

SOCIAL KNOWLEDGE NETWORKS

Adoption Strategies and Best Practices

INMAGIC POSITION PAPER

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USING SOCIAL KNOWLEDGE NETWORKS TO BRIDGE THE INFORMATION ACCESS GAP IN SHAREPOINT ENVIRONMENTS

Social Knowledge Networks (SKNs) are virtual environments where content combines with human resource assets and subject matter expertise around a business process or problem to increase productivity, foster innovation and improve the retention and preservation of knowledge.

To drive productivity and organizational effectiveness, a new approach to knowledge management is required – one that puts the business user and business problem at the epicenter to tap an organization’s innate social intelligence. But in order to reach that level of efficiency and effectiveness, it is necessary to encourage acceptance and adoption across the organization.

The following collection of “Dos and Don’ts” – drawn from a combination of Inmagic’s customer experience and the writings and research of Dion Hinchcliffe¹ and Ethan Yarbrough² – is offered as a guide to facilitating the adoption of SKNs.

1. IDENTIFY A SPECIFIC PROBLEM, PROCESS, OR COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

Although knowledge retention may be one of the motives (and resulting benefits) of implementing a Social Knowledge Network, it’s rarely the singular focus of an SKN. Organizations strive to retain knowledge, but priority generally goes to giving business users tools and applications that will make their job easier. SKNs satisfy all of those requirements.

For the initial implementation, identify an existing process or practice where past experience and information is valuable and reusable – and where the “wisdom of the community” can enhance content. Examples include proposal development, product development/innovation, customer service, competitive intelligence, partner relationship management and facilities management.

Whether it’s explicitly defined or not, there should already be a “community” of people focusing on the topic at hand and devoted to enhancing the process. This group will understand the value of sharing ideas and recommending high-quality work.

Ultimately, via the SKN, projects are easier to complete and knowledge is captured for similar tasks in the future. As the staff realizes that the tool improves their performance by making it easier to

quickly produce higher-quality deliverables, participation will increase.

2. KNOW YOUR USERS AND THE COMMUNITY

You are not your users. Knowledge workers will use SKNs as long as the network solves real problems, makes their jobs easier, and is truly relevant. But you can't know what problems to solve, what friction points your employees encounter or what they consider relevant until you ask them.

Understand their habits and what they're trying to achieve. Then build the SKN around their needs – addressing the challenges that they and their community come up against.

3. SIZE THE INITIAL SKN APPROPRIATELY

The first group of SKN adopters within your organization must be large enough to achieve critical “social” mass, but not so large that monitoring, communicating and training become major projects in themselves.

Lack of focus is the number one reason pilots and/or Enterprise 2.0 rollouts fail. As an alternative to the traditional pilot, a “targeted project” is recommended. A targeted project is similar to a pilot program, but much more focused. Using a smaller set of users – a community of 30 to 50 people is probably ideal – allows the organization to vet the technology and IT infrastructure issues, and increase adoption success.

4. IDENTIFY AND APPOINT A COMMUNITY MANAGER

Hinchcliffe recommends that companies employ a human being to mentor, facilitate, and guide employees in the use of social technologies. He emphasizes the appointment of a “community manager” as a critical component to successfully achieving adoption.

His studies have shown that if an employee puts out a question to the community that is not answered within 24 hours, they're likely not to come back – and an adoption opportunity is lost. Having a community manager in place ensures that someone will be there to monitor activity in the SKN and guide users to the information they need, find the experts they're looking for and/or

answer blocking issues for them. The manager does not act as a controlling authority, but as a *guide* until users are comfortable on their own. History shows that, once users get comfortable, network activity will rise to a level where useful information flows without the boost of the community manager. But until then, a little help is good thing.

Think of it this way: the community manager is the host of the party. It is the manager’s job to make sure anyone trying to use the tools is successful. The community manager monitors activity, watches for people who are struggling, and shepherds them through any challenges. They study the feedback mechanisms – seeking questions they can answer, peer-to-peer connections they can facilitate, or success stories they can highlight. The community manager ensures a good end-user experience, which increases the likelihood that people will return.

