

## 8 hours is enough time to successfully implement a wiki

***Wiki software is gaining popularity as a tool for knowledge exchange and the organization of group work. In this article we will share practical methods for improved collaboration in your team.***

8 hours is the amount of time needed to run the wiki software, introduce some basic information, train staff in wiki usage and run your corporate center for knowledge sharing and teamwork.

### ***Hour 1***

The first thing to do is to choose one of the many wikis available on the market.

I can choose to:

1. Download a completely free of charge Open Source type of wiki. Pros- you pay nothing. Cons- Someone has to deal with all the technical procedures.
2. Purchase a wiki from a company offering dedicated wiki implementation. Pros- the wiki will be tailored to your needs. Cons- the implementation will take at least a week and will be quite expensive.
3. Purchase access to the software (SaaS licence). Pros- you can start using the wiki immediately and only pay a low monthly fee. Cons- data is stored on external servers.
4. Purchase a commercial version of the wiki to install on your server. Pros- one-time fee and quick start up. Cons- you have to take care of the wiki's security.

I choose the 3<sup>rd</sup> point. In 5 minutes I have created my hosted wiki.

### ***Hour 2***

An empty wiki can look pretty scary. We must therefore begin with a structure which reflects what is involved in our organization. To achieve this I create a folder list whose structure corresponds to the most important fields of activity within the organization. Our contributors will be able to develop this later, so it's not worth spending too much time thinking about it at this stage. The structure will be created to save time, just like how files are saved in folders on your hard disk.

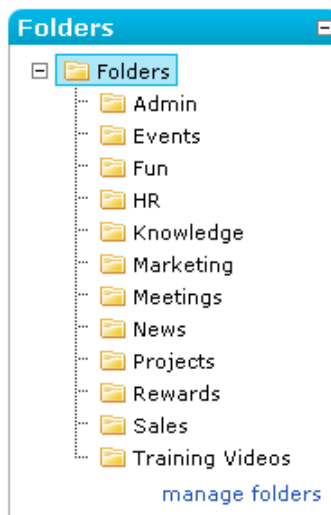


Figure 1- Example wiki structure

Now I create an account on the wiki for each of my colleagues. I only enter basic information as they will add more detail themselves at a later date.

I can add widgets to the wiki main page showing RSS feeds from the company blog, CRM system, project management system and many others. Updates from all of these sources appear on the main page via the RSS feeds. This allows the company to integrate all activity in one location, creating a simple command console. Every employee can personalize their homepage as they wish.

### **Hour 3**

Only 2 hours have passed and I already feel like integrating everything in a single wiki is a good idea. Now for the most difficult part- convincing the others of the wiki's benefits.

When I set up my account I received an email containing advice on how to effectively implement a wiki in my organization. Therefore, let us begin with a pilot meeting. I send an email to all the people interested in the new system and 6 agree to people come- great! The first thing I'll do is tell them about the benefits of using such a system.

The biggest benefits to the team are solutions to our real problems:

**1. 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.

**2. Not having 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.

**3. 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.

**4. 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.

**5. 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.

**6. 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.

## ***Hour 4***

The arguments for the implementation of the wiki are delivered to the team. During the discussion one person is revealed to be opposed to the new system, (this person generally does not like the sound of the new system). This gives me the change to go over the benefits again in more detail and within this hour it is possible to convince a non-believer of the meaningfulness of the project. At the beginning of the meeting I show a 60 second webcast presenting the basic principles of the project, then everyone logs on to the wiki on their laptops to create their accounts and review what has already been added to the wiki. We begin a discussion on what should be included in the wiki.

Suggestions included:

1. Administrative data- technical instructions, emergency contacts, all useful data which is still sometimes lost.
2. A plan for staff holidays visible to all making it easier to plan leave and submit proposals for holiday.
3. Ideas for new activities.
4. Summaries, conclusions and reports of projects so that new and old employees can learn from the mistakes of others.
5. Meeting notes making it easier to enforce what should be done after meetings.
6. A list of places to eat in the area for new employees.
7. Customer information to supplement data from the CRM and facilitate the development of sales to existing customers.
8. Interesting material regarding the competition, links to useful websites and all other information which we want to share.

Most of the proposals are liked by the whole group. The author of the above ideas immediately records his/her idea and attributes it to a folder. Page tags make it easy to find, for example, all pages which require work or are related to a particular client. One hour later we have created a few dozen pages and each meeting attendee feels co-responsible for our work.

## ***Hour 5***

In my organization 7 people are already advocating the wiki. Time to celebrate this first small success. The whole group of wiki fans go to lunch where they discuss further plans of action for the wiki.

## ***Hour 6***

Invitations are sent to all employees asking for their participation in the wiki. They receive a link to the wiki and login details. The 7 guardians of the wiki (from different departments of the organization) are also mentioned in this email. During this hour they provide assistance for those who are encountering the workings of a wiki for the first time. Some people write comments on pages and others add details which had been forgotten.

