



Conquering the Tyranny of Email and Word Processors

2008 White Paper

Introduction

The native speakers of the islands of Hawaii probably had no notion of the inadequacy of the duopoly of Word and Email in corporate communication while coining the term Wiki(literally meaning fast). However, Wikis have grown into just that - a fast and efficient way of fostering communication across corporations worldwide.

Aside from speed, Wikis have also grown out of the social need for a more participatory and inclusive form of dialogue as compared to the top-down, "I write, John edits, my boss approves" hierarchical and role-based nature of Content Management Systems(CMS). The CMS trend flourished in the 1990's as a natural method to automate the creation and publishing of web content, specifically html files. They however fostered an environment where roles were well-defined, and the final say on what constituted acceptable content resided with a chosen few.

Instead, Wikis create a milieu in which people are encouraged to express their thoughts through actual page content, forums, discussion boards and polls; thereby introducing a more egalitarian communication dynamic within firms. They also addressed a fundamental productivity issue: Achieving consensus on any topic, for example a knowledgebase item, required an endless clutter of email with Word documents(and attending Track/Accept changes) attached. Wikis, in stark contrast, by nature of their design offer a centralized view of content and easy access to all participants; thereby eliminating a lot of the redundancy and frustration inherent in communicating via email and word processors.

The macro trends portend an extremely favorable growth for Wikis. An oft cited report by Gartner predicts that at least half of Corporate America will be using Wikis by 2009. Using broad extrapolations, this market is easily of the order of billions of dollars. This clearly makes the Wiki ecosystem one of the most attractive and alluring trends in the early 21'st century. The market, nascent till October 2006, came into greater prominence after Google's acquisition of Jotspot. It is now one of the most exciting and highly discussed technological trends today.

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What's the ROI on a Wiki?

While many of the advantages of Wikis are hard to quantify, a starting place for measuring the ROI on Wikis is the Watson Wyatt 2005/2006 Communication ROI Study ([Click here](#)).

The key findings from this study are pretty instructive:

- Companies that communicate effectively have a 19.4 percent higher market premium than companies that do not.
- Shareholder returns for organizations with the most effective communication were over 57 percent higher over the last five years (2000-2004) than were returns for firms with less effective communication.
- Firms that communicate effectively are 4.5 times more likely to report high levels of employee engagement versus firms that communicate less effectively.
- Companies that are highly effective communicators are 20 percent more likely to report lower turnover rates than their peers.

Some of these can be codified as a first step towards assigning a monetary value to each:

- Reduce time spent on unnecessary email
- Reduce time dealing with email Spam
- Reduce time trying to achieve consensus on Word documents using Track/Accept changes
- Realize advantages of a centralized and consistent repository of information.
- Ability to unleash the creative potential of employees by empowering those traditionally at the periphery of all corporate discussion
- Ability to easily version documents for various reasons including regulatory provisions

Even a cursory glance at these statistics reveals the compelling economics behind the Wiki revolution. As Wikis make collaboration easier they are bound to be the dominant collaboration technology in the upcoming years. As early adopters of Wikis start realizing the returns on their investments in the technology, the adoption rate is likely to accelerate substantially.

eTouch SamePage

Founded in 1998, eTouch has been at the forefront of both the CMS and Wiki revolutions. Starting off as a content management services firm, it provided solutions for various Fortune 500 and government firms. Then, acting upon customer feedback and the collective wisdom of the market, it created SamePage -- a robust, secure and feature-rich Wiki to facilitate better collaboration within corporations and individuals. SamePage has been readily adopted by many mid and large sized corporations in a very short time since launch. Today, SamePage stands out as the premier Enterprise Wiki product with the promise to be the next big thing in Enterprise/Social Media 2.0

SamePage was built with the intention of addressing some pains inherent in collaboration:

SamePage is designed to lower the barrier to participation

Barriers to participation

Non-technical users often balk at the prospect of using new technologies. SamePage is designed to lower the barrier to participation. It's industry-leading WYSIWYG editor incorporates all the powerful functionality inherent in major word processors; thus encouraging users to start using it without any formal training and avoiding steep learning curves common in many comparable products. Wiki champions within organizations have a much easier task in convincing skeptical colleagues about the power and versatility of SamePage.

The SamePage architecture leaves a minimal footprint inside corporate firewalls. It is compliant with major operating systems -- Windows, and all versions of Unix. More importantly, its intuitive design makes it easy for the average layperson to use it with minimal fuss; and its self-delegated administration philosophy obviates the need for costly overheads.

SamePage also integrates tightly with existing email clients. User can comment on discussion boards by using a unique email address associated with that discussion board. Further, SamePage comes bundled with a set of templates that can be used for recurring tasks within organizations. A user can utilize templates to easily create content in a pre-defined format. Any page can also be saved as a template, which in turn can be used to pre-fill content on a new page.

Security of data

Wikis often walk a tightrope between openness and security, and SamePage is designed with both these goals in mind. Using a simple, yet powerful, project-page paradigm it ensures that workspaces can be easily created and access to these can be controlled by self-delegated administrators(hereafter, admins). A project creator serves as the de-facto admin and s/he can invite people from the domain to become members of a project. Members have full rights to access, create and edit content within projects. Further, the granular security is also enforced at a page level whereby the author of a page can revoke access to sensitive content from members of a project.

SamePage can easily integrate with existing corporate LDAP's to ensure a smooth transition between current access regulations and corresponding rights inside SamePage. It also allows for LDAP groups to be easily integrated into user groups within the Wiki.

Search Less, find more

SamePage has context sensitive search functionality. This means that any keyword search will find results from "there and that point down". If you are inside a project, you search within pages in that project. From a top-level view of all the projects, you can search through pages in all projects.