5. IF THERE’S NOTHING THERE, THEN NO ONE WILL COME

Identify subject matter experts and encourage their participation in blogging, rating content, writing comments, and answering questions. Make sure that there is enough activity taking place to draw in a self-sustaining audience.

SKNs facilitate participation because they are centered on an existing knowledge repository – also known as an "information honey pot." Because the network isn’t based on sharing for sharing’s sake, users need not engage to fill a void. SKNs sit at the intersection of content producers and content consumers, where content gives context and purpose to socialization.

6. GIVE USERS A REASON TO RETURN.

It’s especially important in the early stages of an SKN rollout to make sure there’s something new on the home page every single day. Highlight new blogs, the arrival of new content, or upcoming events. Keep your SKN fresh with new, valuable content and insights.

7. SECURE SENIOR LEVEL SPONSORSHIP AND PARTICIPATION

Get one or more people from the senior team to sponsor and participate in the initial implementation, and make sure that their participation is active. If they are contributing comments

and blogs, the rest of the group will be more eager to participate and more likely to view the SKN as an important resource. Also, a little praise goes a long way – encourage executive sponsors to publicly recognize contributors.

8. MANAGE THE PROCESS

Whether a group is small or large, the success of an SKN can be measured by whether or not everyone is aware of who knows what – so when someone has a question or issue, they’ll communicate directly with the subject matter expert. Too often, this dialogue has been “private” or isolated, denying the rest of the company the benefit of the resulting wisdom. If that dialogue were conducted within a SKN, the knowledge would be retained and available to others.

The SKN changes – and improves – communication processes. Initially, to make the change, people may need to be politely reminded to use the SKN rather than shooting off an e-mail for these types of exchanges.

Those reminders should come from one or more managers or community members – or maybe even the senior sponsor. What’s important is that they **not** come from the community manager. The manager should not police communication and should always be framed as a positive force that facilitates interaction and community.

9. INVOLVE IT

The IT group will not need to be heavily involved in the initial deployment of an SKN, but you will need their help occasionally – so be sure to discuss the implementation with IT management. The worst thing you can do is surprise IT with unexpected and unscheduled tasks.

10. ENABLE EMAIL AND RSS NOTIFICATION

Make sure that notifications are enabled when someone responds to a comment or edits a page so that conversations can flow and repeat traffic will be driven to the SKN. Alternatively, you can rely on RSS feeds for these notifications, so long as your group of adopters is familiar with and

understands how to use the feeds.

11. PROVIDE TRAINING

Training end-users shortens time-to-value – the sooner the individuals experience benefits, the better.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

In his role as Vice President of Products at Inmagic, Robert Warren is responsible for driving the company's global product strategy and aligning product development efforts with customer needs and Inmagic strategic initiatives. Bob brings more than twenty years of leadership experience in product management, sales, and marketing in the information technology industry to the company. Prior to joining Inmagic, Bob was Vice President of Product Management at MetaCarta, a leading provider of geographic intelligence solutions.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

¹ **When online communities go to work** by **Dion Hinchcliffe** in ZDNet's Enterprise Web 2.0 Blog

² **White Paper: Enterprise 2.0 Adoption Strategies** by **Ethan Yarbrough**

We would also like to thank our many customers – a group that spans the globe, as well as a wide range of industries – who share their experiences, giving us invaluable insight into Social Knowledge Networks in the real world.

ABOUT INMAGIC

Inmagic® is a leader in developing and implementing Social Knowledge Networks (SKN) for enterprise organizations. The award winning Inmagic® *Presto*, an SKN application, builds upon a rich 30-year history of helping over 5,000 organizations with their information and knowledge management needs. Today, SKNs break down information silos, allowing non-technical business users to access and search relevant content to create true knowledge-based communities that are focused on addressing high-value business processes and objectives. Industry leading organizations such as ACLU, City of Edmonton, Laureate Education, Maple Leaf Foods, MRA, NASA, The Lincoln Center for Performing Arts, the San Francisco Symphony and Wyeth Consumer Healthcare (now Pfizer), rely on Inmagic to improve productivity and collaboration, retain and preserve knowledge and foster greater innovation. Visit Inmagic at www.inmagic.com.



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