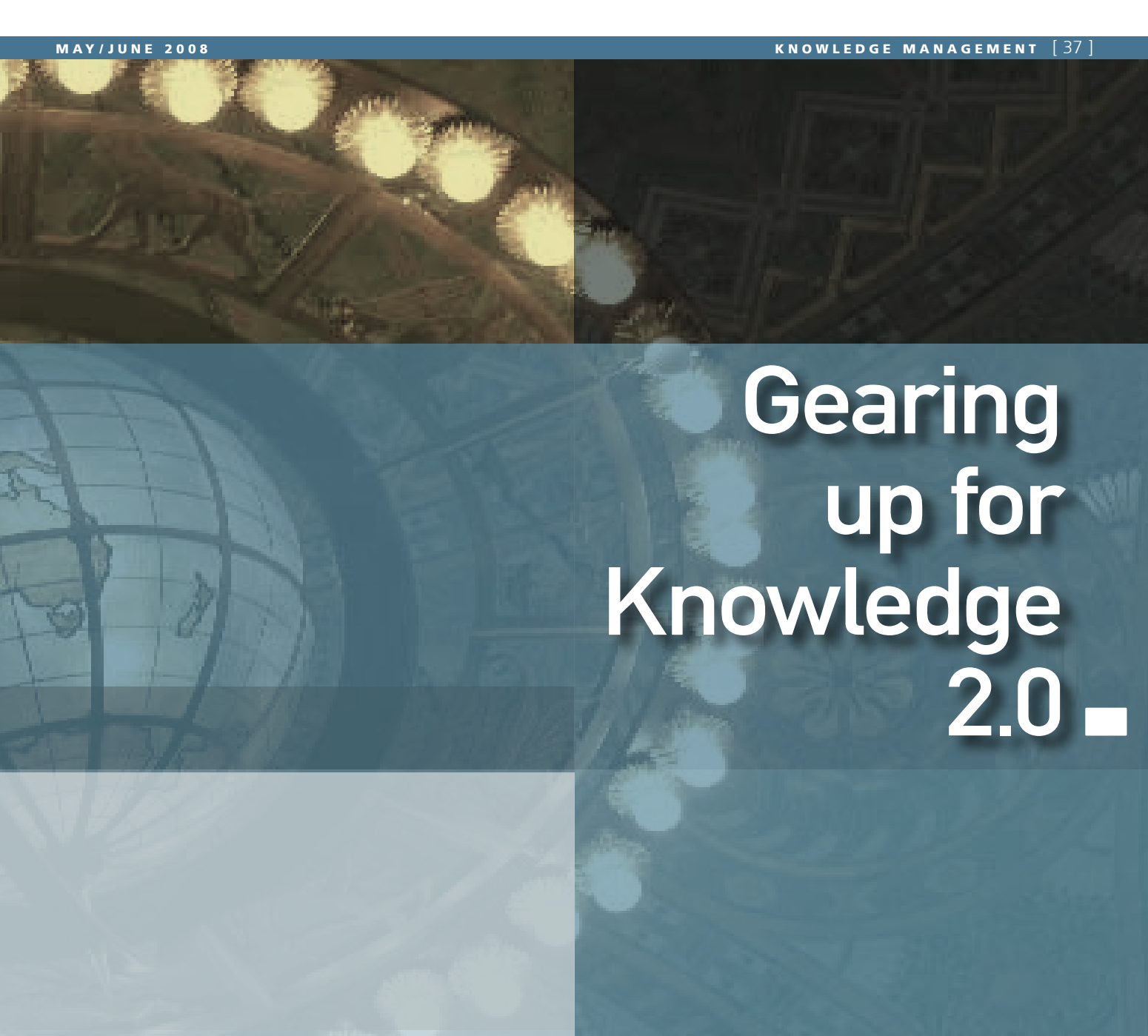


How are companies dealing with the KM challenge in the Web 2.0 era?

Bill Dawes asked some of Australia's leading Knowledge Managers to share their own stories.



Gearing up for Knowledge 2.0 ■

In a recent report from industry analysts Ovum, the question was asked: Whatever happened to knowledge management?

The authors wondered whether a concept that was hot for a period in the 1990s still has relevance in the social networking era.

Their conclusion was that rather than disappearing, knowledge management has

changed its shape - and more - importantly, its name.

Reports of the demise of knowledge management sound somewhat exaggerated to the large number of Australian professionals working to implement KM strategies at large and small organizations across the country.

While KM is acknowledged as a people-centric discipline, its application

involves a wide range of different approaches to utilising IT strategies and document management, content management and blogs/wikis.

Margaret Williams, Knowledge Manager at Gadens Lawyers, is regularly challenged by family and friend about her job title.

“Isn’t that just a fancy new name for ‘librarian’ they ask?”

William's background is originally in library and information science, however her role at Gadens has evolved from Library Manager to National Knowledge Manager, which later incorporated national precedent management as well as other projects

Gadens is one of Australia's leading law firms with 120 partners and 1040 staff throughout Australia.

