knowledge in action

> Effective knowledge sharing knows no boundaries. Xerox DocuShare web-based solutions provide a virtual workspace that enables both teams and communities of practice to easily share their work, regardless of technical skills, geographic location or functional responsibility.
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DocuShare: Bridging Platforms, Communities and Skills

The IT department at Stanford University first discovered Xerox DocuShare when it was investigating knowledge-sharing systems. During a trial of the web-based software, the group discovered it was also a tool that could be used to manage IT projects more effectively.

Stanford is home to 14,000 of the world's top students and 1,500 faculty, including several Nobel laureates and Pulitzer Prize winners. The IT department manages a variety of projects aimed at developing and implementing new IT applications for its business clients – the various academic departments, university administrators, university bursar and others. Because project participants represent a wide range of technical skills, the IT group needed a system that would be sophisticated enough to get the job done, but easy enough for non-technical users to manage.

"We wanted to design a single location with a common interface where university clients and IT personnel could share information that required no technical skills to maneuver," explains Stanford IT Project Manager, Judith Dean. "We also needed a product that was readily accessible from the office, home or on the road."

The IT team was also looking for a web-based technology that could bridge a variety of platforms. Clients have a mix of Macintosh and Windows-based computers, and users sometimes receive or create files utilizing applications that are not available on everyone's desktop. Since all clients use the web, the university's knowledge-sharing solution had to accommodate Postscript or HTML documents created for those users who might not have the appropriate applications.

The team chose DocuShare because it was a low-risk alternative, was easy to access and use and required minimal training and support. DocuShare uses an organization's intranet or extranet to set up a virtual information-sharing envi-

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ronment. Running on existing hardware, DocuShare installs easily and requires little training or internal support. DocuShare users can easily post, retrieve and search for information housed in customizable folders.

DocuShare provides users with instant controlled access to company and organizational information. Read and write permissions are granted and maintained by the various work groups within the organization. DocuShare can be accessed by anyone with a Web browser, whether they're working on a PC, Macintosh or Unix computer.

Managing Projects with DocuShare

The IT department began testing DocuShare with a limited number of users to determine what the tool did and how it might best be used. Soon they were utilizing DocuShare to help manage IT projects for a variety of university business clients. Currently, approximately 125 users have both read and write privileges on DocuShare with a much larger number having read-only access.

Stanford is in the process of replacing its entire student administration system, which is the heart of the IT department's business. The massive overhaul involves a widespread and complicated collection of information and practices regarding student grading, class registration, billing, financial aid and admissions. Stanford's IT team is using DocuShare to share information about the multi-faceted project.

All project team members can now easily locate and work on key aspects of the projects and documents, says Dean. "We look at our DocuShare folders as common work spaces where groups can see what others are doing and leave their work for comment and review. This one, simple location has allowed us to store and exchange information in a common format through the use of a collection of templates we created, making the merging of numerous files into a complete document very simple."

With each IT project, a folder is created in DocuShare. The folder includes such information as the names of the people working on the project, individual project roles, timelines, schedules, the project originator, project goals and the business problem the project is supposed to solve. All of the documents pertaining to the project are housed in the folder.

In most cases, the user group designates a collection manager. The collection manager determines who has read and write access to the various documents, and when to inform interested parties regarding changes and/or updates to the material housed in the project folders. For example, the collection manager gives notice to those who are actively involved in writing or editing a document when a draft is available for viewing and/or editing, and notifies those with read-access when documents are available for viewing.

User Control

DocuShare puts the power and control over the development and distribution of information in the hands of individual work groups. Requiring minimal support from the IT group, which pays for the license, installs upgrades and manages system-level privileges, DocuShare users design and develop their own project folders.

"We have purposely not created a lot of rules regarding DocuShare," says Dean. "We have found that it is better to let our end users develop their own schemas, rather than trying to create the perfect schema and impose it upon our clients."

DocuShare makes it quick and easy for groups to set up virtual workspaces, enabling timely and efficient knowledge exchange, a key to effective project management.

"We have found DocuShare to be a fast, simple and easy-to-learn application that can be used as a standalone product or alongside other technologies," continues Dean. "Most importantly, DocuShare provides a level playing field for our technical and non-technical people." ■