

## Defeating the Information Insurgency

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**How enterprise software solutions create value for the entire organization. Spread collaboration and information-sharing tools to the edges of the organization.**

Hannah is a communications manager for a large mortgage company—corporate headquarters, several hundred employees, and more than a dozen regional branch offices. With lots of activity there's lots of information for corporate and the branches to share and the company likes Enterprise 2.0's social media tools as a way of facilitating better communication. To date, however, corporate has approved only one new solution: a single corporate blog that Hannah, alone, is responsible for updating.

Hannah and I talked at the Society for Human Resource Management strategy conference in Phoenix. I spoke there on the use of social media tools to improve knowledge management and advised the audience on the importance of enterprise software solutions to guard against the creation of "silos."

Hannah's situation illustrates exactly why an integrated enterprise solution is so important.

Because Hannah's company has only the single blog in place, they are falling victim to two common pitfalls of the modern business communications environment:

- 1. The true value of social media content solutions is realized when the authority for publishing is distributed from the few to the many:** doing so reduces the workload of people like Hannah, but more importantly it increases exposure for new ideas in the company dialogue that previously might get filtered out by a singular publishing authority whose different experience and priorities can lead them to a different assessment of what is and is not relevant.
- 2. Shadow IT:** When corporate does not provide widely accessible solutions for information exchange, employees will find ways to serve their local needs by setting up insurgent solutions outside the corporate network. Hannah's organization has established her as information gatekeeper. But she's being circumvented: other people in the company are developing their own blogs and wikis to share information with their local teams instead of waiting for that information to be published on Hannah's blog. The insurgent tools stand alone, unconnected, collecting data and knowledge, but inaccessible to the company as a whole.

As much as her employees' enthusiasm has created a problem for Hannah, it's a good problem to have: they are anxious to create content and share knowledge for the good of others. If Hannah can create an enterprise-wide solution that consolidates and integrates the information they produce, then the potential benefit inherent in their enthusiasm will become realized benefit.

But how does someone in Hannah's position create an enterprise solution? What are some examples and how does she know which one to choose?

There are many solutions out there that have capabilities that will likely meet her employee's needs. Hannah's blog is hosted on WordPress so, by adding key WordPress extensions, her current platform could quickly support multiple blogs, Wikis, information aggregation, and micro-blogging. Or, assuming that Hannah has a the right server environment (LAMP: Linux, Apache, MySQL, PHP), Drupal and its rich ecosystem of extensions may also be a viable platform.

Although Hannah will need to partner with her IT team for the solutions above, another option may be a hosted, off-premise solution to leverage the benefits of the Software as a Service (SaaS) model. This reduces her IT team's commitment while ensuring all employees have ubiquitous access to the platform's capabilities. Solution providers like SocialText, PBWorks, and Microsoft SharePoint Online all have features worth investigating.

Ultimately, Hannah should select the platform that is the best match for her objective. The shape of the solution should be governed by the nature of the problem. For Hannah, the right enterprise platform is likely the one that includes:

- a. Additional Blogs for regions or branch offices. This allows the creators of content a venue for communications, allows others to respond, and democratizes information in her company by taking Hannah out of the content gatekeeper role.
- b. Wikis to address needs of traditional collaborative workgroups while continuing to expose the knowledge built through this collaboration
- c. Search. As the body of content builds, aggregation and information discoverability become critical to maintaining the content's usefulness.
- d. Private micro-blogging and status broadcast tools as a way to reinforce the signal that users send to each other about what they're doing and thinking.

The bottom line is that by focusing on the capabilities and ubiquitous access her employees need while doing so from within the framework of an integrated, enterprise solution rather than a series of unconnected, ad hoc solutions (as is now the case), Hannah will be able to harness employees' desire to share their ideas and ensure that, as they do so, their activity builds a reusable company resource in the form of a robust organizational knowledge base.