"I loved the way that information management techniques never stood still in terms of technological advancement," said Williams.

"However I always felt there was 'so much more' out there than simply capturing and recording what was written down—if we could only tap into the brainpower of an organisation."

"It's been a very exciting and rewarding journey especially seeing the development in the technology to assist in the knowledge management process as well as big shifts in culture to enable it all to happen

The Gadens Intranet (named 'GForce') is the primary means of communication and sharing knowledge across the organisation.

"Via GForce there are a range of other inter-connected tools such as chat lines, practice group home pages (tailored for individual needs), a KnowledgeBase of precedents, advices & reference material, policies and procedures, etc," said Williams.

"We are also experimenting with blogs and wikis and hope to expand on what we have now to include more Web2.0-type collaborative tools. We also offer our clients a range of collaborative client services via our Web site including deal rooms, virtual data rooms, an e-leasing site and customised client websites to meet their sophisticated workflow and reporting requirements."

In August 2007 Gadens deployed a Worksite document management system and it is presently defining and documenting work flows prior to upgrading its document automation and workflow technology capabilities.

Gadens is presently exploring other Web 2.0 possibilities and a wiki is already in one high volume practice group while a national expertise register (or corporate Yellow Pages) is also in the pipeline.

"The challenge of the blog/wiki environment is around quality control and also about 'take-up' and encouraging



"At Gadens we have generally moved on from the old adage of 'knowledge is power' (therefore I won't share it with anyone) to 'Knowledge shared is knowledge doubled'.

Margaret Williams

National Knowledge Manager,

Gadens Lawyers.

stakeholders to contribute," said Williams

"Often a slowly-slowly approach works better (in my experience) than trying to impose something new."

The payoff has been easy enough to measure, as Gadens encourages staff to record their non-billable time spent 'knowledge sharing'. Using a special admin code 'KM' to record this time, they can then run reports to produce for HR for their performance appraisals. This work can and is rewarded and recognised as part of the professional career development.

"I have gathered data from partners who gave me anecdotal evidence about how much time was saved by being able to access the KnowledgeBase of advices, seminar papers, presentations etc. This time can be converted into total time saved... time that can be more usefully spent on fee-producing work."

"The initial flurry over KM in the 90s may have died down but I believe that the basic premise is as relevant (if not more so) today than it ever was. In a professional service firm environment the only thing the fee earners have to sell is their knowledge. Knowledge that is 'captured' such as precedents for example are the most basic tools of trade. We need to continually strive to improve our knowledge management strategies and capabilities through collaboration and capture of 'best practice'."

As a Knowledge Manager at Telstra for the past eight years, Keith De La Rue worked to capture knowledge from product managers and marketers and make it available to the corporation's business and government sales force.

A comprehensive toolkit was developed using content management, communication and learning tools.

"A major focus was developing a range of automated and manual tools that assisted contributors to keep content up to date," said De La Rue.

"We also developed a loose Community of Practice around the contributors, and at various times provided rewards and recognition for knowledge sharing. An important element of developing this process was to link it in to the company's standard product development system, so that it became an integral part of normal business flow."

Currently establishing a specialised consultancy in Knowledge Management,



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Communication and Learning (<http://delarue.net>), De La Rue believes the main challenges to develop a knowledge sharing culture simply emanates from the “Ivory Tower” syndrome—knowledge hoarding by experts.

At Telstra this was by overcome by providing direct rewards in the form of salary rewards based on meeting Key Performance Indicator targets.

“We modified the KPIs to include a component directly related to knowledge sharing activities. We assessed this by using a points system, with different levels of reward depending on the amount of involvement,” said De La Rue.

“However, direct financial rewards alone can be a very poor method of encouraging knowledge sharing—it is easy to end up with a heap of useless knowledge. We also built a complete culture around the team, using a separate internal brand, public rewards and recognition (including branded wrist-watches and other giveaways), and an internal newsletter.

“Direct conversations with contributors could also be very helpful, focussing on the business reasons for sharing product knowledge. Many of the contributors complained about the number of times they were interrupted by phone calls from sales staff, so we pointed out that this could be reduced by sharing their knowledge using the KM toolkit.”

Telstra’s KM strategy treats technology as secondary to the knowledge itself, and the people involved. There is no no distinction made between using content management, communication and learning tools.

The Telstra KM toolkit includes an online document library, a weekly web-based newsletter (with a brief email of topics distributed with each edition), and a weekly web and audio conference briefing session.

The audio of these sessions is recorded and edited, and provided on the document library, along with the presentation slide packs. As the document library also includes a subscription service (providing a weekly list of new items), this provides a form of podcasting.

“During my time at Telstra, Web 2.0 tools such as blogs, wikis, RSS and social networking were not available internally (beyond some trial implementations),” said De La Rue.

“However, one critical element of

“At Telstra we always came down on the side of accessibility, and made all content accessible to everyone. While I am sure that in other cases, security can be a real issue, it seems that it is also very easy to use it as a smokescreen to hide knowledge hoarding.”