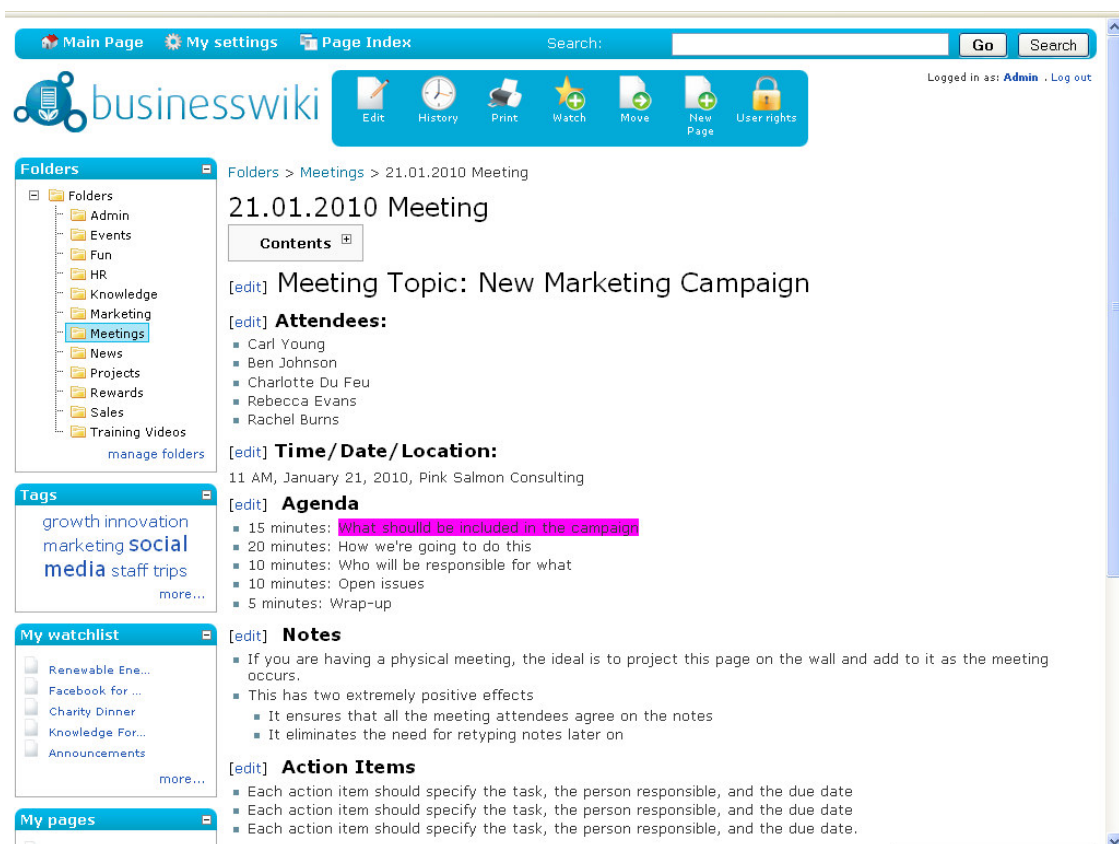
## Hour 7

Time for a little more formalization. Employees receive a 3<sup>rd</sup> email regarding the wiki.

This email raises 2 issues:

1. A request for every employee to create their own page containing details about what they are currently working on and what they will work on in the future. They are also asked to create a section where other people will be able to ask questions. Employees can also post information here about their own websites and personal contact information to ease communication. This makes it easier to create a base of experts.
2. A reminder that meetings are still an integral part of a team's work in any organization. They are the primary activity in which people plan, inform each other on the state of projects, develop new projects etc.

They are also one of the most frequently used, and sometimes abused, methods. People have a tendency to arrange meetings for even the most trivial of issues and such meetings are often well planned. This can result in employees spending the whole day tied up in subsequent meetings, leading to a very low level of achievement at the end of the day. Wiki can help to prevent such situations. It can improve the exchange of information among groups, shorten meetings and make them more specifically focused on topics which are most relevant to being discussed in a group. Information which is not vital to the discussion can be published on the wiki. Therefore it is necessary for everyone to publish meeting agendas on the wiki displaying the topic of the meeting. This allows meeting participants some insight into what will be discussed and also allows them to alter their own agendas for the meeting to avoid any repetition. After each meeting participants are asked to immediately create a note containing details of the discussion and its outcomes.



The screenshot shows a BusinessWiki page for a meeting. The page title is "21.01.2010 Meeting". The main content includes:

- Meeting Topic:** New Marketing Campaign
- Attendees:** Carl Young, Ben Johnson, Charlotte Du Feu, Rebecca Evans, Rachel Burns
- Time/Date/Location:** 11 AM, January 21, 2010, Pink Salmon Consulting
- Agenda:**
  - 15 minutes: What should be included in the campaign
  - 20 minutes: How we're going to do this
  - 10 minutes: Who will be responsible for what
  - 10 minutes: Open issues
  - 5 minutes: Wrap-up
- Notes:**
  - If you are having a physical meeting, the ideal is to project this page on the wall and add to it as the meeting occurs.
  - This has two extremely positive effects:
    - It ensures that all the meeting attendees agree on the notes
    - It eliminates the need for retyping notes later on
- Action Items:**
  - Each action item should specify the task, the person responsible, and the due date

Figure1 – Meeting plan

### ***Hour 8***

I see that my colleagues have added various pages and attachments to the wiki. I now plan to organize a small wiki workshop, perhaps one month later after the dust has settled and we're able to see the wiki in its full glory. We could spend half a day outside the office and give informal presentations of about 5 minutes in length about what each of us have published on the wiki. This seems like a great way to show employees from all different departments how others use the wiki leading to further ideas and inspiration.

### ***Epilogue***

Yes- it really works. Wiki is one of the simplest, but at the same time most powerful tools for teamwork. It often succeeds where other systems have failed. Why? Wikis do not impose an organizational structure or culture. Instead they allow the employees themselves to create a system that they really want to use.

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