

## Intranets

### **KM World/Intranets/Enterprise Search Summit West 2008: Conference Report, San Jose, California, 23-25 September**

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#### **Introduction**

The first major intranets conference was held in San Francisco in 1999. Over the last few years, the Intranets and KM World events have been held in parallel, and this year there was also a track developed from the Enterprise Search Summit which takes place in New York in May. The conferences are organised by Information Today Inc.

[www.infoday.com](http://www.infoday.com)

There were tracks covering enterprise search, intranets, enterprise 2.0, intranet and portal strategies, collaboration tools and practices, knowledge management and enterprise content management. Because of the scale of the event it is not possible to provide a summary of each paper but I thought you might be interested in some of the key issues that emerged from the conference. Many of the papers on KM and collaboration have been reported on by Michael Sampson at

[http://www.michaelsampson.net/conference\\_notes/](http://www.michaelsampson.net/conference_notes/)

#### **Convergence**

The most notable aspect of the conference was the extent to which the tracks covered all the topics at the same time. Intranets, knowledge management, collaboration and enterprise search were referred to in almost every paper.

#### **Intranets as a business resource**

It was not so long ago that many of the presentations were about the problems that intranet managers were having about justifying the intranet to senior managers. That issue has gone away, and there were very few papers describing individual intranets. Intranet managers are now much more confident about the role that they play in their organisations, and many are now developing intranet strategies that set out a long-term approach. One of the driving forces for the increasingly high regard that intranets have in business is the rapid adoption of Enterprise 2.0 applications. As the percentage of the workforce that consists of younger employees well used to Facebook and LinkedIn increases so the adoption of social networking technologies is not only easier but is supported by genuine user demand. Good examples of how this worked in practice came from organisations as diverse as IBM, the Department of Peacekeeping of the United Nations and The World Bank.

A feature of the conference was the announcement of the winners of the Step Two Designs Intranet Innovation Awards. This is the second year the competition has been run; the aim is to highlight aspects of an intranet that have a high impact on the operations of an organisation. The winners this year were

- Fuller Landau (Canada), this year's platinum winner, delivered a rich set of functionality to support core business processes in their accounting firm.
- Syngenta created a full-featured 'location finder' to help knit together their 210 locations across more than 90 countries.

- Swiss Post delivered 'speaking intranet news' via a 0800 number to their postmen and postbus drivers.
- Transfield Services rolled out a SharePoint solution for collaboration that will be the envy of many, providing extensive support for users plus an overall governance model.
- British Airways used their Crew Community Forums to support peer-to-peer collaboration, and to solve a myriad of operational challenges.
- Scottrade used a wiki to capture and communicate key information on their competitors in the fiercely competitive financial industry. Urbis delivered a 'project finder' to help their professional services firm answer the question: 'What have we done before?'
- Janssen-Cilag took the normally behind-the-scenes task of tracking IT equipment and made it into a user-facing solution that streamlines common tasks.
- Youth Hostels Association delivered a meter-reading application that helps staff in hostels and supports the organisation's goal to reduce their energy usage by 10%.

More details are available at <http://www.steptwo.com.au/products/iaa2008>

## **New opportunities for knowledge management**

Knowledge management has had a difficult few years. Since its "invention" in the late 1990s the rate of adoption has been slow, not helped by the fact that technological solutions to KM were expensive and heavily customised. That has all changed with the arrival of low-cost and open-source social networking and collaboration products. One of the market leaders in this sector is Atlassian, and there were good reports of its ease of implementation and adoption (<http://www.atlassian.com/software/confluence/>).

An interesting trend in KM is that successful KM projects seem to be emerging from joint ventures between the KM team and the training/learning departments, so that, in particular, new employees have the best of opportunities to find out how they can tap into the collective expertise of the company, join in networks, and make their own contribution as quickly as possible. The global consulting and accounting firm PwC is an especially impressive example of this and Gordon Vala-Webb, the National KM Director of PwC in Canada gave a very good paper on this topic, as did Yves Noble, KM Head, Capgemini.

## **SharePoint**

Although there were no specific sessions on SharePoint, it featured in many discussions over coffee. Only a few presentations involved SharePoint; these tended to be from law firms that had clearly spent a considerable amount of time and effort on the development process. The coffee discussions were around stories of very long and fraught development schedules. In terms of collaboration, one of the most insightful papers was from New Zealand consultant Michael Sampson [www.michael.sampson.net](http://www.michael.sampson.net). His analysis is that at present SharePoint is a rather flawed collaboration application, and fails to meet some of the core requirements. If you want to get a flavour of Michael's analysis of SharePoint as a collaboration toolset than read <http://www.ericmackonline.com/ICA/blogs/emonline.nsf/dx/sharepoint-as-a-collaboration-tool-an-independent-evaluation>; it is also worth buying Michael's report "The 7 Pillars of IT-Enabled Team Productivity: The Microsoft SharePoint 2007 Analysis" <http://co.michaelsampson.net/sp7p.html>.

SharePoint also featured in the tracks on portals and enterprise content management. Alan Pelz-Sharpe of CMSWatch knows more about SharePoint than any one else I know and his analysis, which he presented at the conference, can be found at <http://www.cmswatch.com/Trends/1377-Three-continents,-one-SharePoint-story> . The overall view was that SharePoint was much more complex than anyone had initially thought, and that the applications where it had been successful so far were highly focused, involving the closest of working relationships between the IT and business teams. Enterprise-level roll-outs, as a general-purpose platform, seem to be rapidly being down-scaled.

## Enterprise search

SharePoint was also a topic for conversation and presentations in the Enterprise Search tracks. Here, a number of vendors from Autonomy to BA-Insight were showing how the current inadequacies of the search product could be overcome by adding in additional software. What was still very unclear was how FAST Search fitted into the Microsoft search story. Certainly the company offers connectors to enhance the SharePoint offering, but in the case of FAST Search and Autonomy these are expensive add-ons.

One of the most interesting papers on search came as a keynote from Peter Morville, the author of *Ambient Findability*. Peter is in the process of writing a book on search usability, and he has been looking at 'use cases' for search. Rather than trying to explain them I suggest that you look at a Flickr slide set at <http://flickr.com/photos/morville/collections/72157603785835882/>.

Keynotes from both Stephen Arnold (Arnold IT) and Susan Feldman (IDC) indicated that search was rapidly moving away from simply providing a set of results for a small number of keywords. The volume of information is growing so rapidly that this was no longer an effective solution, and the next generation of enterprise search applications would be using natural-language queries, and will provide sophisticated contextual analysis of documents.

Much of the coffee table discussion was about the size of search support teams. Google caught everyone by surprise by a lunchtime presentation that indicated that a global enterprise search application using the Google Search Appliance only needed 0.2 people to manage it. In general, people were struggling to cope with even three or four support staff, especially where there was a requirement to develop 'best bets'. A major factor in the US adoption and support of enterprise search has been the new (late 2006) rules on e-discovery compliance.

Interestingly the exhibition was dominated by search and enterprise 2.0 vendors. Three years ago it was dominated by enterprise and web content management vendors.

### **In summary**

Although San Jose is a long way to go for anyone in Europe, this is a very useful conference to attend if you have a broad-based responsibility for intranets, collaboration and KM. Speakers are given 45 minutes for their papers, and so get into a level of detail that is often not the case in European conferences. There are also good opportunities for networking. I'm not sure what the total delegate number was, but my guess is that it was around 600 plus.