

Premium reviews and analysis
for premium content users

January 2011 | Issue 86

VIP Magazine



In Scope

Which is best for your marketing campaign: Facebook or Twitter?

Insight

Building an effective knowledge management programme

SourceWire

Sources on the radar

Tap the Wire

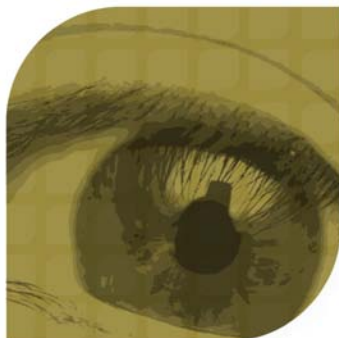
Corporate applications on mobile devices by 2014

Focus On

Knowledge XChanger and DNBI

Horizon

Early warning for business decision makers



"KM teams are often found next to the research or information departments toiling away with little recognition, working hard to show their value."

"Throughout the transformation process we embedded these pillars into the fabric of our client delivery operations allowing the knowledge we share to be turned into tangible monetised value."



Helen Clegg and
Hugo Evans
[View Author Biography](#)

Building an Effective Knowledge Management Programme

Introduction

The problem with building an effective knowledge management (KM) programme is that in almost all organisations KM activities often occur outside normal workstreams. KM teams are often found next to the research or information departments toiling away with little recognition, working hard to show their value. Over the last decade, there has been much emphasis on designing and building technology solutions that will, in theory, facilitate the capturing, analysis, dissemination and repurposing of organisational knowledge. Although things are changing and organisations are getting wise to the fact that it's not all about technology, the trend is still there. While the authors of this article were in Washington last November - presenting at KM World 2010 - we saw lots of examples of technology systems that attempt to solve KM. We believe the reason for this is two-fold. First, technology vendors recognise an easy sale when they see one and every new technology has a potential sale to a KM team. Again, this is because KM teams usually sit separately from standard/core operations so selling to them is less disruptive. The second reason is that most people still have trouble defining what KM is and what function it serves. Most people will say that knowledge management is important, but ask them how and why and the conversation comes pretty quickly to an end. Yet most companies continue to say they value knowledge management (and training for that matter), but rarely follow through with the necessary resources to move KM from a back office function to part of the core operations of the organisation.

Moving Knowledge Management from Back Office to Front Line

At A.T. Kearney Procurement & Analytic Solutions (ATKPAS), a unit of A.T. Kearney's international management consulting firm, we have had the unique opportunity to build a KM programme and embed it into our core operations. As a management consultancy knowledge is what we produce and becomes our competitive advantage. The ability to find, share, process, assimilate and repurpose knowledge quickly and effectively is critical to our success in the marketplace. Approximately three years ago ATKPAS undertook a transformation of our small KM function from back office support to strategic enablement that drives and adds value to our client delivery functions. At the core of this transformation was what we call our KM Programme. This programme rests on eight pillars - Knowledge Capture & Distillation, Different Forms of Knowledge, Syndication of Content, Results, Centers of Excellence (COE), Research, and Governance. Throughout the transformation process we embedded these pillars into the fabric of our client delivery operations allowing the knowledge we share to be turned into tangible monetised value.

Our transformation revolves around three key revelations. First, that solving the knowledge management problem requires more than just technology. There will always be breakthrough technologies that will enhance KM activities, such as all the social media tools, but at the end of the day knowledge management is simply about getting people to share what they have learned - their key insights or information on a specific topic. This means that proper attention needs to be applied to how and why people share, and the process of sharing information. Witness how easily people share on Facebook or update their LinkedIn profiles. What makes them do this? Why do they feel compelled to contribute or update their status? Once we understood

why people share, then it was time to add the technology. Our second revelation was that documents do not equal knowledge. Most KM systems and processes revolve around gathering, collecting and storing documents. Recognising the failure of this strategy we started to look beyond the document. Finally, we realised that the key to a successful implementation of a knowledge sharing programme lies in the understanding that it is a change management effort. It was important for us to recognise that we were attempting to change the way people behave, which required a whole different set of expectations and efforts. This included understanding which triggers motivate our workforce - for example, rewards, competition, internal publicity.

Pillar One – Knowledge Capture & Distillation, Using a Wiki

"...sharing knowledge is almost always confused with collecting documents."

