

Socialtext's Corporate Wiki

Wikis are very useful tools for group collaboration. They provide a simple way of working on shared documents, group projects, and knowledge bases.

Most wiki systems are aimed at consumers. [Socialtext](#) produces one that's designed for business use. In this brief, we describe the offering and its industry context.

Product Summary

Main features:

- Socialtext's wiki is available in three formats:
 - An appliance installed on the customer's premises
 - A hosted service from Socialtext
 - Open source software, available for free
- It has a user-friendly What You See Is What You Get (WYSIWYG) editor. So users need not be familiar with complicated wiki syntax.
- The WYSIWYG editor lets users create more advanced structure and content richness in wiki pages. These editor features are known as WikiWidgets.
- User authentication and fine-grained access controls define who has access to the wiki and their level of access, such as view, edit, or comment on page.
- Users can easily sort, update, tag, and post content, including attachments and multimedia.
- Built-in search provides keyword-based lookups of relevant information. Keyword tags can also be used in this way.
- A feature called Socialtext Unplugged provides offline support for users without Internet access. Users can take wiki content offline, make changes, and then synchronize changes back to the wiki once Internet access is available.
- A product called Socialtext Miki allows mobile users to access the wiki wirelessly from Blackberry, Palm, and Windows Mobile devices. By detecting the client device, the wiki server automatically generates simplified Web pages with lightweight functionality geared for microbrowsers. This allows mobile users to easily view, edit, and search for wiki pages.
- Users can subscribe to individual pages, entire workspaces, or wiki blogs as well as access results to search queries via RSS from their preferred reader, such as Newsgator.
- Using tagging (keywords describing posted information), users can define their own context-based categories that provide additional structure for how wiki content gets organized and viewed.

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- Socialtext wikis can participate in Microsoft Sharepoint as Web parts. They integrate with Active Directory for unified user management.
- There are two levels of developer access: a basic SOAP API and a rich, full-featured Representational State Transfer (REST) API. Developers can use these to build or integrate applications on Socialtext wikis; for example, leveraging recent changes, search, page views, tags, attachment, workspace, and user content.

Socialtext has 45 employees and has had \$6 million in external financing.

Comments and Observations

Email is the most common tool that project teams use to work together. It is an important collaboration tool, but it does not provide a common place where project members can share resources or knowledge, produce status reports, or otherwise collaborate. When you share through email, different copies of the same information flourish, and you are never quite sure which is the most current version. Wikis solve this problem by providing a common and easily accessible information store.

Wikis will become popular as “living, breathing” repositories of corporate knowledge—essentially Wikipedias inside a given organization. Most organizations over time will be comfortable with allowing widespread contribution and update privileges. The success and surprising accuracy of Wikipedia.com has shown how the benefits of open access—content richness, currency, and ease of use—usually outweigh the risk of poor quality or abuse.

Socialtext is a leading supplier of corporate wiki solutions. Not including its free open source users, the company claims roughly 250,000 active users on its appliances and hosted service platforms. This illustrates how early a stage corporate wiki use is in. By 2012, we expect 50 million to 100 million businesspeople to use wikis regularly.

Wikis have a lot in common with teamspaces/webspaces, such as Microsoft Sharepoint. Ultimately, the two will probably merge, and wiki functionality will become a standard part of any enterprise portal platform. The core value of a wiki, after all, is having a simple environment for posting things to a shared online workspace for easy editing and team contributions.

Wikis naturally span organizations. They are not restricted to being within the firewall. It is easy for internal staff, customers, and suppliers—or anyone else—to participate as peers. That is very attractive for many use cases, especially ad hoc project teams and partner extranets.

Wikis can help make a company’s public Web site attractive. They foster community, build brand loyalty, and stimulate visitors to return to the site. Some organizations also find public wikis valuable for customer self-support applications as well as for “crowd-sourcing” new ideas for innovation.

As is common with other messaging technologies, such as archiving tools, wikis allow users to define their own classifications. These tags are applied to postings and provide richer context to content. For example, pages can be labeled with sales documentation or competitive intelligence. The fact that these classifications can be defined by the user on the fly makes for ease of use and greater adoption. However, this approach does not scale well and can lead to too many categories or varied tags. Vendors need to work out ways for user-generated categories and formal taxonomies to co-exist.

Socialtext features that consumers do not need but that business users find helpful include access controls, integration with identity management/directory systems, integration with portals, and programmatic access via APIs.

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Ferris Research

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