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## Simplifying Knowledge Management

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I often wonder why knowledge management takes such energy to adopt, while other collaboration methods, such as social networking over instant messaging have taken off like wildfire.

I use social networking every day to solve customer problems. I mine the organization for the best experts who can help me. This expert is not based on role within the company, or geographical boundary. Soon, there is a group of us who swarm around an issue, and use our collective knowledge to resolve it. And we communicate with each other using our preferred channel which could be voice, email or IM.

Knowledge management would be more readily used if we could mimic this interaction. Here are key steps to take:

## **Open up your knowledgebase**

Knowledge management is not seen as a collaborative tool. Authors who do not field questions from customers create content, which is routed for publication to the knowledgebase. This not only introduces a time delay between when content is written and when it is available, but the content is also not written in the customer's words.

An alternative to this structure is to open the knowledgebase to enable a dialog between customers, agents and authors, with the aim of providing more relevant content.

Feedback forms should be appended to each knowledgebase solution so that they can be reworked to make them more in-line with user demand.

“Just-in-time” authoring can also be adopted. If a service agent is unable to find the right solution to a customer's question within a knowledgebase, the agent can author a new solution on the fly. This allows the solution to be captured with the customer's point of view in mind.

In this model, solutions are not subjected to arduous reviews, but are reviewed as they are reused by other agents. This focuses the agent's energy in perfecting only the solutions that are used. Agents also take collective responsibility for the quality of solutions, as if an error is found, it is instantly corrected.

## **Allow all flavors of contributions**

Knowledgebases are never complete. They should be continually maintained by monitoring their usage patterns - unused content should be pruned, popular content should be optimized, and new content added.

It is limiting to allow a only a segment of agents to author new content. A more inclusive method should let all agents submit draft content using the authoring tools of their choice, dependent on the context that they are in when a knowledge nugget is uncovered. For example, if an agent is working on an email and perceives a knowledge gap, he should be able to highlight relevant content, and route it for review.

On another front, companies can reach out to their user community by integrating their knowledgebase with discussion boards. Users recommend information to be added to the knowledgebase, ensuring that it organically grows with customers changing demands.

Expert users who know the product as well as their customer service agents exist. These experts should be able to post content directly to the company's knowledgebase. Expert user contributions can be rated so that poor contributors are restricted, and star contributors are recognized.

### **Making knowledge more relevant to you**

This is the classic push-pull argument. To make knowledge an integral part of agents' work life, important knowledge like service alerts and policy changes should be pushed to them. Agents should also be able to subscribe to content of interest.

### **Making knowledge easier to find**

Knowledgebases contain hierarchical content categories which a user navigates to find answers. Managing a taxonomy tree is labor intensive and automated approaches to maintaining these structures have undesirable results.

Users don't always think in the context of a taxonomy. One approach would be to augment the company-generated taxonomy with an organically developed folksonomy — or collection of tags. Users could tag useful content and the user community could browse these tag clouds. These folksonomies do not preserve the intrinsic relationship between objects, but they echo more closely how users interact with knowledge that they come into contact with.

### **Broadening the appeal of knowledge**

Today, knowledge management solutions are typically found in a customer service organization, and feedback on content of the knowledgebase is usually only reviewed by a small set of authors.

It is easy to broaden the role of knowledge management by, for example, allowing product managers to cull customer feedback to understand perceived product deficiencies.

Links to beta software can be surfaced in a knowledgebase which can create value for customers by allowing early visibility to new releases.

Cross-sell and upsell opportunities can also be promoted within knowledge content, ultimately allowing a customer service organization to help generate revenue.

A well managed knowledgebase that crosses organizational lines to allow cross-functional collaboration helps shorten the time it takes to deliver what customers want. It can ultimately promote a VP of Customer Service to a Chief Experience Officer role for their customer base.

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