

# Allen & Overy LLP

## Improving informal knowledge sharing and expertise location

9 March 2010

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**Tools:** Wiki, Blog, .NET

**Technology:** Movable type blogging platform, Confluence wiki engine, custom .NET code, integration with internal systems

**Number of users:** 1200 (30% of total workforce)

**Industry:** Legal

**Keywords:** wiki, Intranet, legal, knowledge-sharing, transparency, community

**Timeframe:** 2005 - present

## Executive Summary

The global law firm Allen & Overy LLP wanted to improve informal knowledge sharing and expertise location whilst allowing easy participation and content contribution from users from across multiple locations. We responded to these strategic requirements by building an on-line social platform integrating group weblogs, wikis, social bookmarking and tagging, and an RSS-based updates and subscription system.

## Overview

### Managing a complex information environment

[Allen & Overy](#) is a part of the UK's 'Magic Circle' of law firms. Law firms, in general, face the constant challenge of information management and communicating information internally and externally. As a global firm, Allen & Overy has the added challenge of doing this in an international context.

The firm recognised that having easy access to guidance from colleagues in different teams or geographical locations, and being able to find and retrieve current relevant information, are both crucial to developing actionable current awareness. They needed to reduce information overload and help people share the most relevant information and expertise quickly, simply, and within context. But given time pressures, this had to be achieved without taking people out of their daily work context.

### Developing a dynamic and collaborative internal communication platform

We developed a thorough understanding of Allen & Overy's organisational culture, key workflows and professional interactions by holding a series of workshops, and through a period of close observation and collaboration with pilot groups. This led to us developing and documenting clearly-defined user requirements and recommendations for the design, development and implementation of a new internal communication platform.

Based on the identified business needs and use cases, we drew on four key social software components:

- ▶ Group-based weblog publishing and discussions
- ▶ Wiki-based collaboration and co-production
- ▶ Easy social bookmarking, tagging and retrieval of useful information
- ▶ RSS-based information alerts and updates, combined with e-mail alerts and retrieval

These social tools were integrated with the firm's IT infrastructure including user management, search and content-level access to existing knowledge bases. It was made available to end-users via a single, highly usable interface within Allen & Overy's network.

## Social Business Design for workforce collaboration

Allen & Overy were not overly prescriptive about how the system could be used within the firm, and as a result, new ways of using the technology are constantly evolving.

For example, if information is needed in a particular practice area, someone can post a question about the issue on the shared blog of the relevant legal group. Other members of that group will receive an alert of the entry via e-mail or through an RSS feed reader. Members of the group can then post answers to the group blog and bookmark relevant information as they need it. A page to collect the shared links relevant to the issue can also be created, and thematic labels ('tags') can be applied to the blog post, either by the individual or drawn from a range of existing labels created by other group members.

Each new group that uses the system is asked to provide a single-page business case for its use, as well as describing what constitutes success for their group, and under what conditions they would close the group down. This has helped make people value the groups they create on the system.

A key benefit of the system has been a move away from the traditional mode of email. By introducing a more collaborative, social approach to information management and recording conversational knowledge in a shared system, the firm can reduce repetitive enquiries and encourage staff to find knowledge from peer groups. This leads to improved levels of self-service when sourcing expertise and has also uncovered connections and networks within the firm which would otherwise have been invisible.

### Measurement and cultivation

The project began as a three month pilot for three groups. A few years later, there are more than 50 active groups in a range of professional areas. Some of these groups have also been opened up to senior counsel and knowledge leads in the firm's key clients.

Lasting benefits include more efficient work practices and greater business intelligence derived from the following:

Increased self-service and people's awareness of the information and expertise available to them

- ▶ Timely delivery of relevant information
- ▶ Improved "findability" of information
- ▶ Making content more dynamic and easier to update
- ▶ Increased contextual information exchange and easier identification of expertise
- ▶ Capture of conversational knowledge in blogs and wikis, helping to make tacit knowledge explicit

Allen & Overy recognised that such improvements offer enormous potential for improving people's performance and the firm's overall operations with favourable benefits to client service delivery.

## More Information

Read more about the case on [InsideKnowledge Magazine](#).

Slides: [Allen & Overy Social Software project case study](#)

## Screenshots

(from 2005)

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