

Breakout session notes:
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Experience has shown that some organisations have been slow to adopt social knowledge software but that those that have done so, have made very good use of this technology.

Issues raised by participants in the group:

1. How to get started
2. IT resistance
3. Cost of feeds
4. Vested interests
5. Changing existing behaviour scepticism and a lack of understanding
6. Concerns by risk management

How to get started

The most important thing to do is to set business objectives for each group and site, as these may differ. Allen & Overy initially set up 3 sites, each with different objectives and different approaches. They also focused on internal issues, not anything that mentioned clients. There is a need to promote best practice and be careful of cultural sensitivities. Start with using non-contentious topics. The sites do however need to be imbedded in real world scenarios and it is important to explain why blogs and wikis should be used. Do not call it a blog or a wiki, people do not understand what that means.

Try not to work with one individual, but have a working party and group involvement, this prevents the wiki or blog becoming a mouthpiece for only a few interested individuals. It is possible to invite people to a community this element of exclusivity can help make the involvement seem a more attractive proposition.

Be realistic about the expected levels of participation, you are not going to get everyone involved, and there are going to be differing levels of participation, 80%+ are going to be readers rather than contributors

There is no single set of success criteria for sites, because they should be measured as to whether they met the objectives that were set of each individual site.

Ruth Ward at Allen & Overy positioned her project as an 'experiment' rather than a pilot – this changed the tone of the project.

IT resistance

Allen & Overy found that IT were keen to be involved once 'friends' in that department were bought into the project. Often IT are quite keen to be part of something that they have read about and is seen as 'new'.

Remember: This does not have to be a large roll-out, and can be a bottom-up approach using a few small working groups and sites that target specific aims and objectives. Structure occurs as content is contributed, so there is not a lot of up-front work required from either yourselves or IT.

Cost of feeds

Costs of set-up for a wiki or blog can be minimal. A site can cost as little as £10,000 using licenced software.

Costs of feeds into these sites are dependant on the price of the feeds used and this will depend on arrangements with existing suppliers such as Factiva or Lexis Nexis. However the

using a central RSS feed pool can reduce bandwidth used by an organisation. There are also good free RSS feeds available.

Vested interests

Social software is not replacing legacy knowledge systems. It is still vital that these systems do the "heavy lifting" work. It is interacting with the user that these systems are less successful at, but social software can be used to mediate between user and legacy system, bringing older legacy systems to life. Files can also be uploaded and pushed to legacy system document repositories via wikis.

Social software will not replace intranets, although there are emerging trends towards wiki-based intranets. This can help alleviate the content management bottleneck and gives people ownership of the intranet whilst also minimising Static out-of-date content.

Changing existing behaviour scepticism and a lack of understanding

There are concerns about a tendency for disorder and there can be strange structures in the content contributed. This can be re-structuring very easily and there may be a requirement for some human filtering to manage any anomalies and how this may impact retrieval. However, usually a certain expression becomes 'the norm'. Wiki-gardening is a way that Information Professionals can add value and improve structure if required, but Allen & Overy have had no problems finding content on sites that are 2 years old.

Headshift are about to do a study in to whether taxonomy use is better than social tagging. Remember: Social knowledge technologies do represent how a document is used.

Allen & Overy have found that email usage has decreased whilst communication has increased. For example there is no need to email various versions of agendas and minutes these can be posted up and contributed to. It is also possible to follow the edit audit trail if required.

Wiki's should not lead to less face-to-face communication, but should ensure that the face-to-face time is better spent. Wiki's are good for arranging such events.

Attention is a scarce resource, but the ability to track what documents users are reading means that it is possible to feedback on what people are reading. This can help tailor the information push.

Concerns by Risk Management

Common concerns seem to be about risk management and the fact that there are no house rules or risk policies. The evidence at Allen & Overy suggests that this is not needed, although the IT policies on email usage are suitable for such software use.

Information Professionals need to be involved with advising on any copyright issues, but there is a great deal available for free that is not copyright protected.

Appropriate behaviour has been a concern. A suggestion is that users should be encouraged to use a tone similar to the 'meeting tone' and get new joiners to the sites to introduce themselves as people would at the start of meetings.