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# Leveraging Knowledge to Better Meet Client Needs

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## Leveraging knowledge to better meet client needs

There's no shortage of intellectual capital amongst the global workforce of Accenture's 140,000 employees. The knowledge base of Accenture's employees represents a massive resource and a critical asset. Accenture's Knowledge Management team, which is part of the company's human resources (HR) organization, realized that the more efficiently employees could tap into each other's expertise, the more effectively the company could respond to the needs of its clients. Knowledge Management is a critical component in helping Accenture deliver solutions and services that achieve high performance for its clients.

The Knowledge Management team collaborated with Accenture's IT organization to transition numerous knowledge repositories to a centralized system that would simplify access, improve search and streamline content management with a consistent user interface. The Knowledge Management team's vision was to allow employees to find more relevant content much faster, translating into less time spent looking for information and more time spent delivering value to clients. This time saving would also enable the Knowledge Management team to maximize the time it spends developing powerful assets to support sales and delivery activities. Assets that are managed in the Knowledge Exchange include client credentials, proposals, project estimates and best practices.

## The business challenge

Information is the lifeblood for any corporation seeking to improve its performance, and Accenture's existing Knowledge Exchange application no longer met the needs of a rapidly growing mobile and dispersed global organization. The objective was to create a user-friendly, world-class content management system and Web-based knowledge management

interface. On the old Knowledge Exchange platform, Accenture employees were challenged by everything from cumbersome information access and unpredictable search relevance to the complexities of a decentralized infrastructure. For example, employees had to know where to look for specific information or to determine in advance which Accenture organization "owned" the particular material they required. The new system needed to offer a single entry point for more than one hundred forty thousand Accenture employees worldwide to find knowledge assets and publish, share and promote their expertise and specific interests. Ultimately, the new system needed to fuel Accenture's sales and delivery capabilities with strategic knowledge assets—knowledge services and content expertise.

Tom Barfield, global knowledge management lead within Accenture's HR organization, is responsible for managing Accenture's knowledge base. He notes: "Our employees needed to locate crucial information and resources for greater responsiveness to client needs."

Accenture recognized that in order to meet these goals, a complex, comprehensive and fully searchable knowledge management system would be required, replete with a highly customized enterprise search functionality and underlying taxonomy that would support the wide variety of topics and categories on which Accenture's employees require information.

Vid Byanna, executive director, global infrastructure in Accenture's IT organization, explained, "We determined that we needed to leverage and index a network of intelligence and make searchable the knowledge, expertise, experience, projects, and advice of Accenture's workforce. This enables employees to get the right information to clients faster."

- About 4,500 Accenture employees use Knowledge Exchange every day—downloading approximately 9,000 documents a day.
- Between 1,200 and 1,500 new users come to Knowledge Exchange each day.

## What Accenture did

The existing knowledge repository, called Knowledge Exchange, was migrated to the same global Microsoft platform to which Accenture had moved 600 other legacy systems. The migration to the new Microsoft platform presented an excellent opportunity for Accenture's Knowledge Management organization to rethink the entire knowledge management philosophy—from search functionality and taxonomy to user interface and design.

Accenture consolidated its knowledge assets into a central repository based on Microsoft SharePoint® Portal Server. The development of a new Knowledge Exchange application enabled Accenture to retire over 40 databases and offer a single point of access through the Accenture Portal (the company's employee portal), versus the previous system, which had multiple access points dispersed across organizations.

Consolidating the knowledge assets paved the way for the enterprise search engine to index the content thoroughly and with a consistent taxonomy applied. In the old environment, searches could only be run against an abstract of the knowledge asset, which limited relevant results because the full content was locked in the knowledge asset attachment, not in the abstract.

On the new platform, Accenture's IT team was able to fully index the actual content of all documents so

searches would yield more relevant results. Now, Accenture employees can search a broader range of knowledge assets from a single point of access, or search deeply within an attachment. Today, the search engine indexes approximately 115,000 attachments and topic pages in the Knowledge Exchange. Accenture-wide, employees can also search across almost four million pages or attachments from 46 different Accenture content sources, enabling efficient searches that yield highly relevant results.

Accenture IT teamed with Avanade and Microsoft to re-architect and develop the new Knowledge Exchange solution. The Microsoft team and product experts played a key role during the system design and code quality review phases. The level of support from Microsoft's SharePoint product team was unequalled, and allowed Accenture to fully exploit all the capabilities of the technology, such as unified document storage, tagging metadata properties, search indexing and web part pages, to meet the business requirements defined by the Knowledge Management organization.

