



# How PBwiki Helps Consulting Firms Raise Profits

White Paper

## Overview

In recent years, successfully running a profitable consulting business has become increasingly arduous. Managers must juggle the demands presented by margin pressures, staff turnover, and a distributed workforce. Fortunately, a new class of collaborative software solutions known as wikis can add demonstrable value to the consulting practice, with a direct impact on profitability. However, just deploying a wiki isn't enough: it must be secure, reliable, and accessible from anywhere using a standard Web browser. With a rich set of features, tens of thousands of customers, including 8 of the 10 largest consultancies, PBwiki represents the optimal approach to a rapidly-deployed, hosted wiki for the professional services organization.

## Challenges Faced by Consulting Organizations Today

For decades, the only constant for technology and management consulting firms has been the relentless pace of change. In recent years, this turmoil has become even more pronounced, partially in reaction to the Y2K and dotcom eras, where many customers

were badly burned by failed implementations, never-ending engagements, and massive cost overruns.

In response to the excesses of the past decade, clients are demanding fixed-bid projects, supplemented with strict oversight and rigid completion deadlines; the days of open-ended, carte-blanche projects are rapidly drawing to an end. Even traditional time-and-materials-based engagements are coming under renewed scrutiny. To meet the challenges of these more restrictive modern consulting engagements, professional services firms are increasingly reliant upon a highly efficient, educated, and connected workforce.

This workforce is highly dynamic; turnover has always been a fact-of-life in the consulting industry. Traditionally, when a consultant leaves an organization, all of their experience is lost to the enterprise. Until the recent past, this loss of organizational memory was not a problem: new hires would simply come up to speed on the job, and the customer would pay the tab for this educational effort. However, since many projects are now fixed-bid, this on-the-job training is in effect paid for by the consultancy, and directly impacts the profitability of the endeavor.

If today's margin pressures weren't enough of a headache, consulting managers must now also grapple with the challenges of coordinating the actions of a highly distributed workforce. These include:

- Consultants working onsite at customer locations or home offices
- Customer and partner personnel making up significant portions of project teams
- Virtual teams that come together and disband at record speed

When these dynamic groups do manage to communicate, it usually takes place over email. This method of interaction presents a significant productivity barrier: project team members are struggling under ever-increasing email workloads, and many message

attachments (often consisting of vital project-related documents) are blocked by firewalls or spam filters.

Although all of the aforementioned problems place a serious burden on their business, consulting managers have learned the hard way not to expect much in the way of support from their overloaded IT organizations. Even if IT were willing and able to provide infrastructure for the consulting organization, many projects start and finish so quickly that there simply isn't enough time to ramp up a project-based solution.

## Hosted Collaboration: An Ideal Tool to Support Consulting Practices

In response to the challenges described earlier, some organizations have developed home-grown knowledge and project management solutions. However, constructing these solutions usually removes billable consultants from the field, which also negatively impacts the organization's profitability. In addition, the features offered by these in-house systems are often skeletal, incomplete, and do nothing to help customers and partners. Packaged knowledge management and scheduling applications are available, but they demand a budgetary and time investment far beyond the reach of many consulting organizations.

Caught in the middle between insufficient home-grown solutions and expensive software packages, consulting managers have turned to a new type of collaborative software product to help keep their teams connected and up-to-date.

Known as wikis, these offerings deliver a series of compelling benefits to consultancies:

- Broader and deeper functionality compared to a self-developed solution
- Fast installation
- Shallow learning curve
- More cost-effective than a traditional enterprise software package
- Accessible to clients and partners

Consulting leaders are also confident that wikis can scale to meet their business needs as evidenced by the success of publicly available wikis such as Wikipedia.

Since today's projects demand higher productivity, wikis are often used as knowledge management repositories. By making consultants more educated and organized, they have a direct impact on the bottom line. As a centralized, secure warehouse of information, wikis help preserve organizational memory; new consultants can become productive much more quickly than before.

Finally, wikis are also used to break down the barriers between a consulting organization and its customers and partners. Building tighter relationships with these key constituents also translates into a more effective consulting organization.

Even though a wiki is the right choice for a consultancy seeking to improve margins and make engagements more effective, it is also important to choose the right solution.

## **PBwiki: The Most Effective Hosted Wiki**

Once the decision to implement a collaborative solution such as a wiki has been made, the next consideration is whether to host the software internally or employ a Software as a Service (SaaS) model such as offered by PBwiki.

