Ten Tips: Leveraging Blogs & Wikis In Your Consulting Practice

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Questions for the Audience

☐ How Many Folks Here Are Consultants?
  ■ Solo? 2-5 Person Firm? Larger Firms?

☐ Who works On-site? Who works remotely?

☐ Length Of Projects:
  ■ Several Weeks
  ■ A Few Months
  ■ Longer
About SKMurphy

- We Use Blogs & Wikis In Our Practice
  - We Are A Small Team Of Four
  - We Work Face To Face & Remotely
  - Projects Run Weeks To Months
- Business Development For SW Startups
- Focus: Early Revenue & Early Customers
Goals For Talk

☐ Better Understanding Of Blogs & Wikis
☐ How to Use Blogs to Promote Your Practice
☐ How to Use Wikis for Project Team Collaboration
Two “New Technologies” …That Are 11 years Old

- Blogs: Xanga (96), OpenDiary (98), Pyra (99), LiveJournal (99)
  - “Weblog” Coined By Jorn Barger In 1997
  - Shortened To “Blog” By Peter Merholz In 1999

- Wiki invented by Ward Cunningham (95)
  - “Simplest Thing That Could Work"
  - To Enable A Group To Edit A Website
What Are Blogs & Wikis

- Content Management Systems
  - Requiring Only a Web Browser to Access/Edit
  - Typically With a Built-in WYSIWYG Editor
- Server-Based Web Publishing Systems
  - Edit in a Text Window vs. Local Application
  - No FTP upload
  - Obsolete FrontPage, Dreamweaver, GoLive
Blogs -- Questions For Audience

☐ How Many Of You Read Blogs?
☐ Which Blogs Do You Find Useful?
   ■ (Add to Feedback Cards; We Will Summarize)
☐ Who Is Currently Authoring A Blog?
☐ Who Has a Webmaster for Web Updates?
☐ When Did You Last Update Your Website?
What is A Blog?

- Website with Permalinked Entries
- Typically Reverse Chronology: New at Top
- Entries Can Allow Visitor Comment
  - Trackbacks (Reciprocal Link Mechanism)
- Lightweight Web Content Management
- Can Be a Website with Pages / Hierarchy
Use Blogs to Promote Your Practice

- Demonstrate Your
  - Thought Leadership
  - Domain Expertise
- Act As A Dial Tone For Your Website
- Join The Conversation In The Blogosphere
- Bring Traffic To Your Site
Blogs - Advantages / Benefits

- Software Automates Web Publishing
  - No Need for Technical Webmaster
  - Lowers Cost, Cuts Cycle Time
  - Website Can Be Fresher
- Allow for Visitors To Comment Easily
- Trackbacks Show Inbound Links
- Permalink: Posts Accrue Links
  - Impacts Google Page Rank
Blogs -- Good Example

- Point of View: Personal & Authentic
- Tone: Professional with Domain Expertise
- http://johnlevyconsulting.com/
- http://www.zoliblog.com/
- http://radar.oreilly.com/tim/
- http://www.skmurphy.com/blog/
Blogs -- Getting Started

- Read Blogs Before You Write Blogs
- Plan Your Topics For 1-2 Months
- Answer Prospect Questions / Issues
  - E-mail URL Instead Of Detailed Answer
- Comment on Other Relevant Blogs
- Some Production Tools, There Are Many
  - Wordpress, Typepad, Blogger
Blogs -- Tips & Gotchas

- Get to the Point / Stay on Topic
  - Keep It Simple
  - Titles are Important

- This is a Long Term Strategy
  - Blogging Requires Ongoing Effort
  - Pick a Pace You can Sustain
  - Once or Twice a Week is OK

- Anticipate SPAM, Install Filter(s)
Wikis -- Questions For Audience

☐ Is Your Email Inbox Your Filing Cabinet?
☐ Do You Deliver A Written Report(s) ?
☐ Ever Hear These From a Client?
  ■ Who Has The Most Current Version Of A Project Document?
  ■ I Never Got That Email?
  ■ Why Do We Keep Revisiting The Same Decisions?
What is a Wiki?

