LEVERAGING WEB 2.0 IN THE INFORMATION WORKPLACE

Web 2.0

Presentation sent via...

status updates during creation by SocNet

email

live online presentation

blogged by author afterwards

Feedback loops: IM, SocNet, Email, Blogs

COM 529 – Research & Methodologies
Final Project Deliverable

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Carie Burgess
Rebekah Peterson
Bonnie Southcott
Jeremy Snook
ABSTRACT

This research proposal focuses on identifying technology solutions and best practices for cross-group communication at large organizations. We believe Web 2.0 technologies can be leveraged to improve communication efficiency and effectiveness for these groups, and we will determine whether a single solution can be derived to address all communication needs or whether a combination of Web 2.0 technologies is needed. Our research will consist of interviews to capture ideas of those considering Web 2.0 communication solutions and feedback on current systems. We will also conduct a tools review to identify and evaluate potential technology solutions. Finally, we will conduct a content analysis of written content to gather and assess current thinking on Web 2.0 communication tools.
PROJECT SUMMARY

Web 2.0 is still in its infancy and researchers do not expect market maturity to be reached until 2013 (Young, 2008). Organizations are just beginning to transition from stand-alone content management and office productivity software to a working environment where software, shareware, and Web tools are integrated; this is a process coined the “Information Workplace” (Driver & Moore, March 28, Forrester). Employees and management are both realizing that there is a need to find enterprise systems that will capture information into a manageable aggregation as it arrives from a variety of platforms.

Context

Until recently, standard organizational communication in the 21st century has been very “Web 1.0” – synchronous send/response cycles that easily splinter into different threads under the same topic. For example, when a marketing director creates a presentation outlining key marketing initiatives for the upcoming fiscal year, he might email out the completed deck to his audience, and wait for responses.

The responses stagger back into the sender’s inbox in a rough approximation of a conversation. The sender then becomes responsible for managing all of the feedback he receives and can, at times, become an information bottleneck, slowing down the process of dynamic group collaboration.
With the inclusion of Web 2.0 technologies, this same scenario takes on a much more complex loop, with faster turnarounds. After the marketing director sends out the presentation (via email, backed up by an internal blog post linking to a server location for the deck), the audience’s RSS readers, Blackberries, and social network status updates provide instant, redundant notification of the presentation. Feedback comes flooding back through various communications channels – instant messages, emails sent via smartphones, and comments posted to the blog. All parties involved in the project are privy to each other’s comments, and dynamic collaboration becomes a possibility – regardless of geographic and temporal issues. While this multi-channeled sharing of information is user-friendly, it is also unwieldy. Additionally, lack of established “best practices” in the flow of information, as well as the information storage systems themselves, can create inefficiencies.

In today’s business world, where employees manage and share enormous amounts of intellectual collateral, the key to effective team communication may rest on the shoulders of Web 2.0 technologies such as wikis, blogs, and other information and knowledge management tools (Gregory, 2007). Often, adoption of these tools is ad hoc and their usage even varies from employee to employee within the same organization. While Web 2.0 tools might help the individual manage his or her own information, the lack of a cohesive process, compatible tools, or uniform standards and best practices increases inefficiencies that hurt a company’s bottom line.
Problem Statement

How can disparate groups within a large organization, private or government, communicate more efficiently and effectively using Web 2.0 technologies? Is there a single solution that addresses all communication needs, including persistent data sharing, person-to-person interaction, and fast, refreshing news? Or are different solutions required for different types of information?

Proposed Answer / Hypothesis

We expect to leverage the flexibility and power of collaborative tools such as blogs, video logs, wikis, podcasts, social networks, and RSS feeds to propose a solution that meets the needs of employees and management through the following attributes:

☐ An intuitive, user-friendly interface

☐ The ability to easily share information in various formats, such as documents, videos, podcasts, and news updates

☐ User flexibility and easy-to-manage oversight

☐ Low-hurdle integration with current information systems

☐ Accessibility by both computers and mobile devices
Preview of Report Contents

This report contains the following sections:

- Project Description
- Plan of Work
- Personnel Qualifications
- List of Primary Sources, including sample interviewees and interview questions
- Annotated Bibliography

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Through our research, we will identify a cohesive system of tools, or technology platforms, and define best practices for usage of these tools. This work will provide organizations with a solution that includes the above attributes and enables efficient and effective communication between disparate groups within large organizations. For the purpose of this study, we propose that “large organizations” be restricted to organizations greater than 1,000 employees, based in the United States.

