

# 10 Questions You Must Ask Before Implementing a Wiki – A Checklist

Although much of the content covered here is also included in Chapter 3, I thought it would be useful to include it as a separate section that can be used as a checklist by those about to embark on a wiki project.

When I'm invited to speak to various groups about wiki implementation, I often use these 10 questions as the core of my presentation, and I have found that considering these questions before you start enables you to lay a solid foundation on which to build and grow a wiki.

I hope that you will find this summary useful as both a checklist and as a starting point for your own endeavors.

Ask yourself and your team the following questions before you start to implement a wiki, and be truthful with the answers.

Think about the issue you are trying to solve, and then see how a wiki might be applied, but remember don't just focus on the positive, think about the potential down sides too.

## **1. What business issue is the wiki being used to resolve?**

For any technology implementation to succeed, there needs to be a problem that it is trying to solve, or an operational efficiency to be gained. Think about why you are considering a wiki, do you have examples of wikis being used to address similar issues? Did they work? If so, why?

## **2. How will you measure its success?**

The business issue will impact how you measure success, these could be along the lines of percentage of community contributing, number of people registered, number of new articles or comments. Or if the wiki is a customer-facing one, how many people visited certain wiki pages. Or it could be asking did the wiki reduce the time taken for a particular process; or even analyzing its impact on other systems, such as the reduction in email traffic, or a reduction in number of meetings.

### **3. What's the expected return on investment?**

One of the first questions asked for any new system is usually a financial return on investment (ROI). With wikis the software costs could be as low as zero and as high as several thousand dollars for an enterprise solution. The highest cost may be a resource one in terms of people's time to populate and maintain the wiki, so think about your answers to the previous question. The ROI may not be one directly attributable to the wiki itself, but may come from a change in collaboration methodologies and operational improvements. Before you start to consider an ROI on the wiki, you need to calculate what it actually costs you to complete certain business functions today, or how much the business issue you are trying to solve is impacting the bottom line. You need to know today's costs before you can calculate what you will save tomorrow.

### **4. Where is the content going to come from?**

Meaningful content is the key to any successful wiki, but you need to think about where it is going to come from. While you may be looking for the community to contribute, you will most likely need to seed the wiki. Where is this initial content going to come from? Will you need to invest time in creating new content, or will you import existing legacy content from other systems, such as technical documentation, training, policies and procedures or marketing materials? In a large enterprise implementation will you need to integrate the wiki with an existing content management system? Note that the needs of each wiki implementation will be different.

### **5. Who will use the wiki initially?**

While you may be implementing a wiki to meet one particular business need, think about every area of the company, or community, that could benefit or contribute to solving that problem. Try to move beyond functional boundaries and think about the skill sets and the knowledge base of all

who would benefit. In some cases this may even be people located outside the organization.

## **6. Who will use the wiki in the future?**

Of course one of the great things about wikis, and the central theme of this book, is that they foster growth and further collaboration. There are numerous examples of cross pollination of wikis inside organizations as one team sees the benefits that another gain from using a wiki. Before you start your first wiki, spend some time thinking about areas of potential growth and possible future cross functional collaboration. Make sure you make plans for scalable growth and allow easy access for anyone who may need to contribute, or observe, not just on the initial projects, but on potential future ones as well.

## **7. Who will own the wiki?**

Every wiki needs a wiki maven to maintain it, but it also needs someone with a sense of ownership. Be aware of inherent 'not my idea' resistance in championing a wiki implementation, and be prepared that even though it may have been your idea, you may have to give up ownership in order to ensure implementation. Wiki branding can also be an issue that will need addressing, will you need to customise the look and feel of the wiki, so that it reflects corporate branding. Many wikis allow a sophisticated level of customisation and branding.

## **8. Where will the wiki be hosted?**

The location and hosting of a wiki can be a contentious issue and it is one that needs addressing early. In large organizations the IT group may want to host it (or they may actively be against the idea), in certain circumstances it may be better hosted at a departmental or project team level (and trends seem to indicate that these sort of bottom-up wiki implementations are usually the most successful ones), or even by a third party wiki hosting company outside the firewall.

## **9. Which type of wiki should I use?**

There are many different types of wiki in the marketplace. Don't just decide to use one type because it's the only one you've heard of. Go and do some research. Talk to people who have used wikis for similar implementations, find out what they used, and why. Find out which wikis they rejected and why. Develop a short list of at least three wikis to prototype and test.

## **10. What sort of controls will I need, if any?**

It can be argued that the first rule of wikis is that there aren't any rules. It is true that wikis function best when they are driven by the communities that use them, but you need to think about a few basics of control before you start. Do you need logins, and if so who will authorize them? Will you need to hook the wiki up to an existing user base, such as Active Directory or another LDAP store, or will it be good enough to manage the users and groups entirely within the wiki? Will you have some sort of initial structure for your wiki content? Will you give users a 'sandbox' area to learn the wiki in? Who can see, read and edit what pages? Who will monitor recent changes and do any necessary roll backs? What's the philosophy for rolling back content and incorporating comments? You will find that these answers change and evolve along with the wiki, but it is good practice to at least set a baseline.