

Knowledge management in a **2.0 world**

It's never been more important for lawyers and law firms to be able to organize and access all their knowledge. And thanks to the emergence of Web 2.0 tools like blogs and wikis, it's also never been easier. Welcome to the next generation of KM.

By Doug Cornelius

Illustration by Thomas Dannenberg

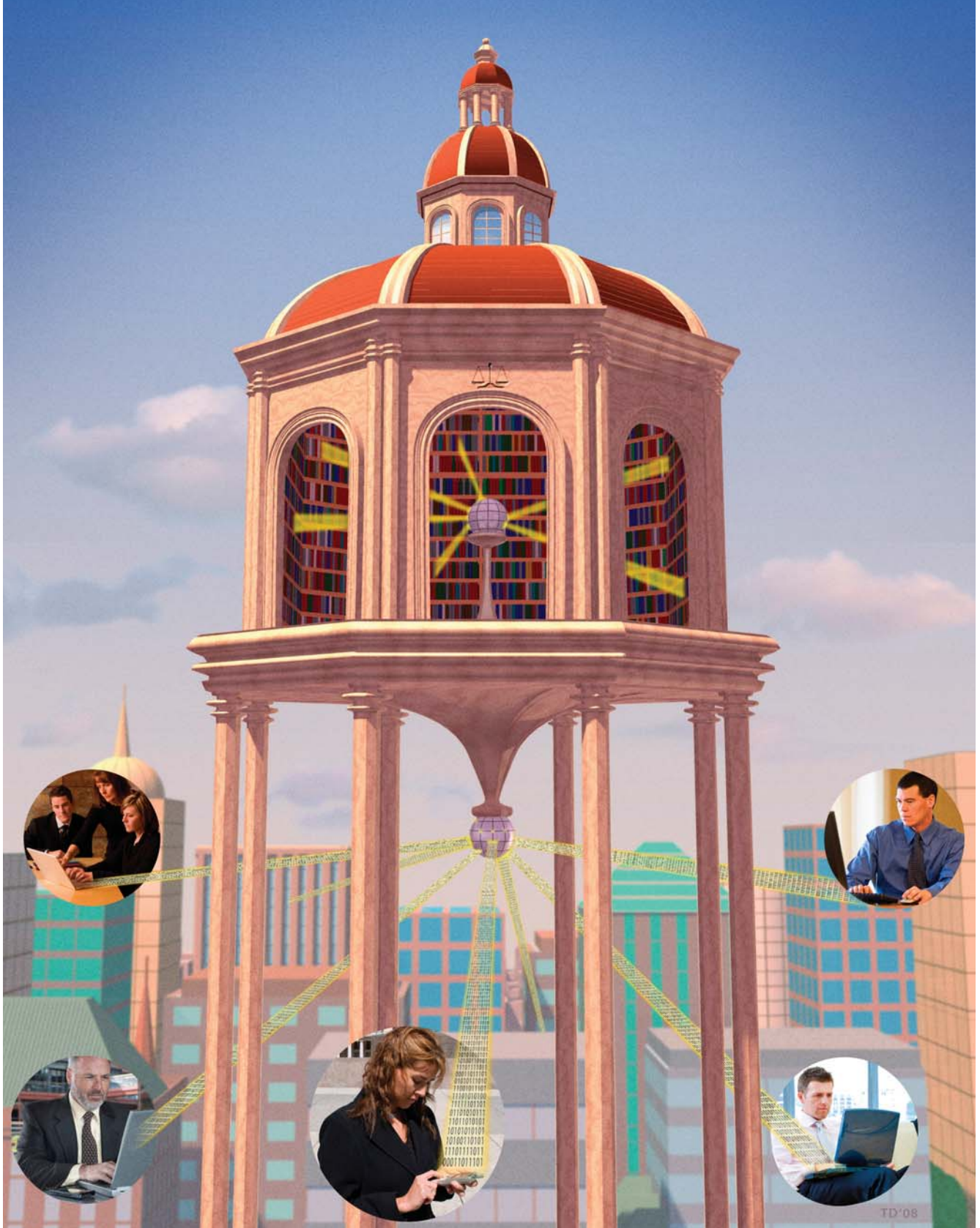
Lawyers sell knowledge. Clients hire lawyers for what they know, who they know and what they know how to do. It makes sense for a law firm to devote resources to addressing its collection and management of that knowledge. From that, the value proposition for knowledge management in a law firm is straightforward. So how do we manage knowledge in a Web 2.0 environment?

