

How to implement wiki in your company

Does your company tap into your employees' full potential?

Every manager and business owner asks themselves if they are creating the optimal work environment for their employees. It is widely believed that employees make up the most important part of any business and you should ask yourself how to make this belief a reality.

Today the heads of organizations often face a number of problems at work. Each of us instinctively feels that working through these problems allows both the employees and the organization to gain a lot.

Problems that companies regularly encounter:

1. When an employee leaves a company they take their knowledge with them.
2. Integrating a new employee into the working environment often results in disruption for the other employees.
3. Even the shortest absence of an employee results in difficulties in accessing the materials on which that person worked.
4. Top performers do not have time to share their knowledge.
5. Ideas are not being put into action and are instead getting lost in daily affairs.
6. Employees lose a great deal of time everyday just searching for information.
7. Employees need inspiration, a place where they can get ideas.
8. Documents relating to current projects are continually out of date.
9. The whole team complains about the excessive amount of emails they receive.
10. It is difficult to find experts in your organization.

Over the past few years I have managed organizations and projects which have changed dramatically. I encountered all of the problems listed above. I decided to take up wiki software to work more effectively on current projects. I started out using MediaWiki and then moved on to Doku Wiki, then I discovered a number of commercial wiki systems and systems which could compete with wikis. For me, the wiki philosophy is the quintessence of the possibilities of the internet; communication in order to create synergy.

Key benefits of wiki implementation

Wiki solves many of the problems of modern businesses, particularly in the areas of knowledge management, teamwork, document preparation, quality management, marketing and PR.

Wiki implementation allows companies to:

1. Create a sense of teamwork
2. Manage large quantities of information
3. Inspire employees to share their knowledge
4. Create flexible knowledge bases with no limits
5. Build and image of an open, innovative organization

Wiki is sometimes used as a central base linking all knowledge bases in a company. We are talking with more and more clients about projects linking wiki with Lotus Notes, SharePoint and other solutions. Wiki fulfils the role of an integral component of knowledge management perfectly.

What is wiki?

Wikipedia is the world's largest encyclopedia created by millions of internet users from all over the world. We can even go as far as to say that Wikipedia is the biggest knowledge management project ever attempted by man. Wikipedia works using the wiki mechanism.

Wiki is a private webpage designed to encourage and facilitate teamwork. Traditional web pages are only created for viewing, whereas wiki pages can be edited and updated by anyone and new pages can be added. Wiki does not require knowledge of HTML.

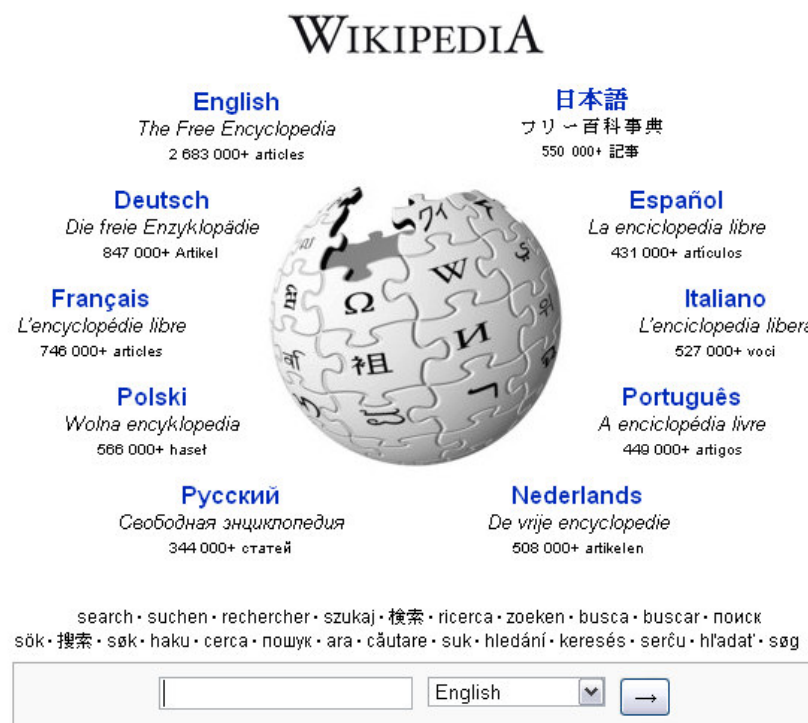


Figure 1 – Wikipedia, the most famous wiki

What are the most common wiki uses?

