



WHY BUSINESSES DON'T COLLABORATE



Meeting Management, Group Input, & Wiki Use Survey Report

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**FUTURE
CHANGES**

Why Businesses (Don't) Collaborate

Survey Report on Group Input, Meeting Management, and Wiki Use

Today, content professionals are tugged in multiple directions, expected to multi-task their way through an increasing amount of work with the help of software tools designed to make them more productive. This survey aims to explore how you and your co-workers utilize software tools and determine, in various scenarios, whether they are actually a help or a hindrance.

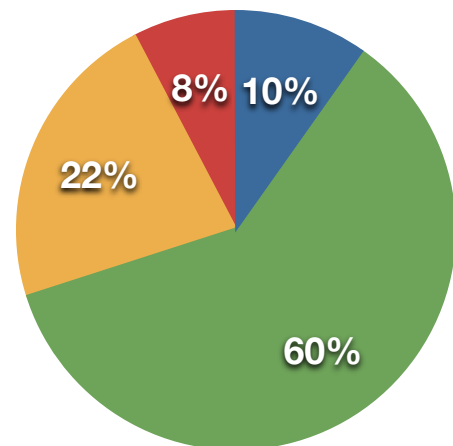
We received **523 responses** to the following 12 questions, and include brief analysis and a sampling of the comments people wrote in addition to their answers.

1. How many work-related emails do you receive per day?

We wanted to know how many messages people receive on a daily basis:

- 60% said they receive 11-50 messages
- 22% said they receive 50-100 emails
- 8% said they receive more than 100
- 10% said they receive less than 10

82% of respondents receive dozens of emails on a daily basis. The comments indicate that people consider email a significant time management issue, and the important information often gets lost in the volume of email.



Comments

- ▶ It is a challenge to absorb, respond, file, and otherwise manage email and also get other work done.
- ▶ About 30% are actionable, 35% have content that might be useful now or later (I'll skim), and the rest is unimportant.
- ▶ I can read, respond to, file, delete or otherwise meaningfully manage only about 25% of the email I receive.
- ▶ Email is a significant time management issue.
- ▶ Many are a waste of bandwidth.
- ▶ Many times, a single e-mail will launch a multiple e-mail conversation.
- ▶ I get copied on a lot of our process and project tracking emails, but auto-move those into folders for checking less frequently.

2. How many of those emails include attached files?

65% of respondents said a few of the daily emails they receive contain attachments, and 25% said at least half contain attachments. Only 2% said that the vast majority include attachments.

Comments

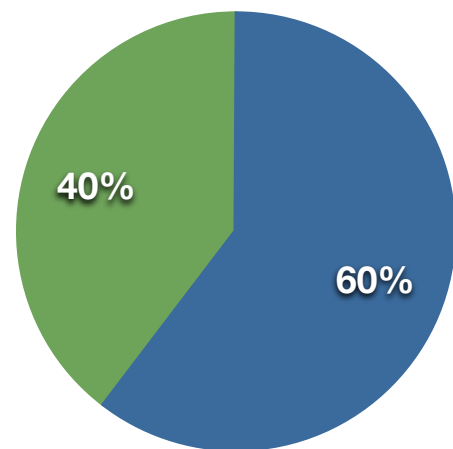
- ▶ Usually, the attached file is only a page or two long. The content could easily be put up on a wiki for review/comments/reading.
- ▶ I have emphasized within those I communicate with to use links to docs on doc server instead of e-mail. In fact, I have an interesting diagram about the problems caused by e-mailing documents (out of synch with master, mailbox full, etc). Many employees at my company 'get it'.
- ▶ We generally include the path to network folder locations rather than attaching files.
- ▶ Too many do not grasp the concept of shared folders.
- ▶ The government is bad at sending a long chain of emails and responses with an attachment still attached from the original email.