The knowledge management movement came to law firms around the same time as e-mail. E-mail was revolutionary! You could now communicate using your computer. Quickly and easily, you could send messages to one person or many people, next door or around the world. Even better, it was in a form that could be searched and retrieved by your computer. But the volume of e-mail started to grow and quickly became enormous. Large collections of a law firm's knowledge were locked in e-mail silos.

Many early knowledge management programs focused on getting the knowledge into centralized systems for the good of the firm. Lawyers were looking for key documents, e-mail, precedents and forms to help them to do their work. But these centralized systems, although good for the firm, did little to help individuals manage their own personal collection of knowledge.

Then Web 2.0 evolved. The web is now no longer a read-only world. You can easily create your own content on websites or add to existing content. You can communicate and collaborate using web pages, blogs and wikis. There are many variations of these Web 2.0 tools. The key functionality is that the communication potential is more open, compared to the closed channels of e-mail. The communication operates by letting you know when there is a change to the web page.

It did not take long for knowledge management professionals to view these Web 2.0 tools as an enhancement to their efforts inside law firms. Could blogs, wikis and other Web 2.0 tools allow for better knowledge management for lawyers? Already, law firms have begun adapting Microsoft's Sharepoint 2007 web platform, which includes many Web 2.0 tools. Firms need to figure out whether to use these Web 2.0 tools and how to use them.



THE BENEFITS OF BLOGS

Blogs have exploded as a way to share news and information. Many news organizations have incorporated them into their websites, including *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times* and *The Toronto Star*. The number of blogs has grown dramatically from a few hundred thousand in 2004 to a few hundred million today. Blogs can be used to replace a group or firm-wide e-mail. The blog allows the author

to distribute knowledge in an open and searchable place.

Blogs are a great way to “catch butterflies.” You can use a blog to gather quick notes and thoughts in an easy-to-search platform, through which the blog’s author can quickly search, find and re-use those notes. Also, the platform is open for others to subscribe to the content or merely discover the content in a search: other people can find and re-use the blog author’s notes.

Blogs are also a great way to capture and distribute meeting

notes. The blogger can take notes in the blog during the course of the meeting and publish them to share for those who could not attend the meeting. Information can be shared with a group by e-mail, but that information is then dispersed and is difficult to retrieve. The sender has the e-mail in her saved items folder and the recipients have it in their inboxes or some other place where they file e-mail. Worst of all, that e-mail does not exist for the person who starts at the firm after the e-mail is sent.

IT'S A WIKI WORLD

A wiki is a collection of easy-to-edit web pages that allow for a synthesis of information. It has the basic features of a word processing program, with a simple editor for creating and editing content. It acts as a simple document management system by maintaining a library of pages within the wiki platform, including all of the versions of each wiki page. (With a conventional word processing document, you need the editor to take some step for those edits to be differentiated: use "track changes," create a new copy, or create a new version.)

"We are using wikis to manage clients. Rather than keeping a client's practices and procedures manual in a word document or three-ring binder, we 'wikify' it."

The wiki also acts as a basic document comparison program, by giving users the ability to compare changes between versions of a wiki page. Every time someone edits and saves a wiki page, a new version is created. And like e-mail, the wiki also has a notification process that alerts subscribers to the wiki page that changes or additions have occurred, giving users a basic communications tool. Of course, a wiki does not have all of the bells and whistles that these four programs do, but a wiki will allow you to create and distribute content directly in the wiki and without leaving the platform.

The big success story of Web 2.0 is Wikipedia, a free, web-based encyclopedia based on a wiki platform that's open for anyone to add content or to edit existing content. With more than nine million articles in more than 250 languages (more than 2.2 million articles in English alone), Wikipedia is several times larger than the Encyclopedia Britannica.

You do not need to register on Wikipedia to begin adding to the content: anyone can anonymously edit any wiki page in Wikipedia. (However, Wikipedia does require you to register to create a new wiki page.) Wikis can capture pieces of knowledge as they appear and synthesize that knowledge into an existing collection.

OPENNESS AND ATTRIBUTION

Wikis are attractive as a knowledge management tool because they make it very easy to contribute content and to find content. A wiki can provide a common workspace for people to create, organize and share knowledge. You can install a wiki

platform inside your firewall so it is limited to members of your firm. Then you can use a wiki as a replacement for an intranet, or add a wiki to an existing intranet.