The flexibility of wiki can sometimes be a barrier to its implementation. I will therefore present the most common wiki uses below; maybe they can act as inspiration.

- Knowledge management- collecting, refining and co-creation of corporate knowledge.
- Intranet for small and medium businesses (e.g. rules, procedures, guides, product descriptions).
- Project management- current information about the state of the project, collaboration on project documentation, creation of development plans.
- Group cooperation- the wiki could be a major tool in the organization of teamwork. It allows you to create projects, to-do lists, calendars, meeting agendas and notes.



- Support- for users of products and technical support. It is also useful for gathering feedback about problems and services.
- E-learning- creation of dictionaries, courses and tutorials.

Wiki and Enterprise 2.0

Enterprise 2.0 is a popular concept in corporate jargon. This trend is directly related to the use of wiki in the firm. Wiki is regarded as one of the biggest trends in Enterprise 2.0 tools. But what is Enterprise 2.0? It is a concept which calls for the use of social networking web applications as tools for corporate teamwork.

Enterprise 2.0 for employees

Meet Charlie. Charlie works in a big glass office building but works a lot better on the big comfortable couch in his apartment. Charlie works in a small team of five people, each in different continents. When one of his colleagues goes home from work in Rio de Janeiro another one starts to read his emails over breakfast in Melbourne. If the person in Rio forgets something, the worker in Melbourne has to wait all day. This has made email reading over breakfast a way of life.

Managing a team of people who have never met and who live in different time zones is a daily challenge for our hero.

Charlie has a boss that he has never met in person but with whom he has contact via the RSS feed of the boss' blog. Charlie also has a blog. Charlie's blog is related to the project and is therefore monitored by his boss, again via RSS feeds. Charlie's team track the project's progress along with 130 other people who are interested in topics presented in the project.

Charlie uses Basecamp to control the conduct of the project (<http://www.basecamp.com/>). It assigns tasks and monitors the degree of their completion and is also an insight into the availability of resources. This software which enables him to manage all aspects of projects costs exactly \$49 per month. It means that he doesn't have to bother with technicalities when a new member joins the team. He simply creates that person an account on Basecamp. In addition, Basecamp also has an RSS feed function which keeps Charlie informed of proceedings.

Group creation and planning of documents greatly reduces Charlie's work load. Thanks to the commitment of many different people who edit these documents, the result is often better thought out. With the channel feed Charlie is notified as soon as a new version of a document on his watch list is saved.

At the weekend Charlie likes to search for inspiration on the web. He finds interesting links in corporate link databases and uses the tags assigned to these links to quickly and easily find the ones which interest him. Using this database always inspires Charlie when he has the difficult task of creating something from scratch. Charlie reports interesting information which he finds to his colleagues. In a system like this used by several thousand people, there is always something that you haven't already heard of. And of course, Charlie is informed of all new interesting links via RSS feed.

Within Charlie's organization there are several recognized authorities, among which are Charlie's mentors. Carrol usually has a lot to say but suffers from a constant lack of time. Her knowledge and



experience have made a great impression on Charlie and she decides to share this knowledge in a simple, convenient way via corporate podcasts. She publishes the podcasts on her blog. When she publishes a new podcast the employees are notified via RSS. Charlie has downloaded the free web application Juice (<http://juicereceiver.sourceforge.net>) which downloads podcasts and uploads them to your MP3 player. Now Charlie can use his mentor's knowledge in his everyday work by listening to her podcasts.

Charlie also has an account on LinkedIn. He's not alone. All of his friends from the company have LinkedIn accounts. Charlie likes LinkedIn because he found his job there. A headhunter from his organization was looking through profiles of people with appropriate expertise. Charlie's profile contained a lot of references so the headhunter contacted them and quickly ascertained that Charlie was the right person for the job. He contacted Charlie through the internal mail system and invited him for a meeting. The headhunter has spent several hours on LinkedIn every day since then.

