

TELUS EMBRACES SOCIAL LEARNING

TELUS is a Canadian telecommunications company that has been around for a century, and it wants to ensure that every Canadian is connected to the rest of the world, whether that connection is through wireless devices, the Internet, television, or traditional telephone lines. The company has 12.7 million customer accounts.

Providing superior service is an important corporate goal. Management believes that good teamwork and employee learning are vital for achieving this goal. Until recently, most employee learning at TELUS took place in formal classroom settings outside the company. Much of what employees learned depended on knowledge presented by instructors, and this learning method was expensive. Employees would be better off learning from each other's expertise, management concluded. Moreover, 40 percent of the TELUS workforce was expected to retire within the next 10 years, making it essential for the company to find multiple ways of sharing and preserving employee experience and knowledge.

The company decided to focus on making team member education more "continuous, collaborative, and connected" through informal and social learning, using mentoring, coaching, job rotations, videos, blogs, and wikis. TELUS set a 2010 learning budget of \$21 million, 40 percent of which was for informal and social learning and 60 percent for formal learning. (The year before, formal learning had accounted for 90 percent of the firm's \$28.5 million learning budget.)

To support the new learning initiative, TELUS harnessed the capabilities of Microsoft SharePoint Server 2010, which provides team members with a single point of entry to shared knowledge within the company and the ability to search all the company's learning assets simultaneously. TELUS used the SharePoint MySites feature to enable team members to create their own Web pages that describe their areas of expertise and special skills. Team members are able to see their positions and those of others in the organizational hierarchy, connect with colleagues, and establish informal groups with other people with similar skills. An Expert Search capability provides ranked search results identifying TELUS employees with expertise in specific areas. MySites also offers blogging tools for team members to build their own blogs and contribute to those of others. Through these blogs, a team member can locate an expert, discuss his or her experiences, share advice, and find the answers to questions without having to take a class or interrupt a colleague.

TELUS used SharePoint to develop team sites called My Communities, where project teams, departments, and other groups can work together and share documents and other content. They are able to create categories for classifying and tagging user-generated content. TELUS Tube allows team members to post and view user-generated video of their accomplishments on the job or questions to ask colleagues. Over 1,000 videos have been posted. A new learning management system working closely with SharePoint Server 2010 enables team members to track and display the formal learning courses they have taken as well as the courses other team members have taken.



TELUS recognized that moving from formal learning to acquiring knowledge through employee collaboration and participation required a shift in company culture. “This is not a scenario in which we can flip a switch and have everyone change their work habits overnight,” observed Dan Pontefract, Senior Director of Learning for TELUS. To encourage acceptance of and participation in the new social learning processes, the company set up an internal site showing tangible examples of the new collaboration tools and launched a wiki to facilitate employee discussion. Pontefract includes information about the new learning initiative on his blog to help prepare team members for the shift.

The new SharePoint system gives TELUS team members much faster access to the specific skills and knowledge areas where they need help—they don’t need to wait for the next formal learning class. Instead, team members can immediately reach out to colleagues who have expertise in a specific area, or they can read wikis and blogs, watch videos, and participate in discussions to find answers.

Implementing SharePoint reduced the TELUS learning budget to \$21 million in 2010. The company was able to trim this budget by 20 percent the following year as it continued its shift to informal and social learning. Further cost savings will occur as the new learning solutions take hold. In the TELUS three-year plan, formal learning will comprise just 50 percent of the total learning budget.

Sources: Sharon Gaudin, “Telus Links Social, Traditional Training,” *Computerworld*, March 27, 2012; “TELUS Telecom Company Embraces Social Computing, Streamlines Formal Learning,” www.microsoft.com, accessed April 5, 2012; Barb Mosher, “Sharepoint 2010 Case Study: Informal and Social Learning at TELUS,” *CMSWire*, June 30, 2010, and www.telus.com, accessed April 6, 2012.