

A Revolution in the Sharing of Knowledge

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My colleagues Jon Mason and Paul Lefrere and I recently completed a fifteen month-long project to understand revolutionary new approaches to using knowledge to establish competitive advantage. These are featured in our book, *Transforming e-Knowledge: A Revolution in the Sharing of Knowledge*, which can be viewed in full at www.transformingeknowledge.info. To support our efforts, we convened an international advisory group drawn from leading authorities in digital rights management, interoperability standards, knowledge management, and e-learning. We sought insights and examples of best practice from all over the world, because many of the boundary-busting ideas are coming from outside North America.

In the process, we discovered emerging best practices for knowledge sharing from associations, universities, corporations, government agencies, and other non-profits. This article summarizes the key implications of our work for associations. It will be followed by two subsequent articles: "Changing the Knowledge Ecology of Your Association" and "Using e-Knowledge to Enhance Your Association's Competitive Advantage."

The Key to Success in the Knowledge Economy: E-Knowledge

Web-enabled infrastructures and practices are creating turbulent disruptions for virtually every industry and profession, plus the associations that serve them. Leading-edge associations are responding strategically to these disruptions. They are not just digitizing their knowledge assets, but are progressively creating new best practices, business models, and strategies for dealing with their bodies of knowledge. The acquisition, assimilation, and sharing of knowledge is truly undergoing a revolution. Using technologies that are already available or will be deployed over the next five years, best practices in knowledge sharing are not only diffusing rapidly but will be substantially reinvented in all settings: associations, education, corporations, government, and nonprofits. Individuals and associations will achieve quantum leaps in their ability to exchange knowledge. Even the manner in which individuals and associations are experiencing knowledge is being transformed.

From this revolution, a new defining concept has emerged. E-knowledge is not just a digitized collection of knowledge. It consists of knowledge objects including content, context, and insights on how to use, reuse, and repurpose them. It also includes links to communities of practice and repositories of tacit knowledge and tradecraft that can only be understood through conversations

with knowledgeable practitioners, managed through associations. E-knowledge is transactable: it can be exchanged for free or for fee. Transactions based on the sharing of knowledge that supports e-knowledge processes can be called *e-knowledge commerce*. E-Knowledge is enabling not only new best practices but also reinvention of the fundamental business models and strategies that exist for e-learning and knowledge management.

We see its leading edge in the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD), the American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA), the Computer Society of the IEEE, and the American Society of Pharmaceutical Scientists, to cite a few examples. These associations are using digitized knowledge repositories and communities of practice to revolutionize their approach to bodies of knowledge. Check out case studies of these associations at www.transformingeknowledge.info.

Perpetual Learning Through Communities of Practice

Most associations treat learning, knowledge management, meetings, publications, and other functions as separate organizational departments, sometimes called silos. E-knowledge is created by the destruction of the silos and the fusion of e-learning and knowledge management. Perpetual learning activities, drawing upon knowledge repositories and links to communities of practice, will become the new coin of the realm. Through these mechanisms, practitioners and association leaders will make e-knowledge a key element in their competitive advantage. We have discovered examples of leading-edge enterprises that are currently achieving significant savings in the time, cost, and effectiveness of deploying and sharing e-knowledge.

The community of practice is the defining organizational form of the Knowledge Economy. Successful associations are developing the capacity to create self-generating, continuously adapting communities of practice. Through participating in these communities, members co-create products, services, and knowledge. Over time, these communities of practice will become the primary source of tacit insight and advanced tradecraft in the body of knowledge. The association's traditional "hub and spoke" channel for centrally developing content and pumping it out to members and chapters will be overlaid with vigorous, distributed, peer-to-peer (P2P) networks. Progressively, the balance of knowledge content will shift toward the distributed networks, although the hub-and-spoke mode will remain important for some iconic products and services.

"Enter Once, Use Anywhere" and Knowledge Marketplaces

ASTD has adopted the phrase "enter once, use anywhere" to describe its philosophy of e-knowledge. Once digitally entered, tagged, and made available across the organization, content and context can be used by any authored party, and can be reused and repurposed. E-knowledge is about sharing digital content

and context through new marketplace mechanisms that make tagged content available to users outside the association's usual channels of distribution. This has tremendous upside potential for associations like the American Association of Pharmaceutical Scientists that have significant knowledge resources that will have great appeal in secondary, derivative markets.

Knowledge marketplaces will lead to new practices in e-knowledge commerce, including declines in the cost and price of bits of knowledge that become commoditized. But e-knowledge will ultimately touch every aspect of every association: mission, vision, infrastructures, processes, and culture. The knowledge infrastructures, processes, and cultures of associations will change – we call the sum of these factors an association's **knowledge ecology**. So everyone who cares about the success of his or her association must understand e-knowledge.

Developing Infrastructures and Enterprise Portals to Provide Value

Associations are developing the infrastructures, processes, competencies, and routines to support e-knowledge, including enterprise portals that enable individuals to use the Web to access secure, personalized products, services, and experiences. The portal is becoming the gateway for experiencing the knowledge resources of the association. Over time, e-knowledge and customer relationship management (CRM) tools will enable these portals greatly to extend the richness and reach of the association's offerings. These will be the key to creating **indispensable relationships** with members, customers, and other stakeholders. Such relationships will enhance the value proposition that associations can provide to members, customers, suppliers, and other stakeholders. E-knowledge will be a decisive factor in associations achieving **value on investment (VOI)** on their technology infrastructure.

E-knowledge is everybody's business. Make certain it's yours. Watch for forthcoming articles by Donald Norris on "Changing the Knowledge Ecology of Your Association" and "Using e-Knowledge to Enhance Your Association's Competitive Advantage."

Donald M. Norris is President of Strategic Initiatives, Inc, a management consulting firm in Herndon, Virginia specializing in transforming organizational products, practices, and cultures for success in the Knowledge Economy. He and his colleagues have developed approaches to “expeditionary strategy and planning” that have proven successful in enabling associations to discover the new killer applications for Web-based products, services and experiences. He has written more than 15 books and monographs on expeditionary strategy, strategic marketing, and organizational transformation. Check out his website at www.strategicinitiatives.com or e-mail him at dmn@strategicinitiatives.com for further information or conversation.