- Read/Write a Website Using a Browser
- Built-in Revision Control – Easy Undo
- Basic Editing Tools: Text, Tables
  - Advanced: Spreadsheets, Workflow
- Can be Public or Private, Most are Private
- Single Simple Name Space for Pages
Using Wikis to Deliver Projects

- Cut Time Needed To Reach Consensus On Deliverables Against A Deadline
- Source for Specs, Status, Agendas, Issues
- Leverage Hypertext;
  - Avoid E-Mail, Attachments, File Servers
  - Now Documents Can Link to Other Documents
- Keep Final Report Clean
  - But Still Track Issues, Arguments, Decisions

- Shows Power of User Contributed Content
- Mediated/Managed by a Community
- Focus is Content, Not Author
- Single Name Space & Rev Control Useful for Encyclopedias & Dictionaries

- Most Teams Collaborate in Private
- No Deadlines, Consensus by Exhaustion
- Managed by a Core Volunteer Community
  - ...There isn’t a Team
- Don’t Install MediaWiki Unless You are Building an Encyclopedia
Wikis -- Advantages / Benefits

- Private Searchable Shared Documents
- Group Edit / Social Process
- Browser Based: No App Compatibility
- Revision Control is Built In
  - Changes Never Lost
  - Facilitates Project Post Mortem Analysis
Wikis -- Getting Started

- Specifications and Issue Lists
  - Separate Arguments, Decisions, Specs

- Team Meetings
  - One URL / Page for Meetings
  - Agenda Pages can become Minutes

- Some Good Wikis for Consultants
  - Central Desktop
  - EditMe
Wikis -- Tips & Gotchas

☐ Deadlines Trigger Write Conflicts
  ■ Pick a System that Prevents Them

☐ Don’t Fall Out of the Wiki Into the Inbox”
  ■ Publish into Wiki, E-Mail a URL

☐ Make Wiki “Source of Project Truth”
  ■ Attach Working Documents
  ■ Attach Relevant E-mails (or Initiate Within)
Summary: Five Tips for Blogs

1. Get To The Point & Stay on Topic
2. Have A Plan: This is a Long Term Strategy
3. Titles Are Important
4. Combine Multiple Posts into Articles & White Papers
5. Good For Creating & Referencing FAQs
Summary: Five Tips for Wikis

1. Start with Specs, Agendas, and Minutes
   - Frequently Accessed & Updated
2. Add Roster: Membership & Contact Info
3. “Recent Changes” Offers Quick Overview
4. Turn on Change Notification Via E-mail
   - Cuts cycle time & Entices Team Out of Inbox
5. Consensus On Content Not Formatting
Summary: Blogs vs. Wikis

- Both Manage Web Content & Publishing
  - Requiring Only a Web Browser to Access/Edit
  - Blogs: Complex Sites, Hierarchy, Chronology
  - Wikis: Single Name Space + Full Rev Control

- Blogs Preserve Authorship
  - When in doubt, this is probably the default

- Wikis Require Shared Incentives
  - Vehicle for Team/Group Consensus
Thanks For Your Time

Any Comments or Questions?
Backup Slides
I Don’t Feel Ready To Blog…
…But Maybe I Should Be Reading Them

□ How Do I Find The Good Ones?
  ■ Technorati Rank
  ■ Blog Rolls of Blogs You Like

□ How Can I Keep Up When They Change
  ■ Most Blogs Offer “Feeds” via RSS/ATOM
  ■ Use Netvibes or Other RSS Reader
Why Now

- Why Now: Lowered Barriers to Adoption
  - Added Browser Based WYSIWFY Editors
  - Templates / Rich Starting Points Available
- Don’t Need to Learn HTML or WikiMarkup
- Not Just Programmers or Webmasters
- Real Business Use: Real Impact