

WIKIS IN COMPANIES

Collect, use and expand your knowledge.

WIKIS

HOW COMPANIES CAN BENEFIT FROM
EVERY EMPLOYEE'S KNOWLEDGE

**“IN 2009, IT IS PREDICTED
THAT AT LEAST 50% OF ALL
COMPANIES WILL BE UTILIZING
WIKIS AS A VITAL INSTRUMENT
FOR COLLABORATION.”
WILL YOU BE ONE OF THEM?**

*Society for Information Management's Advanced Practices
Council (APC)*

WHY DO COMPANIES NEED WIKIS?

Your intranet contains lots of information – but just how quickly can your employees find this information? And how quickly can they modify data? How much time do they spend dealing with e-mail messages popping up, and how efficient is their preparation for meetings and projects? How uncomplicated can new employees access important process knowledge? How much know-how at your company is unstructured or even unmapped?

Many intranets lack editorial dynamism and “up-to-dateness”. Information can sometimes become outdated extremely quickly, partially because employees – due to lacking aesthetics or complicated administration procedures – do not participate. The daily flood of e-mail is also inefficient and is an obstacle for companies: Often enough, information goes missing, or employees are confronted with information that is irrelevant. In addition, information becomes spread about, stored unused in mailboxes and various databanks that may be accessed only by a few employees.

This inefficient form of communication and know-how management slows down companies, leads to knowledge loss, and wastes resources. This is why companies need wikis.

A wiki allows professional, systematic and uncomplicated knowledge management, it also allows employees to communicate actively and efficiently regarding the topics of the day. With a wiki, the entire know-how of a company can be mapped, actively used, and organically expanded. A wiki closes the functional loopholes in an intranet and bridges over departmental boundaries. This benefits every single employee and, therefore, the company.

KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT: STATIC OR DYNAMIC?

Companies benefit from the knowledge and know-how of every single employee. Thus, a wiki is not only a sensible way to complement an intranet but actually a key to really getting your intranet motor running properly. With a wiki, knowledge is not only managed but also constantly being expanded by all employees.

Knowledge management in an intranet is inflexible. Often, an administrator controls all of the access rights and – in a best-case scenario – is supported in this by merely a few editors. The majority of employees can only read what is available. Many intranets suffer under the so-called “One Administrator’s Syndrome: making changes is so complicated and difficult that, in the end, changes are avoided. But can’t ideas come from every area of a company?

Why should knowledge management and -creation be in the hands of just a few individuals? A wiki thrives on the fact that documents can be edited quickly and easily – and by every [authorized] employee. Just try that with a Content Management System in your intranet.

In a wiki, documents, processes, and elements change and develop very quickly and dynamically. Among other benefits, this raises the efficiency of your teamwork. It is also possible to implement a “knowledge pool” within your intranet, but only through the use of wikis can you connect all users to the flow of data as well as the information process. In principle, an intranet can do anything, but a wiki can do it more flexibly, better, and with far greater employee participation. This can only benefit your company.

Further information can be found in our weblog article “Wikis are the glue holding intranets together” (<http://blog.seibert-media.net>).



STRUCTURED KNOWLEDGE
THAT GROWS ORGANICALLY
ALLOWS BUSINESSES TO FLOURISH

10 ARGUMENTS FOR A CORPORATE WIKI

1. Containment of the e-mail flood:

Managing documents and e-mail attachments is very time-consuming; valuable resources are consumed by the constant search for and distribution of e-mails from the “deeps of the mail-boxes”. The wiki is a much more efficient means of communication as well as a central knowledge pool to which every employee has unhindered access.

2. Up-to-dateness

Especially in project management, it is important that participants can quickly inform themselves regarding developments. The documents in a wiki are – thanks to collaboration – always up-to-date; tiresome comparison using e-mails becomes unnecessary.

3. Organic structure

Wikis fit organically into the needs of the company. In comparison to management environments such as file systems or databank-supported systems, they are not connected to static content guidelines.

4. High-performance tools

Wikis have access to an array of high-performance tools for the efficient organization of complex content. Internal linking, external linking, the hierarchical structuring of documents, the exporting of text, or the imbedding of graphic elements and tables can all be undertaken without any special previous knowledge.

5. Flexibility

Wikis are more flexible than other intranet applications and static pages, whose contents have to be brought up-to-date in a technically challenging way. To work in a wiki, employees don't have to work at the same time or even in the same place; they work independently of each other on the same content. Changes are immediately online.

6. Usability (Operability)

Wikis are easy to use. Every employee can easily edit, create and format entries without having any knowledge of HTML.

7. Transparency

Especially in larger companies, there can be very positive effects when employees know just what their colleagues in other departments are working on. The communicative dealings among colleagues can be found under the motto: equal communication.

8. Security

Wikis are tolerant of mistakes. If an employee completely misses the target, changes can be easily reversed and the wiki can revert completely to earlier versions. The functional handling of wikis also includes the allocation of access authorizations for certain areas. Therefore, the view into the wiki may also be controlled.