PLAN OF WORK

Our research project will consist of three separate research processes:

- Interviews of people whose companies have or are considering implementing an internal, Web 2.0 collaborative communication strategy
- A substantive review of existing tools and platforms to identify potential solutions
- A quantitative analysis of written content on Web 2.0 communication tools and strategies to identify current thinking on group communication using Web 2.0 technologies.
Interviews

Our goal for the interviews is twofold. First, we want to capture ideas from people in a variety of positions who are considering implementing a Web 2.0 internal communication strategy. Gathering information from businesses that have researched internal collaboration tools and the way they work, but have yet to implement a strategy, may provide innovative solutions our literature review and remaining research does not uncover. These interviews may also uncover employee communication needs met by Web 2.0 communication processes in other companies that our research did not target originally. These discoveries could help guide our development of best practices and tools in developing an effective Information Workplace communication strategy.

Second, we will interview employees who are currently using an internal Web 2.0 communication system. This will provide our research with necessary and valuable information on best practices regarding feasibility, implementation, and maintenance. It will also offer our project the distinct advantage of learning from others’ mistakes. Awareness of pitfalls or missteps that may happen will provide our team with the knowledge needed to avoid unnecessary setbacks. We expect interviews to last approximately one hour per interview.

Cost / Resources

All local interviews will be conducted in person at the interviewee’s office. If a face-to-face interview cannot be obtained, or the person is out of the region, questions will be asked over the phone. Video and audio equipment will be needed to record the interviews.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>$2,000</th>
<th>Interviewer’s salary (estimated 40 hours of work at $50 an hour to include conducting and transcribing interviews).</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$150</td>
<td>Transportation cost for regional travel (estimated 5 interviews no more than 60 miles distance).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$100</td>
<td>Digital audio recorder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$2,250</td>
<td>Total budget</td>
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</table>

See Appendix A in this document for a list of primary sources that details interviewee examples and sample questions.
Tools Review

To identify existing enterprise-oriented application bundles that could result in a tools solution, we will search the Web using Sourceforge, Google, Microsoft product pages, 37signals, and other search sites. Possible bundled tools examples include:

- **Confluence / JIRA.** This is an enterprise-level Wiki / project management package that incorporates "what you see is what you get" editing.

- **SharePoint Server + Office components.** Microsoft's tools designed to enable corporations to easily share information, covering a wide breadth of needs.

- **Salesforce.** A customer relationship management software package, designed for communication of sales and marketing information (e.g., client information, campaign data, etc.) that incorporates some project management tools.

- **37signals (BaseCamp, HighRise, etc.).** A Web-based project management package, less expensive than competitors.

Next, we will evaluate these tools against stand-alone, specialized components, such as wikis, podcasts, and social networking sites. Use of these stand-alone tools will require more technical integration (and may not fully share data across tools), but will give a modular approach where the user can pick the most suitable tool for each job, as well as upgrade easily at a later date. Integration is a key evaluation criterion, thus the ease of installation and data collaboration among applications (or issues that result) will be called out in the evaluation.

Evaluation Methods

- Create a spreadsheet to evaluate potential tools using our needs list as the evaluation criteria.

- Deploy each of the candidates to an evaluation platform (single server), using a common, canned set of data for the sake of consistency.

- Recruit a small team that can represent various user groups within an organization (such as engineering, finance, legal, etc.). Test the tool for a short, fixed period, manipulating the imported, canned data set within predefined test cases.