3. How many require your direct input or feedback on the contents of that attachment?

- 55% reported that at least half require feedback
- 36% reported that only a few require feedback

Comments

- ▶ Almost all require my input. I am the editor for all the member and provider communications that are generated from our department. I also respond to RFPs on behalf of our department.
- ▶ If I do get attachments, the sender usually wants my opinion on something before that sender does the official 'mass mailing'.
- ▶ Those that don't require my direct input or feedback often need to be available as references and so need sorting and tracking to keep up with updated versions.
- ▶ I myself have discovered that a useful way of obtaining feedback when I have specific questions about an in-process project is to attach an excerpt of a PDF with Acrobat comments embedded. This gets me excellent results -- much better than if I simply point the recipient to the PDF and indicate which pages I want them to examine.



4. Have you been the sender of an email asking for input or feedback on a document from your immediate group of colleagues?

96% of respondents said yes, but the comments indicate that people feel uncomfortable adding further clutter to their colleagues' inboxes, and recognize that trying to conduct group collaboration and revision by email is not optimal. Those that aren't using email and attachments are using a combination of wikis, SharePoint, and shared network drives to host files, and sending emails with pointers to the shared files.

Comments

- ▶ Now many of us put info on the wiki and send a link. Not everyone is comfortable on the wiki yet, though we've been using them for a couple of years.
- ▶ We upload most of the files to wiki and ask people to go there and get it. But sometimes we have people who refuse to do that. In that case, I will send a document as an email attachment.
- ▶ But of course I feel terrible doing this. Email attachments are tremendously bad usability. You can't review past versions, you can't see others comments, you force multiple downloads and risk executable viruses.
- ▶ Usually I include a link to a public folder where they can make a copy with their feedback.

5. Have you ever had to compile the feedback from multiple sources into one document?

92% of respondents said yes, but the comments show that those compiling feedback find it painful and inefficient, and would prefer to gather feedback using a shared, collaborative platform like a wiki.

Comments

- ▶ It's a major source of effort, pain, and grief.
- ▶ Yes. And from people speaking different languages. Compiling content from one opinionated employee and another who was exceptionally verbose is especially challenging.
- ▶ This is the pain in what a technical writer has to do. Now, I'm trying to avoid that by getting people to collaborate on reviewing docs using a Wiki.
- ▶ I go out of my way to avoid this.

6. Did you know that a wiki can be used for documents that require group input, such as project proposals, reports, meeting agendas and minutes, technical documentation, articles, etc.?

75% of respondents said yes. The comments show that those who are already using wikis are generally satisfied, but find that adoption of the tool by the entire group is critical to success. Those that aren't using wikis reported that the main reasons for not doing so are: lack of adoption, unavailability of a wiki, wiki platforms that aren't easy to use, and organizations that do not approve the use of wikis.

Several comments reflected misconceptions about wikis, namely that they are anarchic, subject to hacking, wouldn't fit well in a high-security environment, lack the ability to manage access, or may be vandalized by disgruntled employees.

Although some of these issues may exist with public wikis, such as Wikipedia, they aren't seen in wikis used "behind the firewall" in organizations. Wiki software tools designed for organizational use have security, organization, and access features that make them well-suited for high-security environments.

These *enterprise wikis* allow for information to be organized in individual workspaces based on project, department, team, etc., and access to those spaces can be granted to specific people. Permissions can also be set at the page level, so that a person might login, access a particular space, and have editing rights on some pages, but only viewing rights on others.

Enterprise wikis are designed to allow user account, group, and access information to be provisioned from authentication and authorization systems like LDAP and Active Directory, so that a person can login to the enterprise wiki with the same credentials that they use to access email, the company network, etc.

Comments

- ▶ I have been doing this for years, and it has been the most effective way of gathering input by far. I've found that people are much more likely to participate when they can just go update Wiki pages vs. reviewing formal/traditional documents.
- ▶ While wikis can be useful, they're only useful if the community makes a conscious effort to adopt and actually use the tool.
- ▶ If I was recommended/introduced to a system with an easy to use and informative interface, one where the data entered would remain secure (or could even be hosted on our own server) I would strongly lean in this direction! I'm more than willing to give it a shot.

7. How many meetings do you participate in each week?

62% reported that they attend 1-5 meetings and 28% attend 6-10 meetings per week. The comments reflect a general discontent with the amount of time spent in meetings, and the lack of adequate preparation.

