



TECH TRENDS: Knowledge Management

The consumerization of technology and the “Google-ization” of information have changed the knowledge management landscape. How can you address these challenges in a way that benefits your users, your staff, and your business?

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I didn't start my career in the IT service and support industry. I came in through a side door, so I sometimes find myself looking at the landscape through fairly untraditional (though very fabulous) glasses. After all, before I was a part of this industry, I was a customer. As such, I find myself thinking like a user: how will X make my life better? The great thing about knowledge management is, the answer to that question is simple: When well executed well, knowledge management makes *everyone's* life better.

As you approach a knowledge management strategy, consider the following factors to make sure the actions you take really will improve things for your users, business, and IT staff.

1. Assess yourself. You can't get started until you know your current environment, costs, and needs. This isn't always easy, but a full assessment will empower you to make informed decisions and enable you to justify your knowledge management project. During such a self-assessment, one of our customers discovered that it cost \$12 to answer a support call, \$8 to provide support via chat, and \$0.07 to encourage self-help via a knowledge base. At thirty million requests each year, \$0.07 cents per support interaction is pretty attractive. You do the math.

2. Know your audience. Who are you looking to enable? Just your IT staff, or your IT staff and your user population? How technically savvy are your users, and how much of an appetite (e.g., interest, time) do they have for self-resolution? If you work in the legal industry, for example, and your users are lawyers who bill by the quarter-hour, they may not be very interested in self-help.

3. Create success. Whether you choose a prepopulated knowledge management solution, a homegrown solution, or a hybrid model, you must commit to it. If you're going to populate your own knowledge base, give your employees the time and resources to build it properly. This shouldn't be an eleventh-hour project. Also, make it fun for your users. One of our customers launched their knowledge management solution with a “Love Your Computer Week,” resulting in adoption rates of over 85 percent. Again, you do the math.

In this age of “consumerized” technology, we have a great opportunity to harness our users' (real or perceived) tech savviness. I submit that if you provide users with the information in an easy-to-search, easy-to-consume format, you'll find they're pretty good at helping themselves, leaving you to focus on the stuff that really matters, like creating strategic business value.

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Today, the first place people usually go for a solution is the Internet. They “Google” the answer. Why? Because they're virtually guaranteed to find someone else who's had the same issue—and fast. By the time customers call the service desk, they're better informed, and, in some cases, they've already found a potential fix. The traditional IT-customer relationship has been turned on its head. Now, customers are sharing information with IT and collaborating on a solution. However, with so much untested information readily available, this makes all support professionals, not just those in IT, a little nervous. How do we get ahead of this?

We need to embrace the idea that people are pulling information from a variety of sources. A federated knowledge base that culls from a variety of online and in-house sources is a good start. Visibility into customers' common sources of information will help keep support staff from being blindsided by half-truths.

We also need to be proactive when it comes to dealing with the “information hoarders” who are reluctant to put information in a knowledge base for fear that it might jeopardize their positions and put their jobs at risk. Instead of just asking them to turn over information, leverage these subject matter experts by asking them to own the knowledge in their areas of expertise. Put them in charge of reviewing, approving, and maintaining that information in the knowledge base.

We're inundated with information these days. The challenge is organizing the information stored in videos, in-house documents, online forums, etc., in such a way that it's both accurate and consumable.