This is the first step in our transformational journey to define what knowledge is. In our experience, sharing knowledge is almost always confused with collecting documents. The thinking goes, if one collects documents and stores them in a database then one is collecting knowledge. Further reinforcing this dynamic are technology systems that privilege the collection of documents – just look at the number of document management systems that pretend to be knowledge management systems! However, once we broke out of this restrictive thinking we came to understand that only a small fraction of the information contained within a set of documents is relevant and should be leveraged. So our goal became to distill the knowledge out of the documents and into another a centralised and more useful format. The format we chose was a wiki in SharePoint. SharePoint is our technology platform because it is the de facto collaboration platform for our client base. While we use SharePoint, any standard wiki technology can be used for this purpose. Using a wiki format allows the knowledge to become actionable, easy to find and governable. Users can collaboratively generate content, edit and add to content, as well as rate it and comment on it. Furthermore, the wiki technology enables us to track the age of the content, find out how often it has been updated (and by whom) and its user-generated rating. All this means that good content is easily shared, while not-so-good content is quickly weeded out. Taking this further, our clients are interested in a subset of the knowledge we distill out of our documents. So the process of distillation allows us to make our knowledge sharing more relevant, but it also allows us to take our knowledge and repurpose it for commercial value to our clients.

"...the wiki technology enables us to track the age of the content, find out how often it has been updated (and by whom) and its user-generated rating."

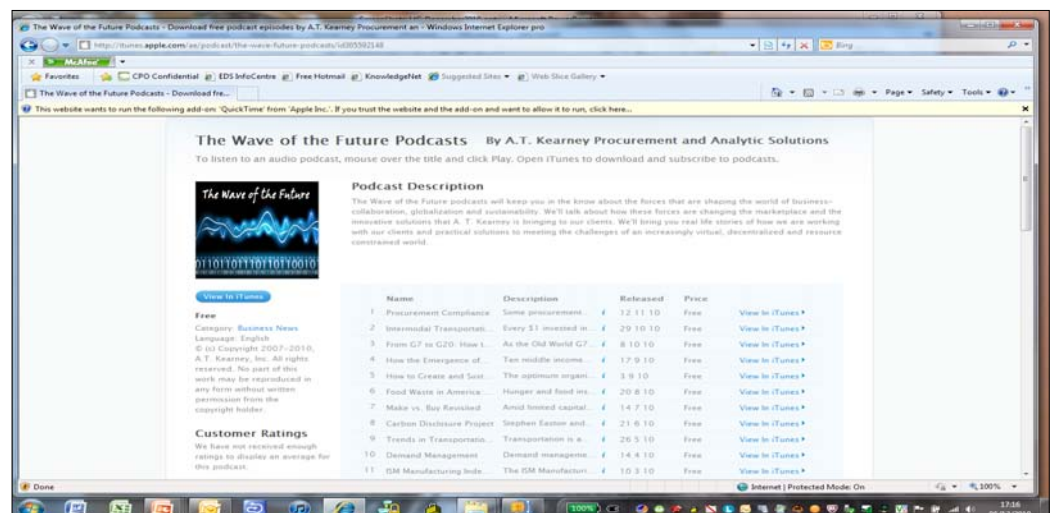
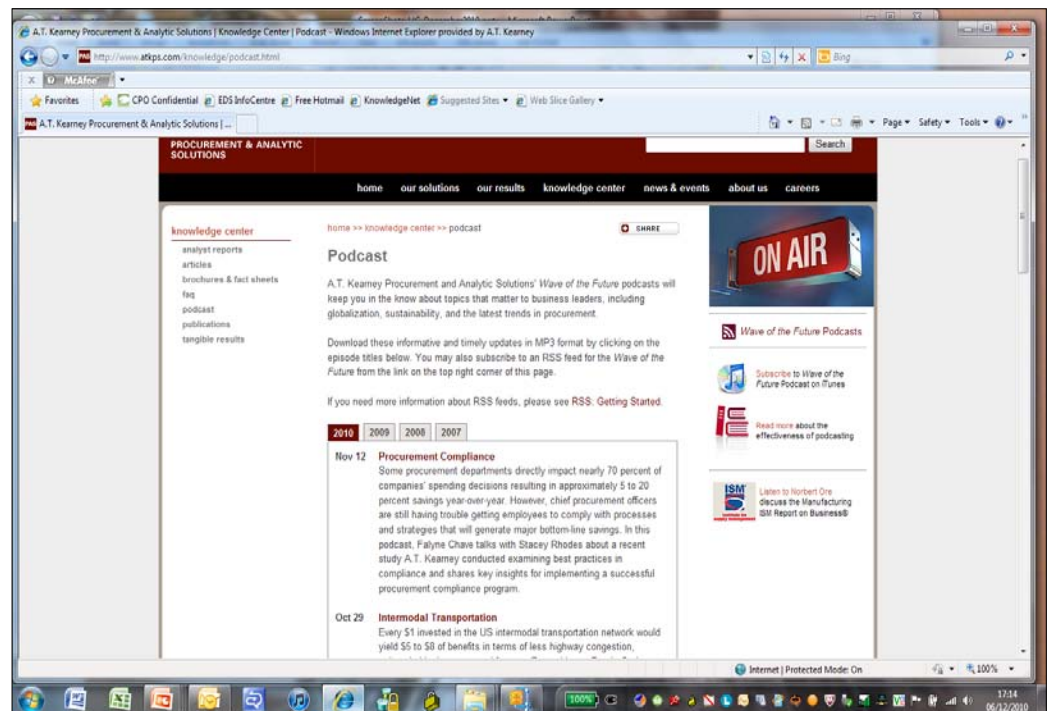
WikiPAS – our Procurement & Analytic Solutions (PAS) wiki

