

KM Knowledge MANAGEMENT

A Quarterly Supplement Exclusively for *The Information Advisor* Readers

www.ia-blog.com

Volume 12, No. 2 • June 2008

Enterprise 2.0: Is It Knowledge Management by Another Name?

Over the last couple of years, our *Knowledge Management* supplement has covered an increasing number of Web 2.0 features and approaches as simpler, cheaper, and—quite possibly—more effective strategies for knowledge management. We’ve examined blogs, wikis, social bookmarking, and, more recently, social networking sites such as Ning and Facebook. All represent potential Web 2.0 approaches to facilitating what expensive and complex, full-fledged knowledge management systems had promised but often failed to provide.

The newest buzzword to describe the Web 2.0 approach to managing and facilitating information usage inside of

companies is “Enterprise 2.0.” There are now bloggers, reports, and even conferences about Enterprise 2.0, and it seems that this label is here to stay. In fact, we are even seeing software vendors who are using the term Enterprise 2.0 to describe the Web 2.0 features they are rolling out for use by businesses. One firm that is already carving out a place for itself in the Enterprise 2.0 arena is a company called Awareness, Inc.; we will examine its offering and talk to an early user of its product in this quarter’s supplement.

But before we get into the Awareness product, it would be helpful to provide some context about the notion of Enterprise 2.0 itself. What do we

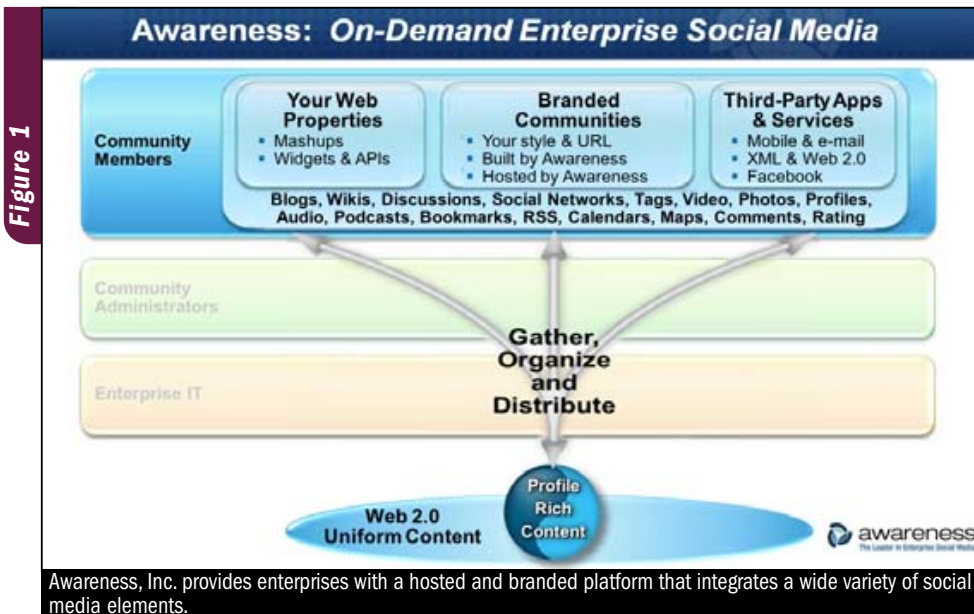
really mean when we use the term Enterprise 2.0? What is its relationship to knowledge management? And what should a firm consider before introducing an Enterprise 2.0 “solution” into its organization?

We did some looking into those questions and, based on our research, we determined that one of the best people to answer these and related questions was Bill Ives. He is an independent consultant based in Boston who blogs on his own site, Portals and KM (<http://billives.typepad.com>) as well as on one of our favorite group blog sites, FAST-Forward (www.fastforwardblog.com).

We corresponded with Ives via email about these and related questions, and he responded to us with some direct answers and by referencing a few commentaries that he had posted on his blog. On the matter of defining Enterprise 2.0, Ives had previously offered a few key points and observations that we’ve grouped and summarized here:

- Enterprise 2.0 is a term that seems to be sticking.
- Enterprise 2.0 is not Web 2.0.
- There is a role for social activities at work, but, with some rare exceptions, consumer web tools should not form the basis of enterprise social computing.
- Enterprise 2.0 tools are developed to solve business problems. These tools look at the social context of information; many support, monitor,

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Awareness, Inc. provides enterprises with a hosted and branded platform that integrates a wide variety of social media elements.

and make accessible important business interactions that build the social side of the enterprise.