Although Wikipedia allows anonymous editing, rarely would a law firm allow for anonymous editing of a wiki used within the firm. Most wiki platforms deployed inside a firm's firewall will allow a single sign-on, so the wiki editor is recognized from their initial sign-on to the network. The wiki page will display the date and time it was last edited and the identity of the editor.

The attribution factor of internal Web 2.0 tools is the key to their success. In Wikipedia, the makers of malicious changes can hide with anonymity. You will not have that anonymity inside the law firm. Everyone in the firm will know who is making changes and what changes are being made. You need to have faith that the members of your law firm are not going to make malicious remarks on an internal wiki. There are many ways to commit professional suicide. Making malicious remarks in an internal wiki is just a new way to do so.

Attribution is not just a safeguard; it is also a positive factor. The openness of Web 2.0 platforms make it easier to pull this information into a portal view of the person. You can easily pull a collection of a person's contributions and edits as an indication of their expertise.

The openness of Web 2.0 tools inside the law firm also makes it easier to monitor. It is actually easier to monitor these tools than it is to monitor e-mail traffic or document edits. By subscribing to the notifications, you can see the content change. That is virtually impossible to do with conventional web pages and document management systems.

WIKIS IN THE WORKPLACE

At my law firm, Goodwin Procter, we are using wikis in four ways. First, we are using them as a classic encyclopedia, similar to the Wikipedia model. We start a wiki page for a substantive legal topic, seed it with information and ask others to edit and add to the information. It is easy to link a topic page to other related topics.

Second, we are using the wiki as a lightweight content management tool. We are replacing hard-to-edit conventional web pages with wiki pages. This use is largely focused on administrative information that can be edited and updated by those who know and are responsible for the content. We are removing the barrier of having to go through IT or an intranet editor to update their content. The individual subject matter experts can update the information themselves.

Third, we are using wikis to manage clients. Rather than keeping a client's practices and procedures manual in a word document or three-ring binder, we "wikify" it. The individual sections of the manual get their own wiki page in the wiki library. Also, each case/matter for the client gets a separate wiki page in the wiki library. On the case/matter's wiki page, we maintain the status of the matter, with key notes and items to be completed.

Fourth, we use wiki pages to manage administrative projects. Each project gets a wiki page. On that page we list the items to be done, the milestones to be achieved, and the links to other relevant information. You can get a background and see how the project has evolved, where it is headed and what

La gestion des connaissances dans un monde 2.0

Jamais la gestion de l'information dans un cabinet juridique n'a été aussi importante. Or, grâce à l'émergence d'outils Web 2.0 comme les blogues et les wikis, elle n'a jamais été aussi facile. Bienvenue dans la nouvelle ère de la GC.

Les juristes vendent leurs connaissances. Il est donc normal pour un cabinet de réserver des ressources afin d'accumuler et de gérer ces connaissances. Mais comment le faire dans un environnement Web 2.0?

La gestion de connaissances (GC) est apparue dans le monde juridique à peu près en même temps que les courriels. Au début, les programmes de GC étaient stockés dans des systèmes centraux, sous la forme de décisions, courriels, formulaires ou modèles de procédures. Mais ces systèmes ont peu fait pour aider les juristes à gérer leurs propres éléments de connaissance.

Puis, le Web 2.0 a évolué. Internet est passé d'un monde en lecture seule en un monde où il est devenu possible de créer son propre contenu, en ajoutant à celui qui existait déjà, par le biais des wikis et des blogues, principalement.

Cela n'a pas pris de temps avant que les spécialistes de la GC voient ces outils comme un nouvel allié dans les cabinets juridiques.

L'AVANTAGE DES BLOGUES

Un blogue est un ensemble de pages Web comprenant des entrées en ordre chronologique inverse. Les communications y sont plus ouvertes et permettent de voir quand et comment le contenu a été changé.

Le nombre de blogues est passé de quelques milliers à quelques millions depuis 2004. Plusieurs organes de presse, dont le *New York Times* et le *Washington Post*, l'ont

intégré dans leurs activités régulières.

À l'intérieur d'une entreprise, la plateforme permet de remplacer les envois massifs de courriels et de distribuer de l'information en un lieu où des recherches rapides sont possibles. Vous pouvez utiliser un blogue pour réunir des notes et les distribuer — celles d'une réunion, par exemple.

