

10 Questions: A Checklist

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An excerpt from *WIKI: Grow Your Own for Fun and Profit*¹ by Alan J. Porter.

When I'm invited to speak to various groups about wiki implementation, I often use these 10 questions as the core of my presentation, and I have found that considering these questions before you start enables you to lay a solid foundation on which to build and grow a wiki.

I hope that you will find this summary useful as both a checklist and as a starting point for your own endeavors.

Ask yourself and your team the following questions before you start to implement a wiki, and be truthful with the answers.

Think about the issue you are trying to solve, and then see how a wiki might be applied, but remember don't just focus on the positive, think about the potential down sides too.

1. What Business Issue Will the Wiki Resolve?

For any technology implementation to succeed, there needs to be a problem to be solved, or an operational efficiency to be gained:

- Why you are considering a wiki?
- Do you have examples of wikis that address similar issues?
- Did they work?
- If so, why?

2. How Will You Measure Success?

There are two ways you could measure success. One is by setting goals for the adoption of the wiki itself. For example:

- What percentage of the community is contributing?
- How many people are registered?
- What is the number of new articles, or the number and frequency of comments?

¹ <http://xmlpress.net/wiki.html>

The other way is to measure the wiki's success based on its impact on your business needs. For example:

- Did the wiki reduce the time taken for a particular process?
- If the wiki is a customer-facing one, how many people visited certain wiki pages?
- Did the wiki reduce email traffic or the number of meetings?

3. What is the Expected Return on Investment?

The first questions you will be asked about any new system will be financial:

- What is the financial return on investment?
- What are the software costs?
- What is the cost of populating the wiki?
- What is the cost of maintaining the wiki?
- What is the cost of training the users?
- What does it cost you to handle the same business functions today?
- What much do the business issues you are trying to solve affect the bottom line?
- Can you calculate the potential benefits of using a wiki? Remember that the ROI may not be directly attributable to the wiki itself, but instead may come from a change in collaboration methodologies and operational improvements.

4. Where Will the Content Come From?

Meaningful content is the key to any successful wiki, so you need to think about where it will come from. While you may be looking for the community to contribute, you will most likely need to seed the wiki:

- Where will the initial content come from?
- Will you need to invest time in creating new content, or will you import existing legacy content, such as technical documentation, training, policies and procedures, or marketing materials?
- Will you need to integrate the wiki with an existing content management system?

5. Who Will Use the Wiki Initially?

While you may be implementing a wiki to meet one particular business need, think about every area of the company, or community, that could benefit or contribute to solving that problem. Try to move beyond functional boundaries and think about the skill sets and the knowledge base of all who would benefit. In some cases this may even be people located outside the organization.

6. Who Will Use the Wiki in the Future?

Of course, one of the great things about wikis, and the central theme of this book, is that they foster growth and further collaboration. There are numerous examples of cross-pollination of wikis inside organizations as one team sees the benefits that another has gained.

Before you start your first wiki, spend some time thinking about areas of potential growth and possible future cross-functional collaboration. Make sure you make plans for scalable growth and allow easy access for anyone who may need to contribute or observe, not just on the initial projects, but on potential future ones as well.

7. Who Will Own the Wiki?

Every wiki needs an owner:

- Who will be your wiki-gardener?
- Who can you count on to be champions?
- Are you prepared to give up ownership – even if the idea was originally yours – in order to ensure implementation?
- What, if anything, will you need to do to “brand” your wiki?

8. Where Will the Wiki be Hosted?

The location and hosting of a wiki can be a contentious issue and it is one that needs addressing early:

- Will your IT group want to host it?
- Or, will they actively be against the idea?
- Can you host the wiki at a departmental or project team level?
- Should you use a third-party hosting company?
- If you have to, can you “fly under the radar” and avoid potentially nay-saying IT groups?

9. Which Wiki Should I Use?

There are many different types of wiki in the marketplace. Don’t just decide to use one type because it’s the only one you’ve heard of:

- Research your options using WikiMatrix or a similar tool.
- Talk to people who have used wikis for similar business needs and ask them what they used and why.
- Ask them which wikis they rejected and why.
- Look at the case studies in this book for similar situations.
- Develop a short list of at least three wikis to prototype and test.

10. What Controls Will I Need?

Arguably, the first rule of wikis is that there aren't any rules. It is true that wikis function best when they are driven by the communities that use them, but you need to think about a few basics of control before you start:

- Do you need logins, and if so who will authorize them?
- Will you need to hook the wiki up to an existing user base, such as Active Directory or another LDAP store, or will it be good enough to manage the users and groups entirely within the wiki?
- Will you have some sort of initial structure for your wiki content?
- Will you give users a “sandbox” area to learn the wiki in?
- Who will be able to see, read, and edit which pages?
- Who will monitor recent changes and do any necessary roll backs?
- What's the philosophy for rolling back content and incorporating comments?