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TRANSCRIPT

Cut #24: How to structure a wiki

George Faulkner with Luis Suarez

02 February 2007

FAULKNER: Welcome to [ShortCuts](#), a weekly online broadcast brought to you by IBM Workplace. We're here to help you get the most of every day Internet and e-mail tools. I'm George Faulkner.

This week's question came to us from the ShortCuts team. It says, how much structure should I build into my wiki? Is there an optimal level of structure that encourages participation?

On the phone with us is ShortCuts knowledge management expert, Luis Suarez. With 10 years' experience at IBM, Luis specializes in knowledge and collaboration tools. He is also a prolific blogger and maintains three different blogs both inside and outside IBM.

Welcome to ShortCuts, Luis. It's great to have you on the show. What can you tell our listeners about structure and building wikis?

SUAREZ: Thanks, George, and thanks for having me once again. Well, contrary to what a lot of people think, you don't need to build a very complex structure to get a wiki going.

For instance, here are five tips that I can think about that you could go ahead and include. The first one is to have a welcome page, right? To have a home page where people could end up in and have a little bit of a description of what the actual goal of the wiki is, what are you trying to achieve, how are you going to try to put together the information in the wiki itself, so that people will know what is expected from them. Right?

Then next to it, if you're working on a project team [or] wiki, or in a community wiki, it's always good to have a calendar page – a calendar where you can identify community events or team events with like milestones or deadlines, so people can have a visual image of how the community is interactive.

So if you have got like a community event, for instance, you can put it on that calendar space and people will be able to go into it and see what's going on, what the topic is going to be, how they can download presentation materials and everything else.

So it's always good to integrate that calendar feature into a wiki because it helps people keep track of what's going on as far as activities are concerned.

Third thing that I have found actually myself very useful is to have like a who is who page – a page where people are encouraged to drop by, edit it and put information about themselves, like you know, a picture, a basic biography of what they do, how they got together into that project, what they expect from the wiki.

So that gives people the initiative of starting something up if they're not really too sure what to share, so you give them the opportunity to say, okay, well, the wiki, I'm still exploring it, but I can already start adding some content which is actually my content, which is a bit of myself.

Then from their own words, it's good for the wiki managers the people who are looking after the wiki and who set it up in the first place – to perhaps come up with a top three category or top three categories that they will want to have some discussion going on to to sparkle some activity.

I mean, you don't have to have like a 10 category section or anything, just to start small with three of them, for instance. Right? Three topics that you want the community or the team to chime in and start participating, give them some guidelines like asking questions, the more provocative the questions that you ask the better.

And over there you actually tell people, you know, we want to get things going, and we've thought about these three topics.

And then finally, have a section for help resources, right? For information where they could find out who they could go to for problems, how they could work with a wiki like, you know, using different training or education manuals, or tutorials, how to do basic stuff on the wiki itself so that they know how to navigate it and everything else...

Because there's a great chance that when they do it they may not have someone next to them to help them out. So if they have got a link to resources on the wiki of how to do stuff with concrete examples on taking from the actual wiki itself, that will certainly help people get going with adding that information.

And certainly when they see how easy it is to add [INAUDIBLE] into the wiki, it will help them and it will encourage them to participate more actively.

FAULKNER: I think about the things that I love to see when I jump into a wiki, Luis, and my favorite aspects are always footnotes and links.

SUAREZ: Right, yes, because you know, after all, that stuff's all, you know, information resources that you're providing, right? And they are very quick hitters that, you know, where people go and see them, they go and say, okay, well, I know that there are more links there that I could go and check out.

FAULKNER: Well, thank you so much for joining us today, Luis. For a transcript of today's show, visit us on the Web at ibm.com/shortcuts. There you'll find more information on this week's topic. And again, if you've got a question for our experts, write us at cuts@us.ibm.com. From all of us at ShortCuts, thank you for listening.

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