Pillar Two - Different Forms of Knowledge (Audio Content)

"...we started a podcasting series..."

"This allows us to capture knowledge and insight in a way that can never be captured in written form."

The second step of our journey was that we learned that knowledge takes many forms. Three years ago, after being inspired by a podcast workshop at the SLA conference in Denver, we started a podcasting series in which we record subject matter experts talking about their area of expertise or a topic in which they are very interested. This allows us to capture knowledge and insight in a way that can never be captured in written form. In three years we have done 65 podcasts and our average monthly download is over 1000. Indeed, our *Wave of the Future* podcast series has gone from strength to strength. What literally started as an experiment is now very much embedded in our KM programme. As we realised the value of this type of audio content, we started syndicating the content on iTunes as well as on two external procurement websites, which has increased the number of downloads and indirectly supports recruiting and marketing activities. But most importantly we are capturing knowledge that otherwise would be lost. Some knowledge is difficult, if not impossible, to capture in written format. By capturing this knowledge in audio format it allows for a greater breadth of relevant information. Our audio podcasts have been so successful that we are looking to branch out into video-based podcasts.



Pillar Three - Syndication of Content

Once we have created our core information our goal is to then deliver it to the client. As a consultancy knowledge is critical to our ability to deliver. In fact knowledge is one of the key differentiators. The ability to show and deliver this insight and knowledge to our clients is what seals the transition of knowledge management from back office team to strategic player, and is the key to its value being recognised. To accomplish this we have set up our best content to be syndicated. Syndicated content comes from our wiki, podcasts, and project results database. So just how do we do this? Through keyword tagging, we flag the best content that we are authorised to share. This flagged content then automatically populates into all of our client delivery sites and Centers of Excellence. This way our clients are constantly seeing the work that we do.

Pillar Four – Program Management Office Sites

Our Program Management Office (PMO) pillar serves as a way for us to deliver our work to clients with technology. It also works as a transformational tool because we leave this tool with our clients. Each of our PMO sites is a place for our engagement teams to work – it is a virtual team workspace – very necessary because our consultants are often dispersed and this solution is so much better than sending information, documents and questions back and forth by email. The PMO pillar contains sub-sites for each workstream as well as project reporting, dashboarding, file sharing, project plans, communication streams and tracking. The sum of the parts is a centralised and logical place to run our various client programmes. More importantly the PMO pillar advances our knowledge management activities. Prior to the PMO solution information for a project was haphazardly collected and resided in email and/or on individuals' laptops. By moving all activity to a virtual team workspace we are able to, with minimal intervention, move the relevant insights and knowledge worth sharing out of the project workspace and into our KM systems – e.g. our wiki.

“By moving all activity to a virtual team workspace we are able to, with minimal intervention, move the relevant insights and knowledge worth sharing out of the project workspace and into our KM systems...”

The screenshot displays a 'Sourcing' dashboard with a sidebar on the left containing navigation options like 'View All Site Content', 'Lists', 'Documents', and 'Announcements'. The main content area is titled 'Sourcing Dashboard' and features a table with columns for 'Status Category', 'Step', 'Next Milestone', 'Baseline Spend', 'Savings Range', and 'Savings Identified'. The table lists various workstreams such as 'Advertising and Media', 'Durable Medical Equipment', 'IT Hardware', 'Office Equipment', 'Postage & Shipping', 'Print and Postage', and 'Temporary Labor'. Below this, there are sections for 'Other Workstreams' and 'Milestones By Workstream'.