- Track evaluations on spreadsheet, along with evaluator comments.
# Cost/Resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$20,000</td>
<td>System administrator’s salary (estimated four months of work).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Small, internal evaluation team (preferably the research team), spending eight to ten hours per week for two to four months evaluating packages. Ideal combination of testers would include expertise from different disciplines, better matching with real-world conditions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$3,000</td>
<td>One server machine (can be desktop class) with Web server software (such as IIS) installed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$10,000</td>
<td>Evaluation packages of software: usually free, with time restrictions. (Evaluation packages that are not free would drive up the cost for licensing full versions.) Ballpark is $10,000 for this, as a conservative high-end estimate; most likely, it will not all be needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$8,000</td>
<td>Laptops (three to four PC-based, one to two Mac-based for cross-platform testing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$2,200</td>
<td>Three to four cell phones for mobile access testing (a cheap, entry-level phone, mid-range phone, Apple iPhone, Windows-based smartphone, and a Blackberry). Includes hardware and subscription (data plan) costs for four months.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$23,200</td>
<td>Total budget</td>
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Content Review and Analysis

The final piece of our research is a quantitative analysis of organic, blog-based conversations regarding Web 2.0 communication. This research will collect and analyze the content of blog posts and blog post comments.

Evaluation Methods

We will first identify blogs that discuss internal Web 2.0 efforts used by organizations. From these blogs, we will capture a sampling of related content that will enable us to track the pros and cons of current enterprise communication tools and systems. This analysis may also identify product features and functionality that organizations need, but are unable to find in current tools available in the marketplace and on the Web.

As comments are key aspects of blogs and can add to the blog discussion, we include comments in our content analysis. However, comments and ideas collected from blogs will be cross-tested during our interview process within the workplace, as most blog participants are early adopters of technology and may not be reflective of what is currently happening in all organizations.

We will then set a time frame for data collection and develop a methodology for coding the information we gather. Finally, we will collect the applicable blog posts, comments, and associated demographic and other data, code the data, and compile the results in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. Some potential categories for coding the data include the following:

- Number of posts about Web 2.0 communication systems
- Number of comments on each post
- Positive vs. Negative: Whether the post or comment was positive or negative in nature
- Tools suggested or discussed in the post or comment
- Product features or functionality discussed in the post or comment
- Keywords: Words that are fundamental to our inquiry in assessing communication tool effectiveness
## Cost/Resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cost</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$200</td>
<td>Internet Connectivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Comcast subscription will be estimated by $50 per month for 4 months.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$1,000</td>
<td>One PC-based computer.</td>
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<tr>
<td>$0</td>
<td>One copy of Microsoft Excel</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No cost as Microsoft Excel is already available to research participants via</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>work and school.</td>
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<tr>
<td>$25,600</td>
<td>Analyst's salary</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Estimated 640 hours of work in 4 months at $40 an hour.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Includes:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Time and personnel resources to search for blogs, identify applicable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>blogs, identify applicable blogs, and collect posts and comments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Time and personnel resources to determine data cogs and determine set of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>keywords used in assessment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Time and personnel resources to code and analyze data.</td>
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<td>$26,800</td>
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</table>
Personnel Qualifications

**Tharaa Bayazid** is a student in the Master of Communication in Digital Media program at the University of Washington. Through courses taken in the program, Tharaa has training in conducting research and research best practices and she understands research to be fundamental to the workplace. Tharaa has conducted content analysis research by analyzing blogs and examining and codifying blog content.

**Carie Burgess** is a content project manager at Microsoft Corporation, focusing on content development for emerging markets. As an employee at a large, global organization, Carie has vast knowledge of the challenges inherent in communication between cross-cultural groups with competing goals and she is familiar with a variety of traditional and Web 2.0 communication technologies. Carie has also worked as a process-reengineering consultant for a city government and has extensive experience in content, business, and financial analysis. Carie holds an MBA from Arizona State University and is currently a Master of Communication in Digital Media candidate at the University of Washington.

**Rebekah Peterson** is a publications coordinator at the University of Washington (UW) and is a Master of Communication in Digital Media candidate. She has extensive experience in the communication field in a variety of industries, including publishing, investment banking, and real estate. Her successful track record in communications and publications project management will prove beneficial in an internal communication project.