Keith De La Rue.



these tools is openness, and a completely open policy has always been fundamental to the whole approach. All content on the document library was available to all company staff, and any staff member was able to load or modify content. There was no need for separate log-in to store or access content (although an audit trail was kept).

“We always saw this as a critical element of the toolkit—the easier it is to share knowledge, the more likely it is that knowledge will be shared! The benefits of this are enormous, and the results have always been widely appreciated.”

The Australian Wine Research Institute (AWRI) is a South Australian body that provides research and knowledge support for the burgeoning Australian wine industry.

Keeping Australian winemakers up to date with scientific research and agricultural developments affecting the grapegrowing and winemaking industries is one challenge facing Linda Bevin in her role as Information and Knowledge Manager at the AWRI.

In addition to providing industry assistance on regulatory matters, the AWRI must disseminate health and environmental issues that pertain to the Australian wine industry. It communicates via a bi-monthly print publication and regular email bulletins.

To provide a more responsive platform the AWRI is presently implementing a new system that incorporates collaboration technologies and document management within the single system. The new AWRI portal will be operate as a corporate intranet/electronic content management system while also providing an “extranet” to communicate with the Australian wine industry.

“A blog was setup as a pilot about two to three years ago, before I joined the AWRI,” said Bevin, “and it failed miserably. In the new system, we’re looking to use web 2.0 technologies to improve collaboration and knowledge sharing. For example, a wiki may be used in a project workspace to share information about the project/subject area.”

Bevin found that moving staff to a culture of sharing rather than hoarding knowledge requires support from all levels of the organization.

The other main ingredients include “people’s willingness to adapt to change;

having user-friendly systems and tools to support knowledge sharing; the ability to integrate knowledge sharing as part of the business process rather than an extra task that staff have to do in their busy schedules; [and] knowing who knows what.”

Land and Water Australia (LWA) is one of our smaller federal bureaucracies. It has around 60 staff and only recently implemented an intranet.

Director of Knowledge Nerida Hart said the LWA is also just starting down the path of implementing an electronic document management system, however it has already begun to explore the power of social networking.

“I regularly use LinkedIn and Skype from my work desktop, and we have a Facebook group set up and the aim is to keep in touch with our alumni. So far it is very popular and contrary to what is being worried about in other organisations, the staff do not spend all day playing on Facebook—they really don’t have the time.”

The job of putting together the annual report in 2007 was made much easier through the innovative strategy of using Drupal Books.

“In the 20+ years I have been in the Australian Public Service this is the least painful Annual report I have ever experienced,” said Hart.

“Each contributor had a chapter to construct and while we could see each other chapters, we could only edit our own. At the end of all the contributions being input, the Communications Manager pulled the whole report together with a minimum of fuss ready for production. Also, being open source, we weren’t hit for big license fees and will repeat the process again this year.”

The Knowledge for Regional NRM Program (www.lwa.gov.au/regionalknowledge) which Hart manages has only used ‘open source’ software for its deliverables. A Regional Knowledge Resource Kit was built in mediawiki (www.rkrk.net.au) and the NRM Toolbar developed by Educationau using Drupal and other open source search engines etc (www.nrmtoolbar.net.au).

“The good part about being a small and agile organisation is that we do not have to jump through the same IT hoops as the big Australian Government Departments and have been able to implement new and latest technology



“Changing 20
to 30 years of
organizational
practices that
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is no easy matter;”

Luke Naismith, Contax

solutions with a minimum of fuss,” said Hart.

Luke Naismith is a knowledge, foresight and change project leader with Contax, a leading growth advisor to businesses in the Middle East.

Now based in Dubai, Luke has more than 15 years of experience in strategy management and organizational change activities, primarily in the public sector in Australia. Luke has led many collaborative projects that have developed creative, practical and enduring solutions using a variety of innovative methodologies and new technologies. He has presented at many conferences, published a dozen expert papers and book chapters on foresight and knowledge management, and is a keen blogger (<http://knowledgefutures.wordpress.com>).

Luke made an active contribution to the development of the Australian Standard on Knowledge Management and initiated a community of practice of leading KM practitioners from across the Australian Public Service.

“Our project team is currently using a wiki for managing a change program. Having all the information available on a central site, easily updateable and instantly accessible with the latest version 24/7 to anyone in our international offices is a huge benefit. The core members of the project team use RSS to monitor changes to the wiki and maintain oversight.

“I have a business rule that no internal person is to send me an update on the project by email but to update the wiki instead to ensure transparency and to track progress,” he said.

Naismith believes KM has evolved from IT and sharing to include knowledge-in-people and know-how and all that entails (narrative, embodiment, communication, cognition, etc).

“This makes the work of any KM project manager incredibly interesting and dynamic and touches on so many other areas for organisational renewal including innovation, foresight, leadership and systems thinking.

“KM is just one path that some people follow; many others in neighbouring disciplines and striving to attain similar goals and we have as much to learn from them as they do from us. Together, through collaboration, we will improve the capabilities for our organizations: and isn’t that what KM is all about?” ■