



KM REVIEW

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Frontline blogging and KM at The Advocacy Project

By William Ives, Portals and KM

Remote workers are constantly challenged with ways to stay in the knowledge loop. Here, William Ives describes a KM initiative using blogs to better connect human rights groups in the field.

The immediacy and simplicity of blogs provide an excellent vehicle for frontline knowledge capture, and their permanency and searchable nature provide an excellent platform for KM.

The Advocacy Project, a US-based human rights group with global field operations, began blogging in June 2002. Before, they often spent up to six months putting together content for Web site descriptions of their frequently remote projects. They needed to move more quickly with new content. Now project interns keep a field diary through their own personal blog that's immediately available to anyone on the Web.

They provide a permanent record of field events and new interns read blogs of others who went before them. Through these blogs, the interns understand what to expect and learn about the groups they will work with before they head out.

Spreading the word

Technology consultant Teresa Crawford and other Advocacy Project staff review the first blog by each intern to see if they understand its proper use. After this initial check, the interns operate free of editorial preview. Crawford and others periodically check progress and if they need help.

The intern blogs are not stand-alone but are incorporated into The Advocacy Project Web site. The diary is found on the same page as the project description and helps it come

alive. The Advocacy Project found the two media to complement each other.

To bring the blogs to a broader audience, The Advocacy Project added an e-mail update for the best blog posts. An editor reviews the intern blogs and picks examples with especially strong and effective stories. These are published in a newsletter sent to an e-mail list of 5,000 stakeholders. This update is driving a lot more traffic to their site and highlighting their work. The intern blogs are also helping with fund-raising activities.

Case in point

Carmen Marcos, for example, provides a good example of an intern's blog. (http://www.advocacynet.org/cpage_view/Rights_RightsAction_24_65.html). She supported Rights Action, a community-based organization located in Guatemala City that supports indigenous communities who suffered human rights abuses during a dam construction project. The blog diary documents both the highs and lows and in one entry, she describes a difficult hike into the highlands and a positive experience with an affected community.

The Advocacy Project realized they had to have more in place to properly support the blogs including an editor to ensure everything is appropriate, updates to the home page, an e-mail newsletter and content guidance.

In the beginning, some interns felt it was like homework and weren't very motivated to post. But when people started to reply and word got around, they got more enthusiastic. Many find the blog gives them an outlet to reflect on their experiences after a long day and

develops a permanent record available to all.

Inside the company walls

The Advocacy Project also uses internal blogs, inside their firewall, to establish and maintain better connections between home-office staff and field workers around the globe. Managers read blog posts from field workers and provide coaching in the comment space. They also advise field workers to look at blogs of others facing similar issues. These blogs allow managers to be more certain that workers in remote locations are carrying out their assignments. The internal nature of the blogs allows the writers on both sides to be more open in their writing since they don't have to worry about who else might read them.

Proven worth

Many organizations, including IBM and MIT, are using blogs for such frontline workers as field technical repair crews or IT project teams. MIT Sloan School CIO Al Essa says: "We have created a blog forum for each project. Project managers provide updates and everyone in the department can access all project logs. This transparency has streamlined project reviews and broken down communication silos. An obvious extension is to use blogs to share project information with our clients and partners." 

Taken from Business Blogs: A Practical Guide, a new book Ives co-authored with internet marketing expert Amanda Watlington.

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