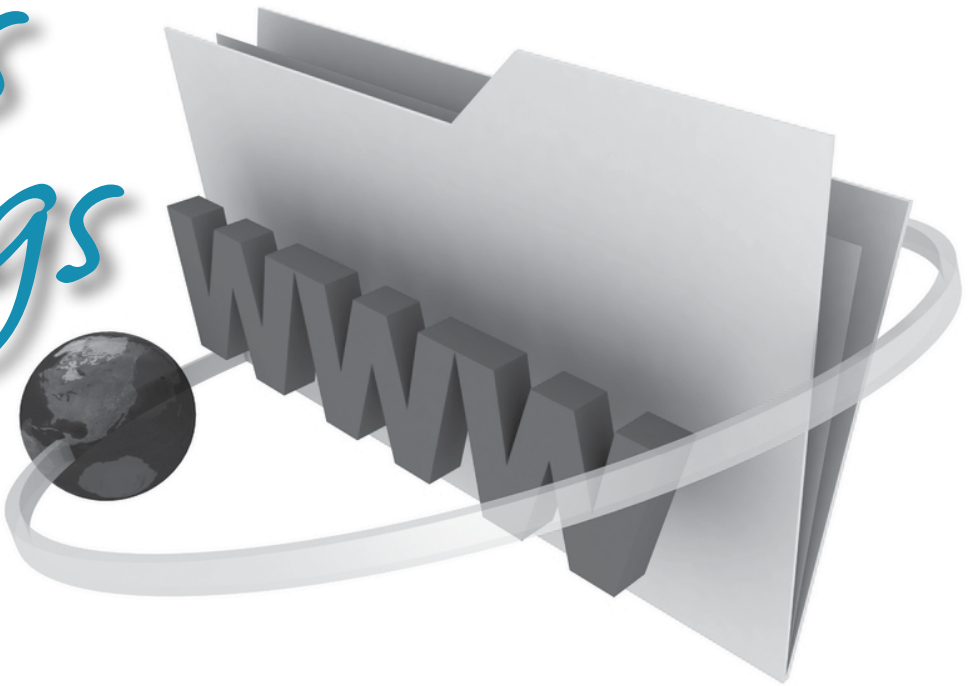


Wikis and Blogs

Infiltrate the Business World



Environment, health, and safety

(EH&S) professionals need a better way to share knowledge. We rely far too heavily on e-mail to communicate with individuals and teams within our organizations. We often attach important documents to these e-mails. But e-mail is unstructured data, relatively uncontrolled, and difficult to search for content. Each of us receives dozens of e-mails each day and, as a result, we suffer from information overload.

As professionals, we have a wealth of knowledge about our jobs, companies, industries, and areas of expertise. This *tacit knowledge*—the 85% of human understanding that resides in our heads—is difficult to manage. Pending retirements by baby boomers, organizational restructuring, and outsourcing compel businesses to take on the challenge of capturing the tacit knowledge that workers have about their jobs, companies, industries, and EH&S. Consequently, businesses of all types are starting to use two relatively new information technologies to share information—wikis and blogs.

WIKIS

Wiki takes its name from the Hawaiian expression “wiki wiki,” or quick. A wiki is a Web site that allows users to add content, as on an Internet forum, and also allows anyone to edit the content. The term wiki also applies to the software used to create such a Web site. A wiki provides an open and transparent sharing and collaboration environment, accessible to all. It is generally accepted that the first wiki, the Portland pattern repository, was created by Ward Cunningham in 1995, and since that date the concept of the wiki has taken off.

Wikipedia, the electronic collaboration encyclopedia, started in 2001 and was based upon the work of Jim Wales and Larry Sanger (www.wikipedia.org). Today, Wikipedia has sites in 10 different languages. The English version contains more than 1,632,000 articles written by numerous collaborators. Wikipedia’s critics say that the information is unreliable, since nearly anyone can edit an entry. However, you can see who authored each article, and you can see the references.

Wikipedia demonstrates how a collaborative technology can help organizations capture their knowledge and experience. Wikis allow organizations to capture not only the tacit knowledge of present workers, but also the intellectual capital of those who have retired from the workforce, as well as communities of interest and other stakeholders. Wikis present all of this knowledge in a virtual repository, delivered over the Internet, in a format comfortable to the future generation of workers. And collaborators do not need to leave their offices to share or search for information.

BLOGS

A *blog* (short for Web log) is a frequent, chronological publication of personal thoughts and Web links. The first blogs were publicly accessible personal journals for individuals. Blogging (i.e., authoring a Web log) gained popularity with the availability of user-friendly publishing tools at blogger.com and similar sites.

Professional journalists use blogs to publish breaking news and amateur journalists use blogs to provide personal insights. Blogging is a two-way communication tool where readers can post their thoughts on another person’s blog.

WHAT'S A BLOG?

A blog is a personal diary. A daily pulpit. A collaborative space. A political soapbox. A breaking-news outlet. A collection of links. Your own private thoughts. Memos to the world.

In simple terms, a blog is a Web site, where you write stuff on an ongoing basis. New stuff shows up at the top, so your visitors can read what's new. Then they comment on it or link to it.

Since blogger.com was launched, almost five years ago, blogs have reshaped the Web, impacted politics, shaken up journalism, and enabled millions of people to have a voice and connect with others. And we're pretty sure the whole deal is just getting started.

A blog gives you your own voice on the Web. It's a place to collect and share things that you find interesting—whether it's your political commentary, a personal diary, or links to Web sites you want to remember. The blogging experience is about not only putting your thoughts on the Web, but also hearing back from and connecting with other like-minded folks.

Source: www.blogger.com

In just five years, blogs have leaped from newsrooms and personal journals with vacation photos to the corporate boardroom, professional communities, and special interest groups.

Business blogs are the realm of corporate executives, and are not limited to “techies” in Silicon Valley. Senior executives at Fortune 50 corporations have blogs, and these corporations are finding that blogs have a positive return on investment (ROI). The General Motors (GM) FastLane blog, for example, allows the company to communicate with existing and prospective customers and to use this knowledge to make critical business decisions. The blog also allows GM to look at a key performance indicator—the number of press mentions (see Charlene Li and Chloe Stromberg, “Calculating the ROI of blogging: A Case Study,” January 24, 2007, www.forrester.com).

Hundreds of professional community blogs exist. Just conduct an Internet search for the term “environmental blog” and see the pages of results! These communities of practice provide a relatively unstructured, yet searchable, way to share and find information quickly. Likewise, you can find special interest group blogs on the Web, whether your interest is in environmental legislation, control technologies, sustainability, pollution prevention, or preserving the environment.

Communication tools like e-mail make it easy to share and collaborate with others, but they are not ideal due to the sheer volume of information and minimal search capabilities. Wikis are much better suited to capturing and sharing

knowledge, and can increase organizational competency. Blogs allow for personal expression, can be good for sharing knowledge, and can show a positive ROI, but are not as powerful as wikis. With these new information technologies available, however, remember that sometimes, there is no substitute for face-to-face sharing of tacit knowledge. **em**



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