Comments

- ▶ During certain periods meetings consume at least 7 hours a day, during slow times meetings consume about 4 hours a day.
- ▶ The less meetings, the better. Most meeting organizers have no idea how to run a meeting, and often end up wasting everyone's time. A well-planned meeting requires much preparation. The shorter and the more effective the meeting, the more pre-planning is involved.

8. How many of those meetings are in-person?

10% said none are in-person.

26% said less than half

43% said most

17% said all are in-person.

The responses show that a significant number of meetings do not take place in person. This makes adequate planning even more important. In-person meetings allow for social interaction, but remote ones require social interaction to have taken place beforehand, so that people can develop the relationships that enable them to work well together. Planning the agenda using a wiki can provide the basis for this interaction.

Comments

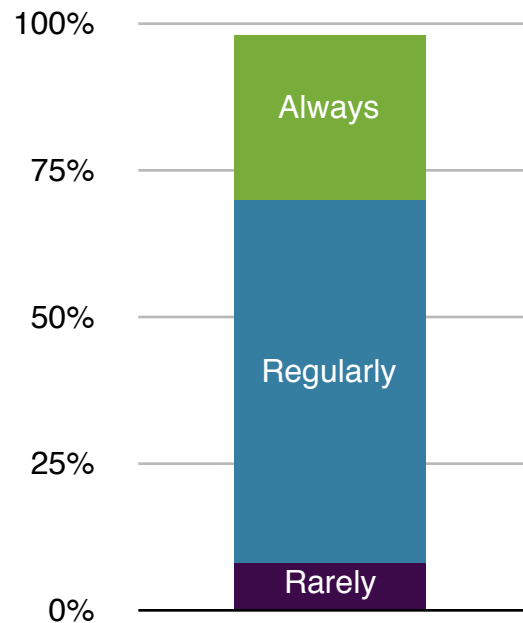
- ▶ Nearly all meetings have the remote option. I attend about a third in person (they are important and local; about a third remotely (they aren't important and I need to multitask), and about a third I attend remotely (they are evening or early morning with India/China and important).
- ▶ Most meetings are both in-person with remote participants via WebEx.
- ▶ They are in-person for people local to the meeting, but there are also employees who call in. Sometimes the meetings are held in a remote location, and we can either participate at a local conference room, or call in from our desks.
- ▶ Probably about 50/50. The nature of our business is such that most internal meetings are face to face, but most client meetings are over the phone.

9. When people send a meeting agenda in advance, do you read it?

8% said rarely.
62% said regularly.
28% said always.

The responses show that people frequently read meeting agendas sent in advance, but this is only the first step. To better prepare for a meeting, people should be able to build the agenda together, and directly edit it as needed. Replying to an email to suggest a change isn't effective, because it is a passive activity in which people have little control of what happens to their input.

Directly editing the agenda on a wiki gives people a direct say in what the meeting will cover, and sets the stage for further collaborative activity on the wiki, such as building the meeting minutes together, tracking action items, and building other essential work-related materials.



Comments

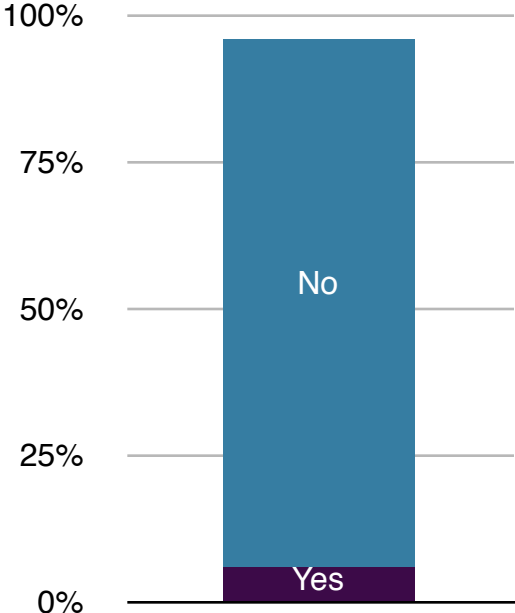
- ▶ I like getting agendas so I know what to expect and potentially prepare material to discuss.
- ▶ We use a wiki for agendas and meeting notes/summaries.
- ▶ The best way to keep a meeting short is to go prepared.
- ▶ Meetings where few have read the agenda in advance are time bandits and the unprepared attendees are robbers. On the plus side, my ideas come over as genius, just because I've had a chance to think things over ahead of time.
- ▶ I think you can cut the meeting time in half by agreeing to the agenda in advance. It also helps to get people to stick to the agenda when you're in the meeting!