Status Category	Step	Next Milestone	Baseline Spend	Savings Range	Savings Identified
Advertising and Media	1.02.04 Finalize Data Collection	1.02.04 Finalize Data Collection	\$0.230 \$0.3	Low 3 % High 8 %	\$NaN MM
Durable Medical Equipment	1.02.01 Gather initial baseline spend	1.02.01 Gather initial baseline spend		Low - % High - %	
IT Hardware	1.01.01 Kick off meeting	1.01.01 Kick off meeting		Low - % High - %	
Office Equipment	1.02.02 Build detailed spend profile database	1.02.02 Build detailed spend profile database	\$0.20 \$0.3	Low \$0.2 High \$0.3	- 5% - 8% \$NaN
Postage & Shipping	1.02.02 Build detailed spend profile database	1.02.02 Build detailed spend profile database	\$0.200 \$0.3	Low \$0.6 High \$1.5	- 3% - 8% \$NaN MM
Print and Postage			\$0.200 \$0.3	Low \$2.5 High \$5.2	- 10% - 20% \$NaN
Temporary Labor	1.02.04 Collect and analyze current vendor contracts	1.02.04 Collect and analyze current vendor contracts	\$0.260 \$0.3	Low 2 % High 4 %	\$NaN

Pillar Five - Results

We house the results of all our client engagements in what we call our Tangible Results Database (TRDB). As with the Program Management Office pillar, our goal was to centralise the input and reporting of our results. These results are classified with a standardised taxonomy, developed by our KM team, which allows us to feed the results into our communities of interest.

The screenshot displays the AT&T Supply Management Tangible Results Database (TRDB) web application. The main content area features a 'Tangible Results Database (TRDB)' section with a description: 'A.T. Kearney's sourcing expertise extends into every industry and thousands of categories. Estimated savings, by category, are accessible through the search. It houses cumulated savings from eRevolve Internet Negotiations and A.T. Kearney engagements.' Below this is a 'My Results' table with columns for Category, End Date, Result ID, Project Officer, Client, Sourcing Country, and Savings. The table lists several results, including Category 20 (12/30/2009) for Markus Strocker, Category 19 (12/29/2009) for Markus Strocker, Category 18 (12/28/2009) for Johannes Aulick, Category 17 (12/27/2009) for Ruslan Korzh, Category 16 (12/26/2009) for Howard Abe, Category 15 (12/25/2009) for Christine AHN, Category 14 (12/24/2009) for Christine AHN, Category 13 (12/23/2009) for Christine AHN, Category 12 (12/22/2009) for Christine AHN, and Category 11 (12/21/2009) for Christine AHN. A sidebar on the right shows a 'TRDB Summary' with statistics: Total Spend: \$208 Billion, Clients: 273, Distinct Categories: 1,142, Auctions: 16,271, Average Savings: >18%, Results Captured: 6,000, Results Last Week: 35, Last Result: Today, 10:00 PM CT. Below the summary is a 'Top Contributors' list with names and star ratings, and a 'My Statistics' section showing Results Submitted: 25, Total Sourced: \$1.6 B USD, Average Savings: 18%, and Categories: 30.