LE MONDE SELON WIKI

Un wiki est un ensemble de pages faciles à modifier qui permettent de faire une synthèse d'informations. Le wiki a les composantes de base d'un simple document Word, qui facilitent les ajouts et changements au contenu de la page.

L'histoire d'une réussite par excellence du Web 2.0 est Wikipedia, une encyclopédie en ligne gratuite et entièrement assujettie à ses utilisateurs : c'est eux qui en créent et modifient le contenu. Avec plus de neuf millions d'articles dans plus de 250 langues, Wikipedia contient beaucoup plus d'informations que l'Encyclopédie Britannica.

Les wikis sont attirants comme outils de travail puisqu'ils permettent de trouver, créer et modifier du contenu. Vous pouvez installer une plateforme wiki à l'interne dans le bureau, de manière à ce que seuls les membres du cabinet y aient accès. Elle peut même remplacer l'intranet. Un autre de ses avantages : l'identité des contributeurs peut être connue.

LES WIKIS AU BUREAU

Dans mon cabinet, Goodwin Procter, nous

utilisons les wikis de plusieurs différentes manières. Comme une encyclopédie de base, d'abord, semblable à Wikipedia, afin de traiter de différents sujets juridiques.

Nous les utilisons aussi pour gérer les clients. Plutôt que de garder les manuels de pratiques et de procédures d'un client dans des documents Word, nous les « wikifions ». De même, chaque problème, cause ou section de dossier obtient sa propre page dans la bibliothèque wiki.

Nous faisons la même chose pour les projets administratifs, qui obtiennent chacun leur page. Nous pouvons ainsi voir l'évolution du projet et les objectifs à atteindre. Cela fonctionne beaucoup mieux qu'un dossier rempli de courriels.

En somme, les outils du Web 2.0 sont faciles à utiliser. Les spécialistes de différents sujets peuvent ainsi se concentrer sur le contenu, sans être ralentis par l'apprentissage de la technologie. Je crois que l'avenir de la gestion des connaissances repose sur une adoption répandue de ces outils. ■

Doug Cornelius est un avocat principal au sein du groupe de pratique en droit immobilier de Goodwin Procter à Boston, où il aide ses clients à investir dans l'immobilier via un ensemble de moyens de placement. Doug est aussi membre du service de gestion des connaissances de Goodwin Procter, où il est responsable du développement et de l'implantation d'outils et de ressources pour identifier, créer, représenter et distribuer des connaissances pour leur réutilisation et l'apprentissage à l'intérieur du cabinet. Vous pouvez consulter son blogue au <http://kmspace.blogspot.com>.

its current status is. This works much better than a folder full of e-mails.

ENTERPRISE 2.0

Andrew McAfee, a professor at Harvard Business School, used the term "Enterprise 2.0" to describe the use of these Web 2.0 tools inside a company. His 2006 article, "Enterprise 2.0: The Dawn of Emergent Collaboration," detailed how "knowledge workers" were not happy with the tools available to them and thought these tools did a poor job of capturing their knowledge.

Lawyers in a law firm operate largely in a meritocracy and succeed largely on their own skills and knowledge, with groups forming *ad hoc* to serve clients and their cases as they come into the firm. Web 2.0 tools are simple, easy-to-learn tools that can help lawyers manage their clients and capture the knowledge they acquire.

These tools are morphing into lots of variations. The key thing is that these 2.0 tools are combining the content capture with communication. These tools compress some of the

process into fewer steps. Although these tools are more open, they are actually easier to manage than conventional e-mail and word processing documents. They are also easier to use. Goodwin's training for a blog or wiki takes only five minutes. We also have another ten minutes to show advanced features.

With Web 2.0, the tools are easy to use, so the subject matter experts can focus on the content and not get trapped in learning complex technology. I believe the future of knowledge management lies in the widespread adoption of these tools. ■

Doug Cornelius is a senior lawyer in Goodwin Procter's Real Estate Group in Boston, helping clients invest in real estate through a variety of investment vehicles. Doug is also a member of Goodwin Procter's Knowledge Management Department, where he is responsible for developing and implementing tools and resources to identify, create, represent and distribute knowledge for reuse, awareness and learning across the firm. You can find him online at KM Space, a blog on law firm knowledge management, enterprise 2.0 and legal technology: <http://kmspace.blogspot.com>.