**Jeremy Snook** is the Lead Producer of the Games division at RealNetworks, Inc. As Lead Producer, his daily responsibilities include management of the acquisition, production, and weekly deployment of casual games to a worldwide audience. As these processes occur in multiple parallel timelines across diverse geographical locations under severe time constraints, the timely flow of accurate information is critical. His experience in this environment will give real-world expertise to this project. Jeremy is a Master of Communication in Digital Media candidate at the University of Washington.

**Bonnie Southcott** is the lead interactive producer at Toolhouse, Inc., a mid-cap digital design agency. Her work leveraging the power of Web 2.0 assets for her company’s clients positions her well to understand how those same assets may work internally in a business application. As a former journalist and radio talk show host, Bonnie has an in-depth, working knowledge of the interview process. Her expertise in this area will guide the creation and oversight of the project’s interview-driven initiatives. Bonnie is currently a Master of Communication in Digital Media candidate at the University of Washington.
Appendix A – List of Primary Sources (Interviewee Examples and Sample Questions)

Project Manager
Status: Company currently uses Web 2.0 for internal communication.

Purpose: Provide ground-level information on the successes and failures of a Web 2.0 communication strategy and its ability or inability to be the primary source for project communication.

Sample Questions:

• What needs were you trying to meet when you made the decision to incorporate Web 2.0 tools into your communication and collaboration process?
• How did you identify the Web 2.0 tools you wanted to use?
• Which tools did you NOT use? Why not?
• Have you seen an increase in communication and openness between project team members as a result of Web 2.0?
• What do you value the most in Web 2.0-style communication?
• What has been the most frustrating with this Web 2.0 communication?
• Has it been difficult or easy to migrate team efforts from other communication methods to this technology platform? Where have you encountered the strongest resistance?
• How well or poorly can you capture project processes on this technology platform?
• Do you find this an effective and worthwhile tool for your projects? Why or why not?

Technical Subject Matter Expert
Status: Company currently uses Web 2.0 for internal communications.

Purpose: Detail the technical aspects of the project.

Sample Questions:

• What networking systems did your company need to have in place for the project to be successfully implemented and maintained?
• How much sustained effort is needed from the IT department to keep the Web 2.0 system running smoothly? What is your estimated average monthly cost, as a percentage of your annual operating budget, to run the system?
• What are privacy and security issues that your team has addressed?
• How stable do you perceive this system to be in comparison to other systems used by your company?
• What are the most common problems employees bring to you about the functionality of the Web 2.0 tools being used?
Training Officer
Status: Company uses Web 2.0 for internal communications.

Purpose: Develop strategies to increase quick adoption of system by employees. Consider the scope needed for training employees the new system.

Sample Questions:
- How many hours do you estimate it takes your company to train employees on this communication method?
- What have you found to be successful strategies to train employees?
- What has been the largest hurdle faced by your training team?
- What would you recommend to a company that is considering a Web 2.0 communication strategy?

Internal Communications Officer
Status: May be considering implementing a strategy for own company or may already be working within a Web 2.0 communication system.

Purpose: Describe needs of business and employees in regard to internal communication. This interviewee would offer the perspective of the project from an operations perspective.

Sample Questions:
- What were some of the major hurdles you see facing (or do face) in getting employees and upper-management to adapt a Web 2.0 communication system?
- What does your department see as the major benefits of using a Web 2.0 system?
- What are the drawbacks you foresee (or currently face)?

Executive Steering Committee/Advisory Board Member
Status: Company is considering proposal to move to Web 2.0 for internal communications.

Purpose: Consider the implications of internal communications from a leadership perspective.

Sample Questions:
- What concerns have been raised in meetings by other members of your advisory board regarding Web 2.0 communications?
- Do you feel that Web 2.0-style communication will increase productivity among employees? If so, how so? If not, why not?
- What is motivating your board to consider this implementation?
Appendix B – Annotated Bibliography


From this book, we will consider chapters 1, 4, 7, and 9 in our project. It is very important to define the purpose of research and how to design a research project. Choosing the appropriate research method, in which we are conducting quantitative approach (content analysis), is fundamental to this project. By using quantitative content analysis, we will be able to transform observations of found categories into quantitative statistical data.