Pillar Six – Centers of Excellence

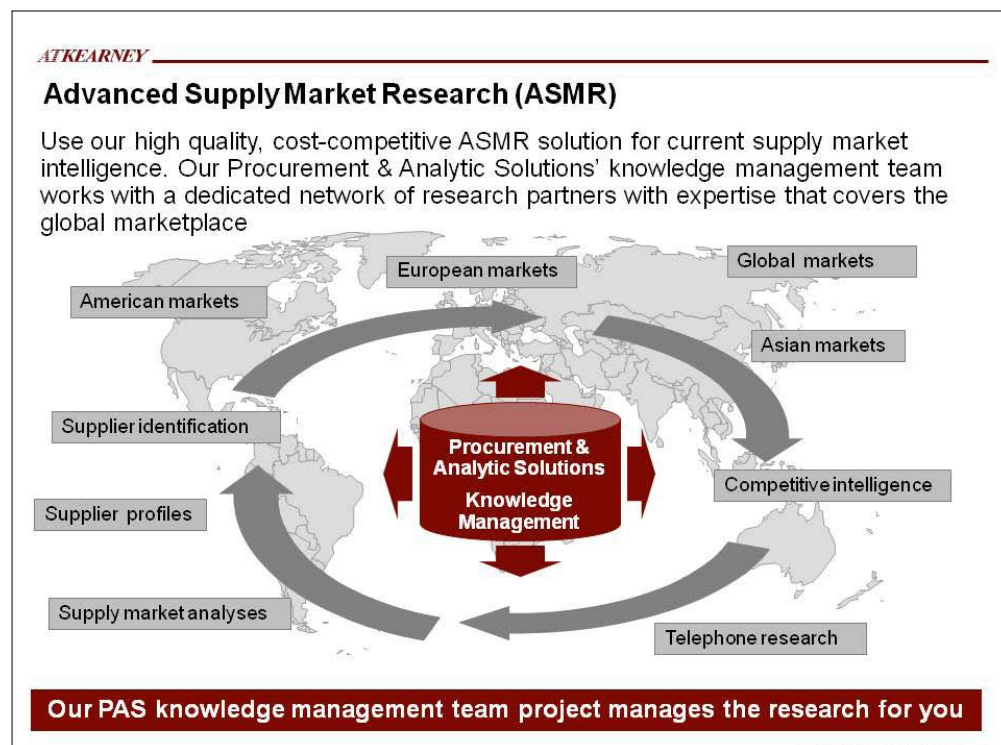
Our Centers of Excellence (COE) are SharePoint community sites that are built around individual topics or procurement categories where we have consultants with significant experience in that area. As with any centre of excellence, the goal is to bring together communities of people around a shared topic in order to facilitate the transfer of knowledge. For example, we have COEs built around categories such as Office Supplies, Travel and IT, as well as broader topics such as sustainability. Each COE draws in syndicated content, through tagged metadata, from our unit's wiki (WikiPAS), our tangible results database as well as our *Wave of the Future* podcast series. The COEs also draw in outside content, for example category-specific RSS feeds. Additionally, and more importantly, the COEs serve as definitive places to find experts. Not only are the experts listed, but their work is prominently displayed within the site, making it easier for subject matter experts to be identified within our organisation. Finally our COE community sites are designed to facilitate an exchange of information amongst the team members. This exchange ranges from sharing links or articles, having discussions or just simple FYIs relating to that category. Within our KM Programme, the COEs become the activity hub for those topics.

Pillar Seven - Research

One of the greatest challenges facing an information/research department, or any team that provides research services (as in our case our KM team), is how to scale research capabilities without hiring an army of analysts which adds to an organisation's fixed costs. Within our unit, we chose to scale our research capabilities by creating a network of dedicated research partners who we can access 'on demand' and who have passed our stringent criteria. We have branded our on demand network of research partners 'Advanced Supply Market Research' because our emphasis is very much on supply market intelligence.

"...we chose to scale our research capabilities by creating a network of dedicated research partners who we can access 'on demand' and who have passed our stringent criteria."

Having additional research capabilities at our disposal has resulted in a number of benefits – we are able to offer an enhanced research service to our internal clients, our small KM team has more time to spend on improving information architecture issues, such as advising on the design of a new COE site, and we have not increased our fixed costs.



Pillar Eight – Governance (Lite)

As a consulting organisation our number one priority is to deliver excellent results to our clients. As such, we avoid employing rigid processes and procedures that get in the way of our client delivery. This makes governance a complex issue. When we first deployed our SharePoint environment we had few (if any) controls. As might be expected this led to a seemingly chaotic situation where sites and information were haphazardly organised and deployed – and finding information was difficult. In our subsequent deployments we learned from our mistake and implemented what we term governance 'lite', which is our way of putting structures around organising and tracking content without restricting the flexibility of the system. The net result is a cleaner and more organised knowledge-sharing environment where it's much easier to find information.

Conclusion

"The key to our success so far is that our KM programme is based on equal parts of people, process and technology."

The key to our success so far is that our KM programme is based on equal parts of people, process and technology. As we stated at the beginning of this article, knowledge management programmes are too often driven by technology. The advent of social media tools has accelerated this trend. For us, the realisation that technology alone is not the answer is slowly percolating through our organisation. Our approach has been a much simpler one, based on enabling our consultants to share knowledge and key insights in different ways yet, at the same time, embedding these knowledge management functions within our core operational processes. Through this transformation process we are successfully making more strategic use of our small knowledge management team, moving them from a back office afterthought to a strategic enabler. ■