

## Wikis – open for all, or open to abuse?

By Rob Bamforth, Principal analyst, Quocirca Ltd

The internet has already had a massive impact on the way we access and distribute information as public websites led to intranets and all sorts of web enabled applications, but it has also started to change the process of collecting, creating and contributing to documents, files and records.

This should not be a surprise as many of the internet tools have a concept of shared interaction at their roots, and the original idea that Sir Tim Berners-Lee had for a web server was a collaborative way of building information and records.

What is surprising is that it took so long for the rest of the internet community to catch up, and largely this has now happened because of the creation of simple to use models and their supporting tools for non-technical users to generate their own content. Not by creating or editing web pages per se, but by working on information in forms they can understand – using constructs such as diaries and encyclopaedia, and environments such as golf clubhouses, market squares, bars etc.

Being the internet, a whole new 'paradigm shift' in nomenclature had to occur, so these models are re-branded under the Web 2.0 banner as blogs and wikis and the umbrella term for all online gathering places – social networking.

These concepts have swept the consumer and professional space rapidly with millions of people blogging and participating in social web sites. The basic process behind all this is to publish content to a large group for comment, with the hope and expectation of finding skills and knowledge beyond that immediately available to the publisher or their direct contacts.

The idea of wikis in particular – shared access, shared edit, record entries – is an interesting way for organisations to manage, update and disseminate information, but steps have to be taken to ensure it provides an accurate picture.

While blogging and entries on social websites generally reflect more personally held views,

wikis encourage multiple participation and collaboration. They are relatively self regulating which tends to amortise the personal and oft times biased opinions of individual into a wider 'group think'.

Like many self regulating systems, continued growth will depend on tools that make usage and access simpler, yet allow procedures to maintain some form of control. Many tools are appearing in the consumer market, but most will not survive or translate well into the commercial world.

For many organisations, the pace of the consumer market causes problems in the selection of tools for business use, especially if employees feel externally available tools are better than those provided by their own IT department.

Even if they want to embrace the new opportunities created by these types of social collaboration tools, organisations have to be able to ensure they can meet their other obligations. This will include securely and effectively managing processes that need to be assured to comply with any associated external standards or adhere to relevant internal policies around the distribution and publishing of records.

There are several areas to address in order to maximise the benefit of using social tools for collaborative records management, in particular wikis, while minimising the drawbacks:

**Security** - Consumer-focused social networking tools have few, if any, information security capabilities built in to them. Organisations will have to select enterprise class solutions that use secure connections and enforce the recording of interactions between individuals and groups.

**Quality** - Initial records may start with standard reviews and sign offs, but the responses and edits of wiki records will not necessarily have the same vetting, and may be of dubious quality. Control is

required, and where problems are identified, the owner of the wiki record should reserve the right to correct or remove as necessary.

**Focus** – If open to wider discussion, many wiki records become defocused as comments or spurious information builds up. What started well can drift off topic as a result of certain vested interests and the information becomes less accurate or valuable. Here too, monitoring and overall control is required, to maintain the focus and quality.

**Integration** - Any business social networking solution must be able to be integrated into an employee's daily work environment, and must be capable of using multiple corporate data storage for information retrieval and handling. This also means they will be protected by the standard data protection processes such as backup and recovery.

**Information Lifetime** - Many social networking solutions lack the sophisticated enterprise procedures such as information ageing and archiving.

Wikis can help in this area, as new information can be rapidly embraced and promulgated through the wiki base – provided that there are enough active users underpinning the wiki itself. This again requires an active approach to ownership to ensure record lifecycle policies are maintained.

**Wisdom of the Crowd** - Social networking encourages this concept where it is assumed that a large enough group of people produces an end result that reflects the truth more effectively than any individual.

This is a dangerous assumption within an organisation where groups may still have a narrow viewpoint, so it is always useful to have expert sources and reviewers as part of any managed wiki collaboration process, to ensure that records stay relevant and sanity checked.

New concepts from what initially appears to be a 'world wild web' should not be dismissed out of hand when looking at ways to manage record creation, update and review. The 'open to everyone' approach of the internet's latest evolutionary phase with social networking and user generated content can have many benefits, providing they are well managed. Organisations can exploit them for effective collaborative records management if they remember to stick to their guiding principals of ownership, responsibility and accountability.

For an in-depth look at how social networking tools might be useful in organisations, download the new free Quocirca report "[Social Networking and Opportunities in the Public Sector](#)".

## About Quocirca

Quocirca is a primary research and analysis company specialising in the business impact of information technology and communications (ITC). With world-wide, native language reach, Quocirca provides in-depth insights into the views of buyers and influencers in large, mid-sized and small organisations. Its analyst team is made up of real-world practitioners with first hand experience of ITC delivery who continuously research and track the industry and its real usage in the markets.

Through researching perceptions, Quocirca uncovers the real hurdles to technology adoption – the personal and political aspects of an organisation’s environment and the pressures of the need for demonstrable business value in any implementation. This capability to uncover and report back on the end-user perceptions in the market enables Quocirca to advise on the realities of technology adoption, not the promises.

Quocirca research is always pragmatic, business orientated and conducted in the context of the bigger picture. ITC has the ability to transform businesses and the processes that drive them, but often fails to do so. Quocirca’s mission is to help organisations improve their success rate in process enablement through better levels of understanding and the adoption of the correct technologies at the correct time.

Quocirca has a pro-active primary research programme, regularly surveying users, purchasers and resellers of ITC products and services on emerging, evolving and maturing technologies. Over time, Quocirca has built a picture of long term investment trends, providing invaluable information for the whole of the ITC community.

Quocirca works with global and local providers of ITC products and services to help them deliver on the promise that ITC holds for business. Quocirca’s clients include Oracle, Microsoft, IBM, Dell, T-Mobile, Vodafone, EMC, Symantec and Cisco, along with other large and medium sized vendors, service providers and more specialist firms.

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