



Northrop Grumman Establishes Communities of Practice to Connect Knowledge and Expertise

OpenText Communities of Practice enable groups of people with common interests to get together and share information and expertise

Industry

Government Contractor

Customer

NORTHROP GRUMMAN

Business Challenges

- Limited understanding of organizational expertise
- Information barriers hamper productivity

Business Solution

- OpenText Content Server
- OpenText Communities of Practice

Business Benefits

- Shared information platform enables better information sharing between employees, customers, partners, and suppliers
- Employees with similar challenges can collaborate and create a support network to share news ideas and opportunities
- Best practices are identified and applied

With Web 2.0 and social computing becoming firmly established in everyday life, a culture of user participation and contribution has emerged in the business world. As a result, knowledge management professionals have begun to apply the social networking model to business collaboration, offering employees new ways to search, create, present, and consume information via the Web. This is certainly the case for Northrop Grumman Corporation's Integrated Systems sector, a unit of the company's aerospace business. Using OpenText Content Server as the content repository for documents and information and the OpenText Communities of Practice module to provide 2.0 capabilities such as blogs, forums, and headlines, Northrop Grumman has embraced the change in the way employees view and exchange content and knowledge.

Background

Northrop Grumman Corporation is a global defense and technology company whose 120,000 employees provide innovative systems, products, and solutions to government and commercial customers worldwide in four main business areas: information and services, electronics, aerospace, and shipbuilding. Northrop Grumman Integrated Systems, based in El Segundo, California, designs, develops, produces, and supports network-enabled systems and subsystems for government and civil customers worldwide.

A long-standing OpenText customer, Northrop Grumman is using OpenText Content Server to support more than 40,000 users from different business sectors enterprise wide. The solution, called "ShareCenter," provides a single and secure repository for knowledge capture and enables employees to search, classify, collect, and disseminate corporate knowledge sources. In 2006, Northrop Grumman's Integrated Systems sector brought in OpenText's Communities of Practice module to help facilitate even greater collaboration and knowledge sharing.

Northrop Grumman's objective when creating the different communities of practice within the Integrated Systems sector was to bring together people with the same type of background and with the same interests or expertise to improve the lines of communication. Prior to implementing the collaboration tools, employees used a shared drive as a repository for their content, and outside of that, knowledge sharing was basically through emails, phone calls, and one-on-one conversations.





With the Communities module, the sector has one central repository that everyone can access to facilitate further collaboration and knowledge sharing across the different business units or sectors. The opportunity to share information, hold discussions on relevant topics, and make their knowledge and expertise known across the different sectors has helped employees to build stronger knowledge networks and gain access to collective intelligence across the business areas.

Building knowledge resources

Using the Communities module, employees can take advantage of the blogs, headlines, and forums all within one structure. Through the navigation panel, users can provide quick links to the critical data that they know people within their own business area or within their own function can take advantage of.

Within many of the community areas, the company has set up an “I need help” forum with a link on the Navigation Console. By subscribing to this forum, users receive an e-mail any time a message is posted or a reply is provided. This allows even greater collaboration among the community members since they can post their questions and get responses from other community members.

The rich interface enables users to customize the look and feel of their website, create their own graphics, bring in data, and essentially offer a one-stop shop for members, which is a key reason many groups, including the different training organizations available within Northrop Grumman’s global supply chain, are taking advantage of the Community module to exchange information for each specific area.

Each one of the training organizations might have their own sub-communities set up within the main community, where they are in control of storing and modifying their own content. For example,

they will roll up their data for their standards and processes to the higher community level, and that becomes the common data that is shared across different organizations. They maintain their training documents, the work sheets for students, or the trainers’ work sheets—the common templates that they want to use— and they are stored in a central repository. Sharing information this way enhances the processes and provides a more effective tool that they deliver to the employees or the users within the global supply chain.

Using 2.0 to foster collaboration between employees

As aging Baby Boomers get set to retire over the next decade, the potential loss of business knowledge and expertise is one of the biggest challenges facing aerospace and many other industries. The issue of how to capture and retain that knowledge is one of the main topics of discussion in a communities of practice site called the “New Managers Communities of Practice” that was created for new managers at Northrop Grumman Integrated Systems. Anyone in a management role has a place to come together to share information and discuss how to capture and retain that critical work knowledge before the staff turnover begins.

Other topics of interest for new managers in this community include the following: How do you order a computer? How do you start a budgeting process? What are some of the processes that we have available within Integrated Systems? Within this community of practice, the new managers can tap into a knowledge base and quickly find the answers.

Another community of practice with a central focus on the retirement issue is called the “Northrop Grumman Property Council,” (NGPC). It is one of several community sites with members from multiple sectors across the company. The NGPC includes members from the Information Technology, Shipbuilding, Space Technology, and Integrated Systems sectors. NGPC members use the library containers in the Communities module and store all documents and information in the OpenText repository, ShareCenter. They also take advantage of the search capabilities to find relevant data and use the “Members Information” menu item as an easy way to search the list of members to see who is a member of the communication team and find details about their area of expertise.

The NGPC members use blogs to post headlines in the Community when they want to announce upcoming meetings or events, organizational changes, or to introduce a new topic for discussion. Not only do they meet virtually, they also meet once a year in person.

Another community of practice initiated across Northrop Grumman Integrated Systems is related to video gaming technologies. This community was started a couple of years ago by people who had an interest in how video gaming technology could be used for



simulation and learning—just as the army uses these concepts for training their members. The community is a good platform for a simulated learning environment. As part of this community of practice, members get together to talk about the different technologies that are available, what is happening within the DoD domain, and how they can stay competitive. Periodic conference calls offer a lot of value to the team members. They also take advantage of the library container in the Community module, which acts as a central location for data storage and management.

Northrop Grumman Integrated Systems also formed a community called “Women in Northrop Grumman” (WINGS) to support internal communication processes. It provides a place for female employees to go to find out about health classes and seminars as well as receive guidance from female mentors within the company.

Developing and nurturing communities of practice at Northrop Grumman

Finding the best way to manage, capture, and leverage knowledge capital often requires the participation of people who are fully engaged in the process of creating, refining, communicating, and using knowledge. Northrop Grumman’s communities of practice are developed around things that matter to people, and they reflect the members’ own understanding of what is important. Employees are able to learn by participating in a specific community made up



of people with whom they interact on a regular basis. The key to success is that employees are able to see the benefits of joining a community of practice. They may need to resolve a problem or are simply looking for an expert, but if people know that, rather than spending hours trying to resolve an issue, they can get an answer quickly by going to a community, they will definitely come back.

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