Charlie meticulously added information such as interesting tags, professional experience and projects in which he participated. He normally establishes 1-2 links per week with people interested in working in his field.

Several months previously Charlie used software such as Microsoft Office. He sent files by email which were sometimes lost or were not the most up to date version. Sometimes another employee had changed something in the meantime and it was then necessary to join together the two versions of the files. He tried to maintain the current projects but this resulted in the need for constant updating of data in MS Projects. He allocated tasks by email which often resulted in an overload or under-utilization of resources. He spent a lot of time enquiring about the status of the projects. When he had a problem he sent out emails in the hope that someone would be able to share their knowledge at that moment.

Now Charlie mainly uses web applications which provide him with maximum access to information and time saving facilities. Work on projects takes place 24 hours per day. By using a wiki for cooperation all workers always have access to the most up to date information. Employees begin the working day by checking the RSS reader and have a complete picture of what their colleagues worked on while they slept within minutes.

If someone asked Charlie which application was his favorite he would say Firefox. His work begins with running a web browser and all of the information he requires can be accessed using such a browser.

If someone asked Charlie what Enterprise 2.0 was he would say that it's a popular buzzword but that it's basically the use of social software within the company. It comprises software which is easy to use and which allows users to build their own structure of an organization's intranet with ready-made elements.

This elaboration was based on Scott Gavina's "Meet Charlie" with the author's permission.

How quickly we can integrate a new employee into the team

By using a wiki, employees can collect and share information that others need. On the wiki you can find information on projects, policies, research, but also useful information on daily work practices such as procedures, settlements, rules for the conduct of meetings, hardware configuration etc. A new employee's first day can be devoted entirely to familiarizing him/herself with the wiki. The employee acquires information and recognizes previous ideas, initiatives and projects. In this way the work of the current employees is not affected by the new arrival as he/she can find much of the necessary information on the wiki.

No time to implement great ideas

The user can save his/her idea in the Ideas section of the wiki. Maybe one day you or another member of the team will come back to it. The most creative companies record every idea. Wiki acts as a database for gathering ideas and rewarding their authors, encouraging the exchange of knowledge.

An employee leaves the company

The wiki enables all employees to describe their ideas, inspiration, projects, documents and procedures. Therefore the employee's departure will be a much smaller loss to the team and the company in general and his successor will have access to the materials on which he worked and the knowledge he accumulated.

Looking for sources of inspiration

It is not always easy to create an original concept under stressful conditions. When you have access to hundreds of thousands of previously recorded ideas suddenly things become much easier. Sometimes you only need to glance at the records of last year's brain storming to inspire some interesting solutions. Using the wiki makes all the meetings and brainstorming worthwhile.

Losing a lot of time looking for information on a daily basis

Team members record information in different formats which can be difficult to share and search through. BusinessWiki allows integration with Office so employees can easily publish their information. Once published this information is easy to reach. Each document has a change history function which also shows the discussions which were held during the creation progress.

Project documentation is out of date

For managers it is essential to have access to the latest design documents and to provide access to such documents to the entire team. Wiki allows easy project documentation throughout ongoing work on the project, meaning team members always have access to the most up-to-date information.

Project collaboration

Problem

Team members are in different locations and some of them are working remotely or outside of office hours. Despite frequent video calls and emails it is difficult to maintain a clear picture of the project. Team members don't know who is doing what at any particular time.

Solutions

1. Create a separate wiki for the project or project site.
2. Ask participants to create their own personal page on the wiki. The personal page allows every member of the team to describe their role in the project and can also be used to post links, photos of past projects, as well as other things which may be useful to others.
3. Create a summary page for the project.
4. Describe the project objectives and the milestones.
5. Create a page with links to all the personal pages.
6. Add links to meeting notes, agendas, contracts and all related materials to this page.
7. Create an Official Status page for the project where all team members will be able to record the current status of the project.

