ensure that growth doesn't inadvertently lead to crisis.

This is a two-pronged process. "First, the business standpoint: How do we stay ahead of our competitors? The product and business development teams work to ensure that we have a good

view of the market so that we can build, buy, or partner to remain in demand,” Gora notes.

Second, the legal standpoint: What factors play into this decision? Gora explains that to be successful in the modern digital climate, companies cannot silo the legal department.

“Because we’re sitting in business meetings, we’re able to identify gaps and mitigate risk as we go along,” he explains.

Gora takes this a step further, encouraging his team to branch out of their everyday responsibilities to meet with colleagues in different departments. Building relationships over something as simple as a cup of coffee, he says, can pay in dividends when a potential red flag arises.

“So the more we integrate, the more everyone wins.

— *Christopher Gora, Director of Legal Affairs, Hootsuite*

And moving into 2018, Gora argues that these red flags — especially with regard to data protection — will be increasingly top-of-mind for companies like Hootsuite that handle data. As regulators continue to shine a spotlight on existing legislation like the Canadian Anti-Spam Law, and impending legislation like the European General Data Protection Regulation, Gora must be mindful that international expansion comes with a high watermark.

“We’ve increased our level of sophistication,” he states. “We realized that international expansion requires a multi-stakeholder approach so that everyone understands the requirements. It’s amazing how complex and even byzantine something as seemingly straightforward as banking arrangements can be.”

However, this won’t slow down Hootsuite’s momentum. The company recently announced two strategic integrations with Adobe and Hubspot. To Gora, this represents an enormous step toward becoming social media’s first one-stop-shop. Imagine, for a moment, the creative strength of the Adobe suite integrated with the power of the Hubspot inbound machine — all in one, easy to use platform. “This is where the industry is going, and we’re leading the charge,” Gora explains.

It’s a win-win scenario for all involved. On behalf of partners like Adobe and Hubspot, the integration expands the number of customers using their services. And for Hootsuite, providing more opportunities for integration makes their platform more valuable to customers worldwide. “It’s about stickiness. It’s about showing customers that we can share intelligence more easily and target messaging more effectively. So the more we integrate, the more everyone wins,” says Gora.

As Gora and the Hootsuite legal team continue to pave the way for digital innovation in the industry, he admits that there is no magic crystal ball to the future. In fact, due to the rapid development of new technologies, the company’s product offerings may look very different in five years.

However, one thing is for certain, Hootsuite will stay true to its four guiding mission statements: “grit in all we do,” “building a better way,” “passion for customer success,” and “leading with humility.” And Gora will be there, striving to connect the dots in an expanding social media universe.

“My journey at Hootsuite is far from over,” he says.

Getting to know.... Christopher Gora

Do you have any hobbies? What do you do in your spare time?

Music is my hobby. I'm a member of a band called Phat Tank. We create musical experiences, meaning concept concerts. Because we all have day jobs, it can take a while to create each one but it's a lot of fun.

Where are you going for your next vacation?

Probably going to be a monstrous road biking trip to Italy in the Dolomites in the spring, followed by some recovery at lower elevations with some great food.

If you could have dinner with anyone living or dead, who would it be?

I would really like to get some insight into Elon Musk's brain and I just think he's at the forefront of so many potentially world-changing technologies, so I think it would be fascinating to sit down with him and go over the Proust Questionnaire.

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