- The security issue is real.
- A report from AAIM, titled “Enterprise 2.0: Agile Emergent and Integrated” (www.aiim.org/article-in-dustrywatch.asp?ID=34464), defines Enterprise 2.0 as “a system of web-based technologies that provide rapid and agile collaboration, information sharing, emergence, and integration in the extended enterprise.” Ives commented that, “It covers a lot of useful ground ... and, I would add, it’s leading to new ways of doing business.”

Ives told us that there is only a “moderate” level of awareness of Enterprise 2.0 among businesses—“not as high as Web 2.0”—and that there are a lot of misperceptions. As for its relationship to knowledge management, Ives said that the two overlap, in that enterprise tools can help better realize the promise of knowledge management. For example, Ives says that the transparency of Enterprise 2.0 creates an accessible record of the interactions in an enterprise, thereby providing knowledge management *as a byproduct* of using these tools.

When it comes to the matter of making a selection of an Enterprise 2.0 vendor, Ives told us that it’s particularly important to make sure that the vendor is focused on business issues and is not simply bringing consumer web tools to the enterprise. He says that the biggest mistake that an organization can make when introducing Enterprise 2.0 software and elements is to just bring in consumer-oriented web tools because they are trendy, without tying their use to specific business goals.

What about the perennial issue of getting employees to take the time to share their knowledge on one of these platforms? Ives makes the point that, when tools like these are introduced to an organization, the firm needs to make sure that using them does not require the staff to take an extra step or go out of their way to use it—if that is the case, Ives says, it will not be done. Instead, organizations should use these tools to help business processes that

involve collaboration or to integrate them with existing enterprise applications as an enhancement.

We also asked Ives about his views on Awareness, Inc., the Enterprise 2.0 firm that we highlight later in this quarter’s supplement. He told us that the firm is a “solid player” in the industry, and he referred us to his review of Awareness’ product from his blog last August. In that review (available at http://billives.typepad.com/portals_and_km/2007/08/awareness-enter.html), Ives wrote that he was “very impressed with what Awareness has accomplished” and that it represented “the most comprehensive solution I have seen so far.” He was particularly complimentary about Awareness’ single architecture to collect and organize all forms of user-generated content as a way to avoid information silos and for its security provisions.

The biggest mistake is to bring in consumer- oriented web tools because they are trendy.

Finally, when asked about what part corporate librarians could play in helping their organizations move to become more Enterprise 2.0-oriented, Ives said that the role that information professionals can take is to be “leaders.”

The Awareness, Inc. Enterprise 2.0 Platform

Awareness, Inc., a Waltham, Mass.-based firm that used to be called iUpload, is not, of course, the only enterprise content or knowledge management firm that has introduced Web 2.0-like offerings to the enterprise. In last quarter’s *Knowledge Management* supplement, in fact, we discussed how Alfresco, an open source enterprise content management firm, was offering its clients a method for integrating its content onto and off of Facebook. Other firms, such as Open Text, have also been promoting their approaches for helping enterprises be more 2.0-like. But Awareness has certain unusual and noteworthy features, and it

has been receiving a certain amount of attention from key analysts such as Bill Ives, making that firm, in our view, worth some focused coverage here.

So what exactly does Awareness offer? Its approach to Enterprise 2.0 is to create branded Web 2.0 communities that run off of a hosted “social media platform” (see Figure 1 on page 1). Eric Schurr, Awareness, Inc.’s VP of marketing, told us that, depending on need, its customers will use that platform as either “external facing” for facilitating interaction with entities *outside* of the enterprise (such as suppliers, partners, or customers) or as “internal facing” for use by staff *inside* the organizations. From a knowledge management perspective, it is the internally facing platform that is most relevant.

The key distinguishing and competitive feature that Awareness points out is that it is a platform to facilitate Web 2.0 activities; it is not itself a blog, wiki, chat board, or other individual Web 2.0 product. In other words, while customers are able to utilize the various Web 2.0 features—blogs, wikis, discussion groups, podcasting, tagging, etc.—these activities are seamlessly linked together and grow from the platform.

