

Using A WikiSpace

A *wikispace*, in simple terms, is a group of web pages with “edit” buttons on them. A wikispace is easy enough for anyone to use, but has enough sophistication so that organizations can be creative and get work done in virtual workspaces. In fact, wikispaces were designed to help organizations get work done without incurring travel costs and conducting formal meetings. Team members can post and edit documents and hold discussions that can be accessed by team members from any location and at any time during the day. This flexibility for participation results in more input from individual team members and greater buy-in from all.

Organizations that use wikispaces report that they are able to accomplish more in a shorter period of time (e.g., strategic planning, policy development) while reducing overhead costs. Participants appreciate the shared workspace (no tracking of multiple email threads) and the increased collaboration from all team members.

Additionally, wiki pages can be created to organize meeting information (e.g., agendas, minutes, action plans) and to post critical documents in chronological order with customized descriptions of content. This feature allows participants to work more efficiently by eliminating the need to search through multiple emails or opening multiple files that are stored on your computer to access information you need.

Using a wikispace also allows organizations to begin to integrate Web 2.0 tools (i.e., web-based interactive tools) as communication and decision-making strategies. And, because many organizations have a limited knowledge of how these tools are being used in business and educational settings, you will be expanding your company’s capacity to utilize web-based tools with an easy to use tool that can be rolled out as an intra-agency strategy. Once you’ve built internal support for the use of wikispaces, you can integrate wikis in your work with customers and key stakeholder groups.

If you want an in-depth description of a wiki, take a minute to watch the Common Craft's [wikispace video](http://www.commoncraft.com/video-wikis). (www.commoncraft.com/video-wikis)

Sandra Hastings introduced the use of wikis in a graduate school course she taught at the University of Connecticut in 2009. This community of learners discovered six shared truths that will most likely pertain to your use of wikispaces as well:

1. **Wikis can be powerful tools** for collaborating, exchanging ideas and information, and developing new tools/products as teams.

2. **Facilitators and participants should expect Individual learning style preferences will influence participants' reactions** to the initial use of wikis (e.g., concerns, reluctance, fear of failure). It may take a while to perfect the use of the tool, but it is doable...in a short period of time.
3. **Facilitators must be sensitive to "confidentiality" concerns** and be prepared to provide "private" site options as necessary. Sandra's **Customers have opted to create private site wikispaces so that no one else can see the conversations and work.** The fee for a basic private space wiki is \$50 a year – a bargain for access to this powerful tool.
4. **Detailed instructions for "how to participate" are extremely helpful** - especially for participants with little or no previous exposure to this technology. It's important to share detailed instructions and encourage participants to ask for help as needed.
5. **It is critical to debrief the use of a wiki to assess the learning and to determine the opportunities for further use** of this tool. After you've completed your first wiki activity, you'll want to debrief the process to **discuss the usefulness of the tool for the group and to determine how to improve the process and/or determine that using a wiki is not an effective strategy for your work.**
6. **Wikis can be adopted in workplace learning - formal and informal learning environments.** The usefulness of the wiki, however, will need to be assessed based on the quality of products developed, the efficiency of the project work, and the transfer of new skills to workplace applications. **Hopefully, your group's use of the wiki will trigger some opportunities for you to use a wiki in your other activities - work, family, and other community service projects.**

Wikis are designed to be fluid, and shaped by the use of the participants. Therefore, the site belongs to all members. Together, you can create a space that meets your needs - sharing information and ideas, collaborating on projects, and incorporating learning and informed actions in your daily work lives.

Contact **Sandi** at Sandra@GregNewtonAssociates.com for more information and sign up for Sandi's **Social Media Blog** at www.sandrahastingsassociates.com/social-media-tips to learn how to increase your organization's use of social media tools.