

# The New Knowledge Management Imperative

## *User Centered, Focused and Organic*

insight

Shiv Singh & Bob Lord | November 2005



## Introduction

Knowledge management has never been more important than it is today. With countries like China and India competing for a place in the global economy, moving up the value chain with more informed, educated and responsive business strategies is the only recourse. The key question is how the knowledge management (KM) practices of companies can be altered to meet the competitive challenges of the global economy.

The answer does not lie in attempting to do a more thorough, disciplined and encompassing job of capturing, codifying and distributing information and knowledge across the enterprise. The amount of information produced by an organization each day is growing far quicker than the ability to organize or absorb it in a timely fashion. Traditional KM practices are not efficient enough to deal with the volumes of information being produced by office workers. Furthermore, while narrow task-oriented KM tools are extremely important to help address specific business operations oriented challenges, they cannot provide a distinct and sustainable competitive advantage.

Rather, a KM strategy that is driven by the needs of the knowledge consumers serves to motivate the knowledge entrepreneurs, and one that furthers organizational dialogue is more relevant today.

## Focusing on the Knowledge Consumer

Knowledge management needs to be approached more aggressively from the perspective of the knowledge consumer. Greater emphasis should be placed on creating a culture of informal information sharing and increasing the aggregate knowledge IQ of an organization. For a company to compete more effectively, every employee needs to be more knowledgeable and educated about every facet of his or her job.

Understanding the specific needs of knowledge consumers and also what broad-based knowledge they require to be more thoughtful, analytical and innovative is the first step. Rather than looking at the aggregate knowledge needs of an organization and trying to capture everything, information needs should be broken down into manageable chunks centered on company objectives or role-specific scenarios. Qualitative and quantitative research can play a significant role in uncovering these needs.

For example, start by ask questions such as: *What insights does a sales person selling a pharmaceutical drug to a doctor need to have? What kind of knowledge does it take for a product strategy manager to make the right decisions regarding the pulling out of specific functionality from a product release? In what form should the knowledge be delivered for this manager to access it most easily and absorb it too?*

While conducting this research can appear cumbersome at first, the effort pales in comparison with the investments that go into tradition KM practices. Research methods such as contextual interviews, job shadowing, card sorting, surveys and collaborative design actively engage the knowledge consumer.

These methods yield critical insights that enable the design team to create a KM solution that will be more relevant and also one that is *adopted* by the knowledge consumers.

## Encouraging Dialogue via Knowledge Entrepreneurs

Addressing the needs in a structured fashion can be difficult because of the volumes of information an organization has to deal with and the turnover in terms of employees moving to other jobs within the company or outside. The answers to these questions also change very frequently.

An alternative is to move away from trying to capture everything and instead toward creating an environment for more analytical and insightful employee dialogue to take place around those questions—whether they are at water coolers or in boardroom meetings. Third generation KM emphasizes dialogue over process and technology. This matters more than ever today. An organization with employees who are continuously conversing about ideas, innovations and knowledge that fuels competitive advantage will always be more successful than one that emphasizes official, structured, corporate approved knowledge management.

Another key piece of this new KM puzzle is to identify the knowledge entrepreneurs, the people who thrive on being the smartest, most informed and innovative workers. Engage, encourage and motivate them to share more and get others to play similar roles. But just as importantly, an organization needs to provide knowledge entrepreneurs with tools that are easy to use, encourage information sharing and fuels dialogue. Web-based tools such as enterprise intranets, employee portals, and blogs play a critical role and have now become the new KM platforms of choice.

## Conclusion

So how can a company compete more effectively in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? By fundamentally understanding what is the most important information that they need to capture and implementing easy-to-use tools focused on enhancing dialogue. Targeting the knowledge entrepreneurs, pushing them forward and creating an organizational culture that encourages information sharing is also important.

In an age where most information is more easily accessible by everyone in the marketplace, competitive advantage is realized when you have a more informed, analytic and strategic employee.

## About the Authors



Shiv Singh is the Director of Enterprise Solutions at Avenue A | Razorfish, the largest interactive agency. In the past eight years, Avenue A | Razorfish has built intranets for clients including, Avaya, Genentech, Thomson, Verizon and Western Union. Shiv's experience spans user research, persona creation, conceptual design, Internet/intranet site architecture, information design and usability testing. He has been responsible for the overall experience design of strategic online solutions for clients in various industries, including retail/CPG, IT and communications, healthcare and life sciences and non-profit.

Please share your insights or thoughts to [shiv.singh@avenuea-razorfish.com](mailto:shiv.singh@avenuea-razorfish.com)



Bob Lord was named President of Avenue A | Razorfish – East Region in July 2004. From February 2003 to July 2004, he served as executive vice president of SBI.Razorfish's East Region. From November 2000 to February 2003, Lord was chief operating officer (COO) of Razorfish, which was acquired by SBI Group. From July 1995 to June 2000, he was the COO and executive vice president of Prism Rehab Systems, a professional services firm in the healthcare sector. From May 1991 to June 1995, Lord was a partner consultant with Symmetrix, a strategic systems re-engineering consulting firm. He holds a BS in engineering from Syracuse University and an MBA from the Harvard Business School.

Please share your insights or thoughts to [bob.lord@avenuea-razorfish.com](mailto:bob.lord@avenuea-razorfish.com).

## About Avenue A | Razorfish

Avenue A | Razorfish ([www.avenuea-razorfish.com](http://www.avenuea-razorfish.com)) is the largest interactive marketing and technology services firm and an operating unit of Seattle-based aQuantive, Inc. (NASDAQ: AQNT). Avenue A | Razorfish operates three regions – East, West and Central – with 11 offices located in major U.S. markets.

The Enterprise Solutions practice at Avenue A | Razorfish designs and builds enterprise intranet, extranet, and partner portal solutions that help organizations empower their employees and partners with the information and tools needed to do their jobs – efficiently and effectively. Leveraging our strengths in user-centric design and technology development, we work with Fortune 500 companies to built workplace solutions that meet user needs and map to business goals. The result: employees at companies like BellSouth, JPMorgan Chase, and Time Warner are able to communicate, collaborate, share knowledge, and perform business tasks more effectively, enabling significant revenue gains and cost savings throughout their organizations. To learn more about our Enterprise Solutions visit <http://www.avenuea-razorfish.com/enterprisesolutions>.

*This article originally appeared as part of KM World's Best Practice series on November 14, 2005.*

Avenue A | Razorfish  
821 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue, Suite 1800  
Seattle, WA 98104  
Phone: 206.816.8800  
Fax: 206.816.8800

For more information please visit: [www.avenuea-razorfish.com](http://www.avenuea-razorfish.com).