Awareness calls its platform approach one that allows for “uniform content,” meaning that all of these Web 2.0 tools are designed to be integrated and work together, allowing, for instance, a discussion post to be repurposed as a wiki entry or a podcast linked to a blog. This approach was designed to avoid the problem when an organization has instituted a variety of Web 2.0-type functions all over the enterprise, thereby creating information silos and making it difficult for staffers to find out what information is where.

The other way that Awareness has addressed a specific business issue is in the area of security. There are a variety of authentication, permissioning, and identity management features in Awareness so that firms can have a greater degree of control in determining who has access to just what types of content. Schurr told us that, as a hosted solution, Awareness is also able to facilitate this kind of security management through the customer’s own firewall.

Another area where Awareness has focused on specific business needs is

by assisting and advising customers in best practices in the successful use of Web 2.0 technologies in the enterprise. For example, Schurr says that one of the important aspects of initiating an Enterprise 2.0 operation is to know how to create an environment that is going to make it more likely for staff to participate and contribute. A few of the most important steps, Schurr told us, are to create a kind of critical mass that would encourage people to participate and to seed the platform with existing content. Users also need to be shown the specific value to them for contributing.

The firm has already built up a surprisingly robust list of corporate clients. Among them are JetBlue, Marriott, McDonald's, *The New York Times*, P&G, and Northwestern Mutual. For more information about the Awareness product, you can link to www.awarenessnetworks.com.

Case Study: How One Organization Connected Its Members Through Awareness

We had a chance to talk with one user of Awareness's social media platform, Sg2 (www.sg2.com), a healthcare information intelligence organization founded in 2001 and headquartered in Skokie, Ill., which has another office in London. We spoke on the telephone with Sg2's VP of product development, Aaron Schwartz, along with his colleague Janet Haugan, Sg2's marketing director, to find out how this has worked out for their organization. An edited transcript of our discussion follows (replies are from Schwartz, unless otherwise indicated).

Q. Tell me a bit about Sg2 and its mission.

A. We connect healthcare professionals, domestically and from across the globe, so they can learn from each other, share leading practices, and improve healthcare as a whole. These healthcare professionals include leaders who work at hospitals, health systems, medical manufacturers, and a wide range of other healthcare-related entities. Our goal is to help healthcare professionals make decisions based not on practices from the past but on how things work now.

Q. What was the problem or business issue you were addressing that led you to Awareness?



Figure 2

A. We were looking for a way to allow our members to interact with each other and share information directly and easily. While we had a website presence, it was only delivering static content to our members. We were able to provide access to our various newsletters and publications, so the members could find out what was new and go and read our publications. But this was more of a library-type resource, and we really wanted an interactive one.

We needed, then, to be able to meld what we already had and integrate it with a forum where our members could share their own leading practices and let other knowledgeable members within our own community answer their questions. While we could have just kept our website and added a "community" tab, we really wanted to push the envelope and create the entire site around our community. So now the website is the community.

Haugan: Also, previously, when our members asked us questions, we would connect them to the right person through our member center in order to get them an answer. But this was a slow and manual process. Also, when we posted resources, members would sometimes call in and ask to talk to us, which also often was a slow and time-consuming process. Now they can get answers more quickly from others.

Q. When you were looking for a solution to this problem, what kinds of vendors did you look at, and why did you end up choosing Awareness?

A. We looked around to see what was out there, to see if there was a partner we could grow with, one that

would incorporate a variety of Web 2.0 features and provide us with the security we needed too.

We started with a long list of possible vendors, narrowed those down to five or six, and finally narrowed that list to two, each of which had a different approach. One reason why we chose Awareness is that we felt that they could be a long-term partner with us as we planned for future growth. Also, we had certain security requirements: We only wanted to permit certain users to access certain types of content, and Awareness was able to provide for this as well.

Q. Anything else that you liked about Awareness up front?

A. Because we wanted to get something up quickly, we liked the fact that Awareness offered a short turnaround time to launch our first release. We also liked that they understood and were technically capable of implementing what we wanted to achieve—that is, integrate our own content along with new social networking features.

Q. So when did all of this take place?

A. We started talking with Awareness last December, signed a contract in early January, and launched the site on March 10.

Q. Did you have to do much work ahead of time to prepare for implementation? For example, did you need to work with your IT department, do staff training, deal with new management type issues?