10. Do you ever request revisions or additions to, or deletions from, the agenda?

12% said never.
78% said rarely.
6% said usually.

Only 6% regularly request changes to a meeting agenda. This is because an environment where members of a group can only request changes does not encourage people to do so. In fact, in this environment many people do not even realize they can request changes, or are afraid that it is not culturally acceptable to do so.

This stifles the input that can accurately shape contents and focus of a meeting, and in turn stifles interest and engagement among people attending the meeting. In an environment where input is not actively sought, it is no wonder people often use meetings as a time to catch up on email, browse the news, or chat to friends.

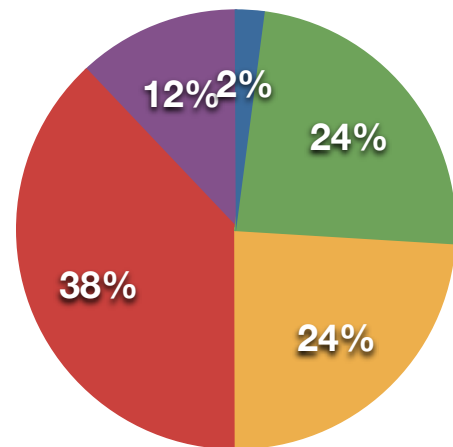


Comments

- ▶ Agendas are often mutually agreed upon in advance or we don't need to meet.
- ▶ When necessary I request changes. I don't like to waste time being at the wrong meeting.
- ▶ If I have something to add or if something was inaccurate I would request to have it changed or question what was behind an item that perhaps didn't seem clear. Especially if this is something that I may have to input to.
- ▶ Only if the meeting involves a group of peers that will be asked for contribution of information or the meeting invitation has included a request for topics.
- ▶ Rarely. When does the actual conversation _ever_ follow the agenda?;)
- ▶ I do if it affects my workflow, or if there is a misunderstanding about proposed changes that affect workflow.
- ▶ It altogether depends on requirements at the time, or ongoing issues. If items have been left off agenda, then I request that the agenda be updated. If I've convened the meeting, then I draft the agenda and request input from meeting participants.

11. Do you take minutes or notes during meetings?

- 2% - never
- 24% - rarely
- 38% usually
- 24% - always
- 12% - other answers



Comments

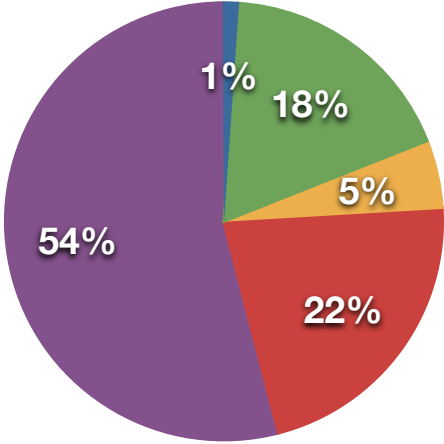
- ▶ Yes. However, these notes are for my own personal use and are rarely distributed to other participants, interested parties.
- ▶ I take notes on the bits pertinent to me - we usually have someone else assigned to take the formal minutes
- ▶ I run half the meetings I attend, and take notes during the meeting on the project wiki page. If I am just listening, I make a few notes for myself on paper.
- ▶ I take notes for myself. I don't take minutes for the group. Someone else does that.
- ▶ Usually I take notes for myself. If I am the meeting leader, I sometimes designate someone else to be notetaker in advance.
- ▶ Only take minutes when my turn is up, but usually take notes
- ▶ I almost always take notes. I hardly ever take the minutes (there usually aren't any taken).
- ▶ I take personal notes, but not notes that I share with the rest of the team.
- ▶ I take notes and share them if someone asks for them. There are relatively few people in my company who take good minutes and it's not a standard practice to do this. Although it maybe it should be!
- ▶ I take notes for agenda items which are relevant to me and which needs my action/inputs
- ▶ It depends on how important the issues are to me directly. If others need to keep track of an issue, I'll let them take responsibility for their area. Our meetings typically don't have a secretary.

