

ASTD TechKnowledge 2008 Conference & Exposition

W209CS: Using Wikis to Collaborate and Learn Across an Organization

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Learning Objectives:

- Determine how a wiki can support your learning initiatives
- Speed up collaboration between learners/participants by using a learning wiki

Resources:

- PB Wiki (<http://www.pbwiki.com>)
- Del.icio.us ([http://www. http://del.icio.us/](http://www.del.icio.us/))
- Yahoo! MyWeb (<http://myweb.yahoo.com/>)
- iLearn Wiki (<http://ilearning.pbwiki.com/>)

We are also running our own wiki for this session so that we can continue the conversation for as long as needed: <http://our-tk.pbwiki.com/>.

Further Reading:

- Harney, John. The Consolidation of Collaboration. (Aim e-Doc Magazine, July/August 2007, Vol 21, Issue 4.)
- Karrer, Tony. Personal and Group Learning Using Web 2.0 Tools (<http://elearningtech.blogspot.com/2006/09/personal-and-group-learning-using-web.html>)
- Karrer, Tony. Personal Learning for Learning (http://elearningtech.blogspot.com/2006/03/personal-learning-for-learning_20.html)

The following article details the genesis of the iLearn project, as well as the process and results.

Connecting People to Knowledge and People to People

Part 1: Web 2.0 Tools

We humans are social creatures seeking interaction with others. Our brains are wired for the complex language and reasoning necessary to support our interactive nature. Brains have an ability to gain and store unlimited amounts of information from our interactions. To top it off, brains have the ability to use the stored information to think and analyze for solving complex problems.

Today's Internet serves as another venue for interactions. With a primary focus on learning, this is the first article in a series about interacting on the Web.

Evolving Web tools allowing interactions have adapted nomenclature similar to software versions. Using body parts will help place them in historical content. Think about your early exposure to the Internet. Searching to read and learn; thus using the eyes and the brain (Web 1.0).

Web 2.0 tools allowed the users body to add ears and a heart to this electronic world. E-mail is a fast & easy communication. IM is a portal for real-time conversations. Blogs allow the sharing of personal ideas and feelings. Wikis provide a place to collaborate with others. RSS feeds bring subscribers the latest news through an automatic e-mail or posting. Video webcasts and podcasts add another dimension. Today, Web 3.0 tools are currently adding arms and legs to the user's body by making information more accessible through wireless and mobile systems.

Workers are connected to others and information by organizational charts, adjacent cubicles, phone lines, the Internet, help desks, subject matter experts, libraries, teams, customers, suppliers, incoming and outgoing information, family, friends, and other means. Nodes are the point of intersection between those seeking information and the information source – and workers are constantly seeking information!

From a business perspective, the tools are about improving productivity for improving outcomes. If an organization desires to increase its effectiveness, a support system must be built whereas workers can easily find information and people. Enter Web 2.0 tools.

Businesses are currently using Web 2.0 tools communication and collaboration tools to share information, strengthen communication, and build learning communities. *Investor's Business Daily* reports most companies have invested, are testing, or are considering investing in Web 2.0 tools.

Trying 2.0

Most U.S. companies are at least mulling investments in Web 2.0 technologies, says a survey*

Technology	Have invested, are testing, are considering investing	Have no plans to invest
Blogs	54%	46%
Podcasts	63%	37%
Wikis	64%	36%
RSS	68%	32%

*survey of more than 250 tech decision makers at U.S. companies with 500 or more employees
Source: Forrester Research

Wikis, Informal Learning, and a Personal Journey

Late in 2006 during my own personal study about informal learning, I read two interesting posts by Tony Karrer about using Web 2.0 tools for informal learning. A discussion with a fellow learning professional fostered the idea of forming a short-term learning community to study informal learning using the tools set forth by Karrer. We developed a plan, secured a posting tool, and then sought willing participants.

The Tools

IM: Chat tool for the initial group discussion to select research topics.

Social bookmarking (as del.icio.us, Yahoo MyWeb) allow members to bookmark useful links and give group members access to those links. Once established, links to each bookmarking site were posted on the wiki. These tools also allow user access to their bookmarks from a different location.

PBWiki hosted the wiki. Wiki (a Hawaiian word meaning fast, quick) is a body of writing a community of users is willing to maintain by adding, editing, and removing content. As the fastest way to get text online, wikis organize and share up-to-date information.

The Plan

Involve 4-6 learning professionals for a 4-5 week period to test a learning model using Web 2.0 tools and increase knowledge about informal learning.

1. Members initially posted topics/questions about informal learning to a master list on the wiki.
2. Through a group chat, participant selected 1-2 topics to for their study.
3. Participants had 10 days to research their topic and post their findings on the wiki.
4. Participants had 5 days to read the entries and submit questions to the author, who had a week to answer questions.
5. Repeat the cycle with another topic.
6. Come together for a face-to-face meeting to reflect on both the learning and the process.

Results

- Wikis are a simple-to-use tool for collaboration.
- The smaller the group, the more critical the role for each member. One member dropping out or not contributing has a greater effect on a smaller group.
- Having a person familiar with basic code is helpful, but not required.
- Social bookmarking is an interesting and useful tool.
- Finding willing participants wasn't easy. With access to 60-75 names involved in training, we received only a few inquiries. I still wonder why so few learning professionals were interested.
- We planned a face-to-face meeting as a reflective, wrap-up. In retrospect, meeting as a group at the beginning would have served as a kickoff, allowed each of us to link names and faces, and clarified the process and expectations.
- As one would expect, each of us had different level of self motivation and commitment. Again, having the initial kickoff meeting may have reduced the gap.

- Each of us had different formats to post our information. Interestingly, this is something we didn't anticipate, but may be one future groups may want to discuss.
- Receiving feedback and question from other team members is paramount. As a whole, our team stumbled here. Again, a kickoff event may have helped.

In the end, the experiment was practical, useful, and a positive learning experience. Since this wiki is normally password protected, please request a password from frank@fpgresources.com if you desire to visit the project.

Conclusion

Web 2.0 tools are about embracing the power of a professional network for collaboration, knowledge transfer, growth, and improved productivity. Collaboration doesn't require extensive systems because the tools already exist. John Harney describes collaboration as both process and practice serves as an excellent closure. "As a practice, workers can use informal techniques and technologies (such as blogs and wikis) to create new, innovative ideas and responses. As a process, users conform to formal business processes through document-centered process management." Just something to ponder.

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