A. Yes we did—in spades for all of those things. Because Awareness hosts the site, we actually did not need to do that much with our own IT, but there was a lot of work involved to get our

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own data into the new system. That was probably the hardest part of the implementation.

We also had to ensure that the security model was going to work correctly, and there was a ton of work in getting our own management and internal experts on board with this project, to understand how this was going to transform the way our organization works with our clients.

Q. Let's talk about your use of the platform itself. Which social networking features do you find you use the most? And what about integration with Facebook?

A. We have not used podcasts or wikis yet. But to some degree, we try to make generic the vernacular for all of the Web 2.0 stuff to make it more understandable for users. The fact is, healthcare has been behind the curve in this area, and we did not want to differentiate all those elements. So whether it's a video, an audio file, an attachment, a comment or whatever, we just call it a post. It's all seamless from the users' standpoint. The Facebook integration was not part of our first release, but now we are conversing about putting up our own Facebook page or embedding a piece of our site into Facebook.

Q. What sorts of administration oversight do you need to do on your end?

A. Although Awareness is a hosted solution, not all the administration is turned over to the firm. We still have a lot of day-to-day work to do on our end. That involves, for example, authentication—determining who has the rights to what content—which is done via our CRM system. We also do the content management; we enter our new publications and decide where the new information maps to and what will help our members use it. There's other editorial work too, such as deciding to highlight and feature certain posts.

Awareness's content manager makes it easy for us to do this editorial work, though. We no longer need an IT person to load content; now the content owners of each area can manage their editorial areas on their own.

Q. What have been the biggest benefits that you've obtained from implementing Awareness?

A. There are a couple of things. As I said, initially we offered our publications on the web, but there was no interaction or ability to connect clients to each other. Now everything is transparent; everyone can see everyone else. People can connect in a more timely way, and in their own fashion. Also, in our original website we could only connect with our own members, but now by creating a true social networking site, we have been able to open things up to prospects too.

Haugan: Also, in the past, often our own experts would respond to a member's question through a conference call, but now we do so using the blogging feature. This allows multiple clients and our own people to have access to that expressed knowledge as well. This keeps our members informed about what other members are thinking and saying.

Q. Did you need to provide encouragement or any incentives so people contribute to the platform?

A. We talked a lot about the issue of encouraging participation. We were fortunate in that we had content already "baked" which gave us a head start in having information on the platform. But it's also the case that many of our members are still having to get used to this new way of sharing information. There are some people who are reluctant; perhaps they are shy, or there may be competitive concerns, or some just need to get up-to-speed on this new system. So we still want to come up with creative ways to get people to do more posting. Some people will tell us, "I don't really want to put my question up there on the blog," but we try to tell them why doing so is to their advantage. For instance, we let them know that by doing so, they will get their question out to people all around the country who might have an answer or ideas to help. And we are trying to get our own experts to respond quickly as a way to get things started. This is still all very new.

Q. Overall, what took the most time to get used to or to understand how to do effectively?

A. Well, again, there were the issues of getting our own data into the system, and the matter of helping people understand about posting and sharing. But even more broadly—and this was something that Awareness told us would occur—once a project like this is up and successful, it can really revamp one's whole business operation. Some of the changes were ones we anticipated, but others were not. For example, now our content changes much more quickly than before, and this means lots of activity that we need to watch and attend to more closely.

Q. Finally, based on what you've learned in all of this, do you have any advice for other firms that are considering integrating a social networking service like Awareness?

A. Do your best to understand who exactly your audience is that will be using these features. For instance, in our case, our users might include a CEO of a massive hospital who never used a social networking site, a 25-year-old healthcare administrator who has always been doing this kind of thing, and everyone in between. Understand what your users are already used to, think about how you want them to use the site, what kind of training they will need, and what your expectations are.

Haugan: Some of us assumed everyone was up-to-speed on Web 2.0 technologies, but we found out that it was new to a lot of people. So there was a need for more education and for teaching people what was there and how to use it, in order to get the same information they had access to before, as well as explaining all the new content now available.

It's a brave new world. You can spend a lot of time planning, but at the end of the day you have to jump off the cliff. ■

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Quarterly Supplement
is published by

Information Today, Inc.
143 Old Marlton Pike
Medford, NJ 08055