Feedback

1. All of the information related to the project is stored in one place and is accessible from anywhere at any time.
2. Information is always up to date.
3. The project manager no longer has to write reports as the Official Status page fulfills this role.
4. New members of the project team can quickly integrate using the information provided about the history and current status of the project.
5. After completion of the project information remains within the wiki and can be used at a later date for future projects.
6. Other teams have access to the knowledge provided by the project team.

Too many emails

Problem

Employees regularly send plans, reports and project updates. These messages are sent to all workers in a particular group, or sometimes to every single employee causing an overload of information for workers. Sometimes people open emails only to find that the content has nothing to do with them. Similarly, workers regularly delete emails they shouldn't thinking that they are irrelevant to them. The sheer quantity of emails sent rarely reflects the actual need for such emails.

Project managers suffer the most. They receive a copy of every message and waste a lot of time reading and evaluating this information.

Solutions

1. Create a separate wiki for each project and invite the workers to use it.
2. Create a separate page to discuss issues related to the different areas of the project.

- The workers themselves decide which discussions they want to be involved in and what interests them.
- The likelihood of forgetting important information decreases.
- The burden of unnecessary information decreases so workers' comfort increases.
- The mail server's load decreases.
- Documents are always up to date and workers can also refer back to previous document versions. They can also track any future changes to the document.
- All information is now easy to search through, unlike an inbox.
- After the discussion the result is still available to all.

Living Internet

Problem

The content of your intranet is out of date. People keep sending each other emails asking the same questions.

Solutions

1. Start to publish reports, documentation and procedures on the easy to update wiki.
2. Let employees be involved in answering questions posed on the wiki.
3. Give everyone a sense of community by encouraging them to edit, update and improve the content of the wiki.
4. Create a company dictionary containing specific vocabulary used within the company.

Feedback

- Information is easy to find using the search facility.
- Information is always up to date.
- Employees are involved in the creation of the knowledge base.
- New employees quickly familiarize themselves with the company.
- Employees who leave the company leave their knowledge behind.
- Errors in documents are continually corrected by those who use them.
- Experts are less detached from their work. Any answers to questions that they have provided are available on the wiki for others to use at any time so they are not continuously interrupted.

Knowledge Base

Problem

When an employee leaves a company they take their knowledge with them. New employees face a long period of integration and make a lot of mistakes.

Solutions

1. Create a corporate knowledge base and encourage employees to publish in it.
2. Allow specialists to respond to questions via the wiki.
3. Encourage workers to publish notes and conclusions of projects for everyone else to see.
4. Project groups can ask and answer questions on the wiki.
5. HR, Administration and PR publish their guidelines on the wiki on an ongoing basis.
6. Give everyone a sense of community by encouraging them to edit, update and improve the content of the wiki.

- An employee leaving the company leaves his/her knowledge behind for others to use.
- New employees benefit from the knowledge of their colleagues.
- The company learns from its mistakes which are documented on the wiki.
- New employees learn about previous projects, guidelines for individual departments and answers to FAQs.

Wiki FAQs

Why use a wiki to share knowledge?

Wikipedia is the largest jointly created knowledge base in the world. The philosophy which we use and the tool on which it is based come directly from the Wikipedia phenomenon. Using wiki mechanisms we can not only obtain high quality knowledge but also a high degree of employee involvement unobtainable by other methods. Wiki builds long term value in every team member, all of whom become part of the knowledge sharing community.

Global network or local wiki?

Creating a global knowledge sharing system (or any other intranet) usually requires all members to meet the right standard. However, it appears that a significant part of knowledge exchange occurs within departments and project teams. Wiki is also used in conjunction with the global intranet departments (marketing, PR, HR Q&A, R&D) where knowledge exchange is particularly important.

Why should wiki succeed where other systems fail?

Many systems are not accepted because employees feel that the systems are imposed on them and that they must fit around the system. Wiki allows each team to create its own rules on knowledge exchange. Wiki is a simple and flexible mechanism which adapts to an organization's culture and behavior. The team uses the functions of the wiki which really work for them. If you have tried and failed to implement internal systems for organizing the work of departments or the company as a whole you should try wiki. It is also worth remembering that many people are already familiar with the workings of wikis thanks to Wikipedia. For these people using a wiki for work purposes will be simple and natural.