Accenture incorporated the Avanade Connected Architecture. NET technology into the solution. Avanade helped define the application architecture and provided deep technical expertise that helped speed development, particularly for .NET custom development.

Kevin Dana, lead architect for the platform and standards architecture team in Accenture's IT organization noted, "We first focused on eliminating our highly decentralized database environment which consisted of many independent, organization-based knowledge sharing tools. Our goal was to improve efficiencies, costs and capabilities."

The ability to render relevant search results is a direct function of the taxonomy that Accenture's Knowledge

In addition to bottom-line benefits, Accenture has gained international recognition for its success at knowledge management. The annual Global Most Admired Knowledge Enterprises study, an international benchmark for best practice knowledge organizations, has included Accenture every year since the study's inception eight years ago. In 2005, Accenture ranked second overall, up from 10th the previous year. The Global Most Admired Knowledge Enterprises study is sponsored by Teleos, an independent knowledge management and intellectual capital research company.

Management organization uses. Accenture's IT organization created a custom taxonomy tool that allows the Knowledge Management staff to change the taxonomy verbiage to reflect market terminology updates or terms that are specific to Accenture. For example, the taxonomy term "Communications Industry" might change to "Communications and High Tech Industry". The taxonomy tool enables the KM team to easily convert the tagging on content to reflect changes in the company's vocabulary or the external market. This ensures that the most comprehensive search results are delivered.

Accenture's IT organization also built Dynamic Link Web Parts (DLWPs), which automate the manual process of updating content. This feature enables advanced searches leveraging knowledge asset metadata for precise results. Now, members of the Knowledge Management team can configure DLWPs to display new contributions automatically based on their specified criteria.

Content management tools such as Dynamic Link Web Parts, uniform content submission forms and more consistent metadata simplify building and maintaining Accenture's corporate knowledge base. As Barfield shared, "Our knowledge management employees can now focus on content. This alone saved my staff 20 percent of the time that they had spent finding new contributions and manually updating links."

With the underlying functionality in place, Accenture turned its focus to user interface and design. The Accenture Portal centralized several key channels for Accenture employees, including sections on career development, compensation and benefits information, travel and news. While maintaining a consistent look-and-feel with the other Accenture Portal channels, the Knowledge Exchange interface allows employees to easily discover information through topic areas, stay up-to-date on specific topics, become part of a community and take advantage of powerful research tools. For example, employees can manage their own expertise profiles, upload contributions, collaborate using features such as "find an expert" and "communities of practice" tools, add attachments to a download cart and then download all or some in a single zip file, and connect to a global group of researchers who investigate areas and develop points of view for Accenture.

Accenture's IT organization piloted the Knowledge Exchange to about 1,000 knowledge management employees prior to a global rollout. The pilot allowed Accenture topic page owners to publish their own content. Using the web part page templates and selection of web parts, the transition from the old application to Accenture's centralized Knowledge Exchange was efficient and natural.

Barfield stated, "The Knowledge Exchange system provided a foundation for our knowledge management strategy. With this foundation, we can begin to realize the Knowledge Management organization's vision of helping people find information to do their jobs more quickly. We have additional plans to extend the platform to improve collaboration and knowledge sharing capabilities."

### **High performance delivered**

With a scalable document repository, improved search capabilities and a consistent user-interface, the new Knowledge Exchange offers a centralized enterprise knowledge sharing platform that improves workforce productivity. It enables client-facing employees to more efficiently locate crucial information and resources for clients. Accenture reduced \$1 million in annual costs by decommissioning dozens of database

applications associated with the old system. Knowledge Exchange also enabled Knowledge Management employees to focus on ensuring that Accenture has access to the best collection of content and information resources.

Individual document downloads averaged about 170,000 per month under the previous Knowledge Exchange. Recently, downloads topped 200,000 Zip archives per month. Each downloadable archive contains, on average, two or three individual documents, which means that download volume has doubled or tripled under the new Knowledge Exchange platform.

Ultimately, Knowledge Exchange has bolstered the satisfaction levels of Accenture's people. User satisfaction has increased seven percent, and internal feedback mechanisms indicate that employees have the information

they need to do their jobs. Barfield explained: "The end user experience is more straightforward, and as a result, more employees are using the Knowledge Exchange. Employees are finding more information and spending less time searching."

As Accenture pursues its goal of helping clients move forward on the path to becoming high-performance businesses, it now is aided by a Knowledge Management system that itself is a model of high performance.

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