12. When someone sends you minutes after the meetings, do you read them?

- 1% - never
- 18% - rarely
- 54% - usually
- 22% - always
- 5% - other answers

Comments

- ▶ I need to make sure what they conclude is what I concluded. (Often, it's not aligned!)
- ▶ I refer to them to look up or verify a decision.
- ▶ It's always fascinating to see what the minute-taker thought was important in various discussions. Sometimes the meeting on paper bears little resemblance to the one I recall having attended.
- ▶ For a new person on the team, it helps to go back through the notes from the recent past to get caught up on what's going on.
- ▶ Quick scan, if my involvement has been "logged" incorrectly, I send out a clarification to the group.
- ▶ I rarely read them on receipt. I might refer back to them at a later time.
- ▶ There are often action items from meetings so it is important to confirm that the information is accurate.
- ▶ People are not always good about sending minutes. IF they bother to take minutes, they might bring them to the next meeting and go through them with the group.





Stewart Mader is founder of Future Changes, a specialist consultancy that teaches people at Fortune 500 companies, universities, non-profits, and small businesses how to improve productivity using wikis.

He has written two books: *Wikipatterns* and *Using Wiki in Education*, and created the widely-used Wikipatterns.com community for sharing business wiki adoption strategies.



Stewart articulates the benefits of wikis clearly and comprehensively. He's the voice of experience.

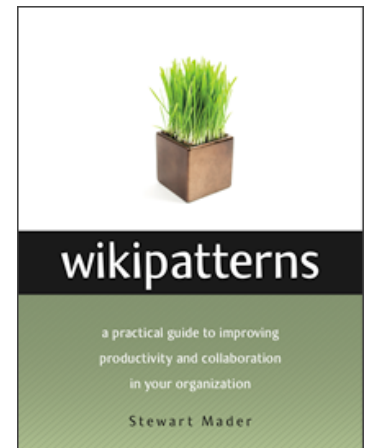
Audience Member - Stanford Tech Briefing

There's not many humans on the planet that know more about wikis than Stewart Mader. Wherever folks are talking about wiki technology, you'll find Mader, explaining how wikis work, how to get folks to use them, how to govern them, and how to use them to solve various real-world challenges.

Scott Abel - Organizer, Web Content and DocTrain Conferences

Clear explanations from an author sympathetic to the confusion and sometimes plain fear that is associated with actively changing any group's collaborative culture.

Ward Cunningham - from the Foreword to *Wikipatterns*



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SCOTT ABEL

Scott Abel is a content management strategist, structured XML content evangelist, and social media choreographer whose strengths lie in helping organizations improve the way they author, maintain, and deliver their information assets. Scott's blog, *The Content Wrangler*, is a popular online resource for content industry professionals with an interest in content management. Scott's social networking site, *The Content Wrangler Community*, is a global network of content professionals that attracts thousands of members from around the world.



A founding member of Content Management Professionals (<http://www.cmpros.org>), Scott previously served as Executive Director of the organization. Scott writes regularly for trade and industry publications, blogs, and newsletters and acts as a judge for both the Internet Advertising Awards and the Web Marketing Association Awards. He also runs several industry events, including the Web Content conference series (<http://www.webcontentconferences.com>) and Intelligent Content 2010, and is the official conference blogger for a variety of content industry events.

Keep track of what Scott is doing and thinking via Twitter (<http://www.twitter.com/scottabel>) and where he's at via Brightkite (<http://brightkite.com/people/scottabel/>) and where he's heading via Tripit (<http://www.tripit.com/people/thecontentwrangler>).

About The Content Wrangler, Inc.

The Content Wrangler (TCW) specializes in content management and social media strategies designed to help content-heavy organizations create, manage, and deliver content to the right people, at the right time, in the right format and language. The company provides social media marketing assistance to organizations interested in harnessing the power of online communities, crowd-sourcing, blogging, and user-generated content as part of their marketing. PR and customer service mix. TCW also provides industry-sponsored research aimed at helping software and services vendors better understand the real-world challenges faced by members of their target audience.

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