This article discusses the usefulness of wikis as a tool for collaboration among team members. It discusses the lack of functionality among current systems, and how wikis can fill the need for smart collaboration. The author offers a list of various tools (e.g. blog, document management systems, wikis) and discusses the characteristics of each and the scenarios in which they would be useful. She also offers examples of how wikis could be used in a variety of business functions, such as meeting notes, knowledge base management, and brainstorming, among others. The author also lists case studies of businesses that have used wikis and how IT managers should implement them.

This article may enhance our research with case studies on the successful use of wikis. We may also be able to determine the negative aspects of a wiki or other Web 2.0 technology from this article as well.


This article discusses the challenges inherent in today’s “Information Workplace,” Forrester’s term for organizations that are transitioning from stand-alone software products to a working environment where software, shareware, and Web tools are integrated. The article explores previous combinations of collaboration tools, portals, content management systems, and office productivity software and speculates organizations’ plan for fixing the disjointed technology environment in which they currently exist.


This article discusses a study of students' and lecturers' perceptions of using wikis as a platform for conducting assessed group projects in two postgraduate Master’s level university courses. Results
include a discussion of cognitive processing, such as whether the use of wikis enhanced knowledge sharing and whether wikis enabled students' application, synthesis, and/or evaluation of knowledge.

The study also revealed that wikis provided insight into how group processes worked and what processes were most effective, but that wiki usage did not guarantee cohesive group work.

Generally, students found wikis useful for arranging information and sharing knowledge, while instructors thought wikis made managing and marking group work easier and more effective. Such observations may be useful in evaluating wiki usage in other institutional settings.


In this book, Kirsten Foot et al., detail how the web has been used for political campaigns in the past and implications for the web in future political campaigns. In chapter two of this book, the authors outline how one can trace practices within a web sphere, as they call it. Part of the process is defining the web sphere how the content is analyzed. This book was a major aspect of the project as it shaped the data collection and analysis from day one.


This article discusses the results of a survey of social media adoption by corporations. The author discusses why social media is a hot topic, what the risks are found in social media, and what the future may be for this technology. According to the company's information, Melcrum is a research and training business in the professional communications sector.


Gillin's examination of blogging and podcasting explores the strengths and shortcomings of both social media tools. The author repeats throughout the book that social media tools may be new, but the motivation behind those tools is not. That motivation is simply the desire for people to connect and create community. Gillin's background as the editor in chief of both TechTarget (which he founded) and Computerworld, gives him the platform from which to speak as a relative authority on the subject. His self-deprecating admission that, in 2003, he declared that blogging's wave had crested underscores the guesswork involved in predicting anything about social media.

The case studies in Gillan's book will help shape our discussion of successful blogging and podcasting, both promising tools for internal, effective business communications. Blogging and podcasting are personality-driven and relatively inexpensive for businesses to implement, making them potentially effective tools in creating a strong company culture.
Gittlen provides a sampling of opinions from enterprise IT leaders who believe that companies ignore Web 2.0 collaboration tools at a cost to their bottom line. Of particular interest in Gittlen’s article is his brief case study of Cisco. The company’s presence in Second Life provides an effective way for its employees, who span more than six time zones, to give tech talks, hold press conferences, train employees and conduct product launches in a relative face-to-face way. Cisco management understands the limitations of the tool, however, and conducts private company business behind the firewall within internal virtual worlds. While the high cost associated with developing private virtual worlds may deter many businesses from implementing the idea, may still find value integrating the ready-made offerings of Second Life. It is an idea worth investigating in our research.


Koplowitz’s article discusses the difference between Web 2.0 technology offered by large companies such as Microsoft and IBM and smaller enterprises. He argues that smaller companies may be a better value than large companies that are entering the Web 2.0 market. He also lists some measures that companies can use to determine which vendor to use in their Web 2.0 software.