More importantly, SamePage searches not just pages but also discussion boards and attachments associated with a page. Thus, a user can easily and more quickly locate relevant content across a large amount of data, furthering increasing their productivity at work. In economic jargon, SamePage reduces the "search cost" inherent in finding germane information within an enterprise.

Reinforcing the need for secure data, the SamePage search functionality is designed to be 'ACL-aware'. This means that a user searching for a keyword will only see pages that s/he has access to based on project and page level permissions. SamePage incorporates delayed indexing in the product design thus allowing for the wisdom of the community to decide on the appropriateness of content on any page.

More content, Less noise

A robust project-page architecture ensures that contributors adopt a level of discipline in creating, maintaining and disseminating content. A project creator is a self-delegated project administrator that determines who is allowed to participate in the project, and in

what capacity. This self-policing mechanism is re-enforced at a page level where the page creator can decide who has rights to read, edit and comment on content within the page. Thereby, a user will easily access and consume relevant content and have an easy to filter out noise; further increasing productivity and employee-morale inside the firm as a whole. Most importantly all this data is **centralized**; thereby ensuring that everyone sees one, consistent message at any point in time.

This flexible yet self-regulated environment is a refreshing change to the increasingly chaotic email culture rife in corporations today. Firstly, email inboxes are regularly flooded by spam, resulting in lots of unproductive time and frustration. Beyond that, email originators carelessly 'cc' and 'bcc' participants for no particular reason except to "play it safe". The result is that people reading email often find that an extremely small percentage of email is actually relevant for their consumption.

Plug and Play

SamePage includes plugins to further reduce the complexity of creating and assimilating content. Users can easily insert the content of other pages, or even other sites, using an include plugin. SamePage further also includes handy plugins to insert RSS Feeds, Calendars, Table of Contents, redirects and Children trees. It also enables a user to create their own custom plugins by modifying relevant class files.

One Size fits all

SamePage is built keeping Standards at the forefront of the architecture. Each page has the underlying HTML available for use with other Web Applications. SamePage is built using commonly available and documented technologies like JSP and Servlets. It can be installed on either Windows or Unix and it works seamlessly with popular browsers -- Microsoft Internet Explorer(IE) and Firefox. It integrates with the freely available Oracle 10g database.

A sense of community

The success of any collaboration tool depends on it's ability to create and reinforce a sense of community within it's participants. SamePage keeps track of where any content originated from and therefore the community of users can easily identify people that degrade the quality of communication in any way. Correspondingly, it is easy to observe the efforts of positive contributors to projects. Over time, this 'wisdom of the community'

can moderate and regulate the kind of content that appears on pages, and hence institutes a culture of consensus building as opposed to one of command and control.

Further, it includes Forums and Discussion Boards to enable members to contribute their thoughts regarding content in pages and projects. Over time, this can serve as an important facilitator of community and thought building within the organization. Discussions can serve as a proxy for the popularity of any proposed idea; and can serve as a sounding board for people involved with the project.

Fully internationalized content

In keeping with tune with the needs of users with a preference for localized versions of software products, SamePage has been built to support interfaces and content in any language. End-users can simply type in content in any language and the Wiki engine renders it through the browser. Further, the interface and menus used to create, edit and disseminate content can be customized to display content in non-English language. This can be done by content created by eTouch's global network of partners, or alternatively the end-user can easily utilize a resource bundle to modify the content into their local language and in a way they deem fit.

Scalability

Numerous Wikis in the marketplace today face an inherent problem -- while they work with small and mid-sized groups at a department level inside Enterprises, as the usage grows to encompass other groups the Wiki is unable to support and sustain increasing levels of user activity. As a result, users encounter significant frustration while trying to access and utilize the Wiki, thereby leading to a decreasing return on the investment for the the product.

The very core of SamePage's architecture is designed to obviate this problem. The robust, underlying CMS code ensures that numerous instances of SamePage (with the same user generated content) can be installed on different machines and all these nodes can share and utilize one database and one file system. Consequently, large enterprises can easily scale up their usage of SamePage with minimal incremental hardware investments, and more importantly with minimal disruption to the Wiki interaction for the earlier adopters.

Why not use a free, open-source Wiki?

The Wiki Ecosystem has seen a proliferation of open source Wikis that are often marketed as free products. These open source contributions have resulted in the creation of some extremely useful Wiki sites including Wikipedia. However, they suffer from various shortcomings that make them unfit for an Enterprise, namely:

- Complicated install and configuration
- Limited support from the Vendor
- Costly maintenance, enhancement and customization
- Lack of granular security mechanisms

SamePage has been built ground-up for the Enterprise. It's industry leading WYSIWYG editor makes it surprisingly easy for a non-technical person to create and disseminate content. SamePage integrates seamlessly with LDAP's and LDAP groups including nested LDAP groups. These features, along with numerous others outlined in this paper position SamePage as a leading player in the Wiki marketplace.

Summary and Conclusion

Wikis are the next evolutionary platform on which corporations and individuals worldwide will collaborate to manage innovation and to foster more efficiency in the Workplace. Wikis stand to gain from the learnings of the CMS and Email revolutions, and improve upon these to provide an intuitive, engaging and viral platform for people to create and disseminate content. SamePage is well poised at the forefront of this Wiki movement. It has the proven ability to dramatically alter the economics of content within your organization. Visit <http://www.etoach.net> or call us at 510-795-4800 to get details.

References:

1. Watson Wyatt 2005/2006 Communication ROI Study ([Click here](#)).
2. 'Email is so five minutes ago' - Businessweek.com article(November 28,2005)