

## Meeting Reports

### ERM's Knowledge Sharing Platform

UKeiG Intranets Forum, 26 February 2010

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The latest Intranets Forum meeting was held at the offices of Environmental Resources Management (ERM) in St Mary Axe, EC3, overlooking the famous Gherkin building. About 25 UKeiG members attended to learn more about ERM's Knowledge Sharing Platform, which was recognised as one of the world's top ten best intranets in a 2009 survey by Nielsen Norman Group.

To put the intranet in context, we learnt that ERM is a leading global provider of environmental, health and safety, risk, and social consulting services, and has 137 offices in 39 countries, employing approximately 3,300 staff. Dr Bonnie Cheuk, our host, is responsible for knowledge management, internal communications, the intranet and the ERM website.

When she joined four years ago, she made the decision to rebrand 'knowledge management' as 'knowledge sharing'. This was later redefined as 'knowledge sharing and communications' and shows how ERM is placing increasing emphasis on promoting real dialogue and two-way communication.

ERM wants every consultant to be able to tap into the expertise of others and find relevant information and documents quickly, so that they can provide the best advice for their clients and grow their careers. That is what the intranet does. It was created in Sharepoint 2007 and uses mostly out-of-the-box features. It replaces Lotus Notes, which was in use prior to this but without any real governance.

MINERVA is managed by an intranet team of five, and Bonnie introduced us to two of them at the start of the session. They support the 200 site managers (who have other roles in addition to looking after their intranet sites) spread throughout the firm. The name MINERVA was chosen by staff in a vote.

After giving us the general background, Bonnie took us on a live tour around MINERVA, which really is an award winning intranet incorporating so many interesting features. Topics that stood out for me included:

### 1. Urgent requests

This appears at the bottom of the home page and is where anyone in the firm can post a question. ERM staff have always been happy to share information with their colleagues but often didn't know when help was required. This feature solves that, and we could see that many responses had been submitted.

Service-line metadata are added to the question, so that it also appears on the service area page, along with a status tag showing whether the question is still active or has been resolved.

### 2. Safety Zone

Safety is an important part of ERM's work and every meeting starts with a 'safety moment'. Likewise on MINERVA, every week a different colleague shares a safety moment. This is done via a blog, and allows others to add their comments.

### 3. Staff profiles

All postings include a link to the profile of the submitter fed from Active Directory. Staff can also add further information about themselves. Following a campaign run with the support of management the original completion rate of 35% rose to 100%!

### 4. Statistical analysis

The most popular blogs and top pages are announced at regular intervals.

At the other end of the spectrum, a site closure process is started for those sites with few visitors.

Search queries are analysed to see if they bring back the right sites, and Best Bets are created where necessary.

### 5. Strategy Development Process

This, for me, was really impressive and shows how MINERVA slots in at the heart of ERM. In September 2009 a new Strategy Development Process started, which included a new interactive intranet site storing all the relevant information. Five channels for knowledge sharing were set up:

- a) Global office face-to-face meetings were held to inform staff about the process and introduce the various methods by which they could add their views. A Flickr-type photo library was set up so that staff could upload any photos they had taken during these meetings.

- b) A “Tell us your insights forum” was created and each week the results were summarised for the business leaders.
- c) An internal “ERM Tweet” application was set up which proved very popular. It resembled Twitter to such an extent that one colleague wanted to know why he couldn’t find it on the real thing!
- d) A telephone hotline enabled staff to dial in and leave a message (anonymously if desired) which was then transcribed and posted on the “Tell us your insights forum”.
- e) Anyone wanting to submit their views anonymously could email a confidential mailbox which only Bonnie could access – so it was not therefore completely anonymous!

Once all the insights had been gathered together, a “CEO Jam” (radio broadcast) was organised, where senior leaders shared what they had learnt so far and staff could call in with further insights. A queuing system operated for asking questions, and staff could also post a question online, although callers by phone had priority.

50 senior leaders then attended a strategy meeting to review and share their own ideas. From the start it was made clear that they would not be able to take on board all staff insights, but they would be able to focus on issues that were important to staff, and consider those they had not considered previously.

The effort put into ensuring that staff had a variety of opportunities to participate, and to do so in the format that most suited them really impressed me. Over 3,100 staff members (from a total of 3,300!) submitted ideas, and these were consolidated into 400 insights.

Plans for the future include upgrading MINERVA to Sharepoint 2010 and at the same time reviewing the current metadata to improve performance. It was interesting to learn that one of the intranet team has a PhD in metadata management – another indication of how serious ERM is about making sure the knowledge sharing process is as effective as possible.

The whole session was very lively and interactive, and Bonnie was a very knowledgeable and engaging presenter, answering a variety of questions relating to metadata, the support given to site managers and intranet governance. I went home bubbling with ideas and inspired by what can be done with the support of senior management and the right team, and I am sure I was not alone.

Bonnie has written an article on knowledge sharing at ERM – see ‘Innovation Co-Creation’ by Bonnie Cheuk (*Inside Knowledge*, February 2010, pp14-18)