9. Protection of resources

Wikis are undemanding regarding their system requirements. They require neither a certain operating system nor high processing resources. They are reachable from every – even older – internet-capable PC and can be edited using every normal browser.

10. Cost savings

In comparison to many traditional tools and processes, learning how to interact with the wiki requires minimal time. Test phases, employee training, as well as complex configurations disturbing productivity are mostly superfluous.

TWIKI, XWIKI UND CONFLUENCE: THE WIKIS FOR COMPANIES

The most powerful wiki applications for companies are the open-source solutions TWiki and XWiki as well as the commercial software Confluence, available from Atlassian Software. These structured wiki systems are excellent choices due to their high level of development, their individual expandability, and their system-orientation.

A COMPARISON OF THE VARIOUS SYSTEMS			
	TWiki	XWiki	Confluence
License	Open Source (GPL)	Open Source (LGPL)	kommerziell
License costs	None	None	1.200 – 8.000 \$ / Jahr
Updates	Often	Often	Often
Plug-ins	About 200	About 25	About 300
Programming language	Perl	Java	Java
Databank	No	Yes	Yes
LDAP-Authentication	Yes	Yes	Yes
Attachment management	Yes	Yes	Yes
WYSIWYG Editor	Yes	Yes	Yes
Maximum users	Unlimited	Unlimited	Depends on license
Website	http://twiki.org	http://www.xwiki.org	www.atlassian.com/software/confluence

A chart of all the features of these systems can be found under www.wikimatrix.org.

Further information for working with TWiki can be found in our weblog article "TWiki in actual company practice" (<http://blog.seibert-media.net>).

A CORPORATE WIKI IS NOT WIKIPEDIA

The most famous wiki in the world is Wikipedia. This leads to the widespread assumption that the success of the online encyclopedia can be transferred to a corporate wiki simply by implementing the Wikipedia concept. However, that is a false conclusion, as Wikipedia and a corporate wiki are fundamentally different systems with very different demands and ways of functioning. Companies need an intranet based on a wiki, not a web-lexicon.

Wikipedia is public, and all of its contents are available for everyone to peruse. In contrast, the content in corporate wikis can be organized into various areas, according to projects, teams, divisions, customers, and so on; only specified users would have access to these contents. A corporate wiki is not – or is at least only partially – public and is governed by a system that allows the excellent fine-tuning of access granting. This makes it possible to grant reading- and editing rights for individual documents as well as to modify these rights at any time. Moreover, Wikipedia problems such as vandalism and so-called "editing wars" are thus practically impossible.

In contrast to Wikipedia, which only fulfills the basic task of "encyclopedia", a corporate wiki is flexible, is used for many different activities (including the compiling of documentation, the creating and maintaining of knowledge pools, project managing, meeting- and event organizing, and so on) and fulfills the many different demands of the employees.

Participation in a corporate wiki is significantly higher than in Wikipedia; only one percent of the users of Wikipedia contribute content on a regular basis. Participation in a corporate wiki, on the other hand, is a part of many workers' daily work routine. Thus, the corporate wiki grows much faster and more organically, building the core of a team's activities.

Wikipedia is a wiki, but a corporate wiki is not Wikipedia; rather, it is a flexible instrument for communication and collaboration that yields far more.

WHY PROFESSIONAL DESIGN IS IMPORTANT

A wiki is a valuable, powerful tool. Does a tool also need professional design? Yes: Professional design has great influence on the establishing of the wiki in that it increases acceptance for the system and contributes significantly to the activating of the employees and thus to the success of the application.

Professional design ensures that the surface of your wiki is visually well structured and thereby easily understandable. This guarantees goal-oriented, efficient and simple usage of the application (usability) and reduces the employees' reserve. Furthermore, good design mirrors the level of importance that the wiki itself has for a company.

A wiki clothed in the corporate design of the company increases the identification of the employees with this system: It is perceived as a fixed and important component of the internal communication (rather than as a foreign element) and is accepted more quickly. What is more, if the surface of the wiki is designed in a visually appealing way, your employees will be more likely to enjoy using the wiki, raising its ease of use.

//SEIBERT/MEDIA/DESIGN is there to ensure that your wiki fits the design of your company and to make sure that the user interface is customized to fit the individual needs placed on the wiki by both your company and your employees. The potential of the system will in this way be completely exhausted.

Further information about //SEIBERT/MEDIA/DESIGN may be found at <http://design.seibert-media.de>.



TWiki "BlueNet", client: Reisebank
Homepage (left) and detailed view (right).

MEASURES FOR SUCCESS

After introducing the wiki, you can't simply fold your hands in your lap and wait. A few measures should be undertaken to really get the system running and exhaust the possibilities of performance for your company. If these are successfully implemented, nothing will stand in the way of the wiki.

Creating acceptance:

A wiki should be integrated within your company's architecture as one of many important tools for the promotion of collaboration.