Besides the points that the author makes regarding small software companies, he also cites interesting data regarding the use of Web 2.0 in business. He states "nearly 25% [of enterprises] cite implementing Web 2.0 technology as a 2008 priority." This data may give us a strong framework for promoting Web 2.0 applications as valid communication tools.


This article discusses podcasting as a tool for knowledge distribution and discusses how engaging in podcasting can promote collaborative knowledge building among the podcast producers, as opposed to using podcasts to merely record and distribute information. Findings suggest collaborative development of podcasts enables conceptualization of content that stimulates both individual and collective learning and knowledge creation. Based on this, and the ease and speed in which rich media content can be developed using podcasting, further research on podcasting for institutional communication and learning is warranted.

While the majority of Groundswell is focused on how corporations can harness the power of their customers online, there is a chapter dedicated to the same concept internally with employees. As the grunts in the trenches, employees have unique insights into how a corporation works and can provide extremely valuable feedback to the direction and success of the company. The authors look at three communications methods: community (Best Buy’s "Blue Shirt Nation"), wikis (Avenue A/Razorfish, Organic, Intel), and idea exchanges (Bell Canada). Key points addressed include the necessity of widespread participation and involvement from management. Senior company management needs to listen to what the employees are contributing for these efforts to be self-sustaining and beneficial to the company.


According to Martin’s findings, as much as 60% of business email information is mission-critical. Given the unwieldy nature of email, and the turnover rate in the average mid- to large-sized American company, this information “storage system” creates a terrible risk for corporations to lose valuable assets tied to individual emails. The author concludes that Web 2.0 collaboration tools are becoming essential in a workplace where email collaboration is robbing most companies’ bottom lines. His discussion of wikis and blogs in the workplace highlights the pros and cons of each tool, concluding that corporate America has little choice but to move forward with both in order to create a more efficient workforce.


Murphy outlines the remarkable way in which the Vanguard Group, one of the largest mutual fund companies in the nation with 12,000 employees and $1.1 trillion in managed assets, has transformed its intranet into a dynamic employee communication tool. Personalization is key with CrewNet, the name the company has given the feature; employees can visit the portal and, in 15 minutes, manage their time off, benefits, and travel requests, and arrange to collaborate with peers using e-mail and online workspaces. The company estimates that it will save $10 million annually integrating into its existing system the tools that Web 2.0 has to offer. This article provides an exemplary case study for our research. The company also provides a fertile field for potential interviews with Vanguard management currently planning to implement internal wikis and blogs in 2008.
Leveraging Web 2.0 in the Information Workplace


This is an interesting, if short, article that outlines a business case where a company used "knowledge seekers" (those elsewhere in the org that would desire knowledge from the study) to effectively develop a larger-scale implementation of the study. The results were also used to spur technological developments in complementary ways. "Because seekers are self-interested, they ask tough, exploratory questions of knowledge originators, extracting important nuances—not only about how a project was executed but also about how costs built up, how knowledge might be applied elsewhere, what worked and what didn’t, and so on.


This article discusses how knowledge sharing tools such as intranets, blogs, wikis, and online groups can be used for formalization and sharing of best practices and experiences within an organization. The study compares and contrasts four phases of knowledge sharing using these tools which include basic knowledge sharing using an intranet (one-way information production), communication tools of knowledge sharing for collaboration and cooperation (discussion) using online groups or mailing lists, and combined models using intranet and internet based technologies.


Universal McCann is a top ten, global media communication agency. Wave 3 is the third in an annual series tracking the worldwide trends in social media. Based on the responses from 17,000 people in 29 countries, Wave 3 measures consumer usage, attitudes and interests, and is the largest exploration of its kind. The study is a result of quantitative, primary research using the same methodology that guided the first two waves (in 2006 and 2007, respectively). Study designers restricted participants to those they described as “active Internet users,” people who use the Internet every day or every other day, expecting these early adopters to act as social media scouts in viewing what is happening just down the digital road.

The study will help us target the most commonly used elements of social media outside the work force. This will guide our exploration, discussion and recommendations of which social media elements may have the greatest impact in the work place, in order to meet employees' communication needs and interests.