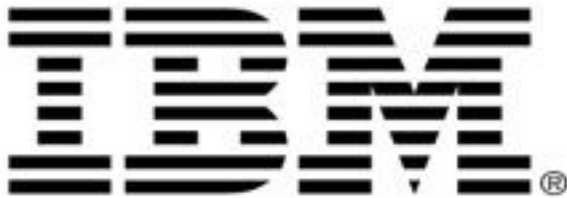


IBM Finds Multiple Uses for Marketing Knowledge Bases



A large corporation like IBM (\$90 billion in revenue, 300,000 employees worldwide) has everything to gain from a marketing knowledge base. But it ain't easy — even for a company known throughout history for its technological prowess.

At IBM, marketing has benefited from technological support in many ways — marketing automation, e-commerce, sales lead management systems — the variety is endless. So when it comes to consolidating marketing knowledge, you'll find an abundance of approaches in play.

At the simplest level, IBM marketers take frequent advantage of the functionality inherent in their own Lotus Notes software to create "team rooms." Notes is the standard across the corporation for e-mail and collaboration applications. Any user can set up a team room for any use, any time.

Most popular among the marketers are team rooms for campaign planning and execution. You'll find posted the tactical marketing plans that are created by product managers and referenced by marketing strategists and communicators in various geographies and business units around the world. The beauty of the Notes team room environment is its ease of use: The marketing plans are working documents, and subject to constant updates and adjustments. As the documents evolve, everyone on the team has access to the latest materials.

The other major category of documents found in the marketing team room is reports. As campaign results are generated, team members can keep an eye on their progress. The marketing specialist responsible for campaign reporting will update the reports inside the team room, and then send around an e-mail note to team members advising them of the change. This vastly reduces the number of large files flying around for distribution among users.

The Market Research Portal

Another type of knowledge base in use at IBM is the intranet portal managed by the IBM market intelligence function. In this knowledge base, IBMers can access the internal and external competitive research resources in use around the corporation. About one-fourth of the material is research internally developed by IBM. The rest is external competitive research content, licensed by IBM from more than 25 third-party providers, like IDC and Gartner, using Bitpipe's technology, plus custom-commissioned research developed for IBM on a work-for-hire basis.

According to Robert Shearman, manager of market intelligence, the knowledge base is maintained in the Americas marketing organization, but available for use by marketers in all geographies and product units. Its key benefits are twofold. First, it allows marketers easy and convenient access to an important corporate asset, eliminating the chance that the material will be created or purchased more than once. A corollary point: The knowledge base tends to reduce the demand for custom research development, thus maintaining discipline and saving unnecessary expense.



Secondary Research Subscription Site

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Secondary Research Subscription Site

This web site allows you to subscribe to secondary research services from vendors like Gartner, Forrester, IDC and many others. There is a cost for subscriptions, which will be charged to your department. Each subscription is on a calendar year basis and is not renewed automatically every year.

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search against the titles and abstract of some of the Secondary Research reports... + GO

Corporate-wide Access

some vendor services have been purchased with an enterprise-wide license. Access these services at no charge... + VIEW DETAILS

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selected vendor(s) are offering free trials to their services for a limited time... + VIEW DETAILS

Second, the knowledge base becomes a self-enforcing mechanism for rationalizing the market research function across the corporation. No marketer may invest in market research without first checking the knowledge base. If the subject has not been covered, whether through primary or secondary sources, then an application can be made for its purchase. The IBM finance department, in effect, polices the function, refusing to issue a purchase order for new market research unless the applicant can prove that all internal resources have been exhausted.

Sales and marketing personnel are the primary users of the IBM market research knowledge base, but it is also accessed by product developers, finance people, human resource personnel, and — of course — IT people. The IT staff is responsible for implementing the portal and making sure it is integrated with IBM's various legacy systems.

Shearman keeps a close eye on usage. In his experience, the key drivers of success for a knowledge base of this sort are:

- ease of use and navigational friendliness
- the relevance of the information
- useful features that make users' lives easier

The Marcom Central Knowledge Base

A third type of marketing knowledge base is in use at IBM. Known internally as Marcom Central, this Web-based tool houses a wide variety of collateral material managed by IBM's global software product group. It is built on technology licensed from Leopard em, an electronic marketing communications management and hosting service in Boulder, CO.

Inside Marcom Central, software marketers can access thousands of samples of currently available marketing communications: advertising, sales collateral, catalogs, direct mail, data sheets, product demos, videos, presentations, and webcasts.

Marketing communications professionals upload the materials once they are created. When posting, users must fill out a description form that allows the samples to be organized and accessed easily. The form prompts input on several key characteristics:

- product category (known around IBM as the "brand")
- collateral type
- target industry segment
- target company size
- expiration date (the default is one year)

This taxonomy allows a user to search based on familiar terms. For example, you could ask it, "Give me everything you have on DB2 [a database platform] for the telecom industry." Once the users have identified the relevant materials, they then have a number of options: View the collateral as a PDF, download it, e-mail it to someone, compress it for easier transmission, burn it to a CD, or print it. Marcom Central is also linked to an internal print-on-demand facility, which means users can create custom four-color reproductions, personalize with data-driven specificity (addressed by the name of a recipient, for example), in lots as small as one, and have them shipped anywhere in the world within 10 business days. The sales teams, naturally, love this feature.

Another useful application is the translation center. Marketing communications teams in various geographies access centrally produced campaigns, translate them locally, and then re-post the versioned collateral to the knowledge base. This comes in handy in shared-language situations, like Portugal and Brazil.

Thousands of users across the IBM software group are using Marcom Central today. Most samples are posted by agency personnel, primarily Ogilvy & Mather, IBM's advertising and direct marketing agency of record, and George P. Johnson, IBM's global event marketing services provider. Staff at all IBM agencies are trained on the tool, using a five-minute online module. Day-to-day management of the tool consumes 30% of one software group manager's time.

Part of the value to the software group marketers is the tool's reporting function. Marketing teams can check on what's being used — and what items are not so popular. They can also look at usage levels by user type — sales vs. marketing, for example, or country by country. This kind of reporting means that marketers can determine holes or gaps, to better plan the right mix of new materials.

IBM's global services business unit operates a similar database using technology licensed from Leopard em. But the software team has configured the knowledge base to suit its particular needs, and has taken advantage of additional functionality. The IBM hardware unit has still to get into the marketing knowledge base arena. As a corporation, IBM is finding that building a marketing knowledge base is a living, evolving process, and a variety of solutions may need to be applied to meet a variety of requirements.