Respecting the rules:

Working in a wiki should be guided by specific rules of behavior, which every employee must understand and hold to be binding. Having a minimum amount of control is important.

Guaranteeing usability:

A wiki must be as simple and optimal to use as possible to bring together efficiently the collective knowledge of employees who are busy in different places.

Reducing administrators:

One experienced employee should arise as a "wiki champion", assuming an important role as designer and carefully supporting other colleagues.

Encouraging participation:

For the wiki to function and, thereby, succeed, it is important that the employees are encouraged to participate. Managers and other seasoned employees could lead here through good example.

Integrating other tools:

Wikis are expandable. One significant benefit results from the integration of small software programs, which structure and simplify repeating work processes.

Optimizing frameworks:

A wiki should serve to exchange knowledge, ideas and experiences. Wikis are most accepted when the working atmosphere promotes collaboration or encourages employees to collaborate.

"Its equally amazing that with a wiki, I can work with my mates in Australia, colleagues in Europe, and collaborators in the US – all without trading tons of emails and spending hours in meetings. [...] And that makes my work amazing. As amazing as that ability to reliably fly halfway around the world. Whoever thought a technology tool would be that amazing? [...] I do, and I hope you do too. If you're already using a wiki, excellent! If not, give it a try, and I think you'll see how immediately useful it is, and how quickly it transforms how you think about – and do – work."

"Wiki Evangelist" Stewart Mader

THE WIKI-EXPERTISE OF //SEIBERT/MEDIA

//SEIBERT/MEDIA has collected extensive experience with wikis, uses TWiki in its own intranet and is also very well acquainted with other open-source systems such as XWiki and MediaWiki as well as the commercial program Confluence. We supply competent contact people for the realization of your integrated wiki project.

//SEIBERT/MEDIA has already advised numerous businesses regarding the introduction and implementation of wikis, and is your professional partner when it comes to introducing, establishing and maintaining your corporate wiki. To accomplish this, we work across borders, successfully executing integrated wiki projects from advising to operations. We have established processes and steps that allow us to adapt quickly to your needs and demands, thus quickly starting your wiki intentions. Our service portfolio contains the complete integration of wikis within company networks, including strategy development, conceptual design, design, actual implementation as well as adaptation, employee training, and the connecting of the wiki to other web applications.

We work with globally recognized wiki-experts and translate, for example, the articles of the famous "Wiki Evangelist" Stewart Mader into German – exclusively. Martin Seibert is a certified TWIKI.NET consultant as well as a member of the international TWiki community; he is very active in the further development and continual optimization of the application. //SEIBERT/MEDIA also participates intensively in an active sharing of knowledge – for instance, Martin Seibert appeared as a speaker at the highly respected conference WikiSym in Porto in September 2008.



We would happily be of service to you in improving your company with optimized internal communications structures and professional knowledge management. Our experts Martin Seibert (left; Diplom-Kaufmann) and Sebastian Preuss (right; M.A.) will advise you personally and without obligation:

T. 0611-205 70-0, consulting@seibert-media.net

THE COMPANY

//SEIBERT/MEDIA consists of four areas of expertise: Consulting, Design, Technologies, and Systems. We have been developing intranets, extranet systems and web portals as well as classic Internet sites since 1996. Starting in 2005, our design department has been designing high-quality media representation for companies along with communicative concepts for both web and print mediums. Consulting in the area of online marketing and usability rounds off our service portfolio.

//SEIBERT/MEDIA/CONSULTING – Profitability through strategic far-sightedness. Communication is a goal-directed process which follows specific intents and purposes. Clear, strategic thinking and the binding commitment of precise plans for the implementation of goals are the basic requirements for the success of a project. Our consultants have distinct know-how in the area of Business Process Engineering, which enables them to oversee all the areas of project planning, from process analysis to the shaping of business procedures to the definition of an appropriate web strategy.

The Usability Department is part of //SEIBERT/MEDIA GmbH's consulting area of expertise.

//SEIBERT/MEDIA/DESIGN – Companies are like personalities. Every company leaves behind – through its image, its language, and its behavior – an impression within its environment. A company that would like to be attractive to its customers, business partners, and employees needs competent and professional consulting to achieve this. Our design and creative work is marked by passion and ambition. This combination results in high-quality solutions.

//SEIBERT/MEDIA/TECHNOLOGIES – Performance through variety. The Technology Department is the center of expertise for individual application development and web programming. We plan, realize and operate professional web softwares for our customers. To accomplish this, we have access to competent programmers who have accumulated many years of experience.

//SEIBERT/MEDIA/SYSTEMS – More speed, reliability, and expandability for your internet sites. Professional web-hosting is clearly more than just the preparation of a domain and server space. In fact, it adapts to your individual demands and ensures your long-term success through quality, advice, individuality, and performance.

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WHAT WE CAN DO FOR YOUR WIKI:

ADVISE, PLAN, DESIGN, IMPLEMENT, AND OPERATE