Self-hosted wikis are burdened with a number of serious drawbacks, including:

- IT must acquiesce to this software purchase
- Hardware and other resources need to be procured
- Installation and configuration might require hiring external experts
- IT will need to grant external users (such as customers and partners) permission to access this internally-hosted system

On top of all of these time-consuming obstacles, the distributed nature of this new solution means that it will naturally need to be reviewed by corporate security personnel, which will add additional delays to the process.

Once installed and configured, the self-hosted wiki will continue to need care-and-feeding. As is frequently the case with enterprise software, maintenance is often significantly higher than the initial cost of the solution. In many cases, these administrative tasks will need to be performed by a billable consultant who could be working on revenue-generating projects instead.

In contrast to their on-premise counterparts, on-demand wikis such as PBwiki remove much of the risk and cost from the picture:

- SaaS-based solutions like PBwiki aren't subject to the IT decision process and associated delays
- There are no outlays on hardware or staffing
- PBwiki can be deployed very quickly
- Granting access through the firewall to clients or partners is not an issue

From the perspective of customers and partners, PBwiki offers a professional experience, with a simple, award-winning look-and-feel. Organizations that use PBwiki

are able to customize its appearance, thereby projecting a consistent brand message to their clientele.

Management benefits from PBwiki by being able to gain instant visibility into a project's status, schedule, budget, and key documents, in contrast to the current state of affairs where project managers must be individually polled. Sales teams are also able to ascertain the current health of an engagement, which helps prevent awkward encounters when attempting to sell additional services.

For risk-averse consulting managers, PBwiki is a proven, safe approach. Over 40,000 organizations use PBwiki, which hosts over 600,000 wikis worldwide. Each month, over 2,000,000 people use PBwiki.. Large consultancies have entrusted PBwiki with their vital project management data. These organizations include:

- McKinsey
- Accenture
- Deloitte
- Capgemini

Infrastructure quality and security are both recurrent concerns for enterprises about to entrust their data to hosted solutions. PBwiki offers a fully redundant, secure environment for its hosted information. Data is encrypted, and backups are performed at both a system and user-requested level. PBwiki provides distinct layers of security, which would be daunting to match for an on-premise solution. The PBwiki application itself tracks modifications with full audit trails. Data is protected by four levels of access control plus page and folder-level settings. For organizations that have deployed LDAP/Active Directory, PBwiki is able to integrate with this platform, thereby offering single-sign on capabilities.

For consulting organizations with an eye on the bottom line, PBwiki is affordable. It doesn't require a major up-front investment in hardware, software, installation or

training. Return on investment (ROI) is measured in weeks, not months or years. PBwiki can generate up to an hour of additional productivity per day for each consultant, and the product only costs \$8 per month per consultant.

## PBwiki Features for Consultants

PBwiki supplies a consulting organization with a broad range of capabilities that add tremendous value in the following areas:

- Collaboration
- Documentation
- Project Management
- Calendaring
- Templates
- Multimedia Support

### Collaboration

Using PBwiki, a consultancy can work with customers and partners, securely. Project-specific pages can be set up and restricted to the appropriate audience. Configuring these customized security settings doesn't require any support from IT; it can be done by an authorized PBwiki administrator.

Files can be shared online, eliminating the need to send electronic versions to all constituencies. This reduction in email traffic alone serves as a significant productivity booster. PBwiki records a full audit trail of all changes, making it easy to see who has made modifications to shared resources.

### Documentation

PBwiki makes it possible to store and disseminate broad ranges of organizational knowledge, including policies, best practices, and training materials. As described earlier, anything that can improve consultant productivity has a direct impact on profitability, especially on fixed-bid engagements.

### Project management

By providing a centralized, easily accessible system of record, PBwiki lets team members coordinate project schedules and timelines, while collaborating on shared to-do lists. Project status reports can be stored online and retrieved from anywhere. Many organizations use PBwiki to run project status and customer meetings as well.

Figure 1 shows how easy it is to create and populate a project management page. Note that the structure and appearance of this page is completely configurable via a Web browser without any coding:



### Calendaring

Coordinating schedules for a geographically dispersed team can be a significant hindrance for any consulting organization. PBwiki helps address this problem by offering a fully integrated, shared calendar, accessible by any authorized team member (including partners and customers). This calendar may also be used to schedule scarce resources, such as training rooms.

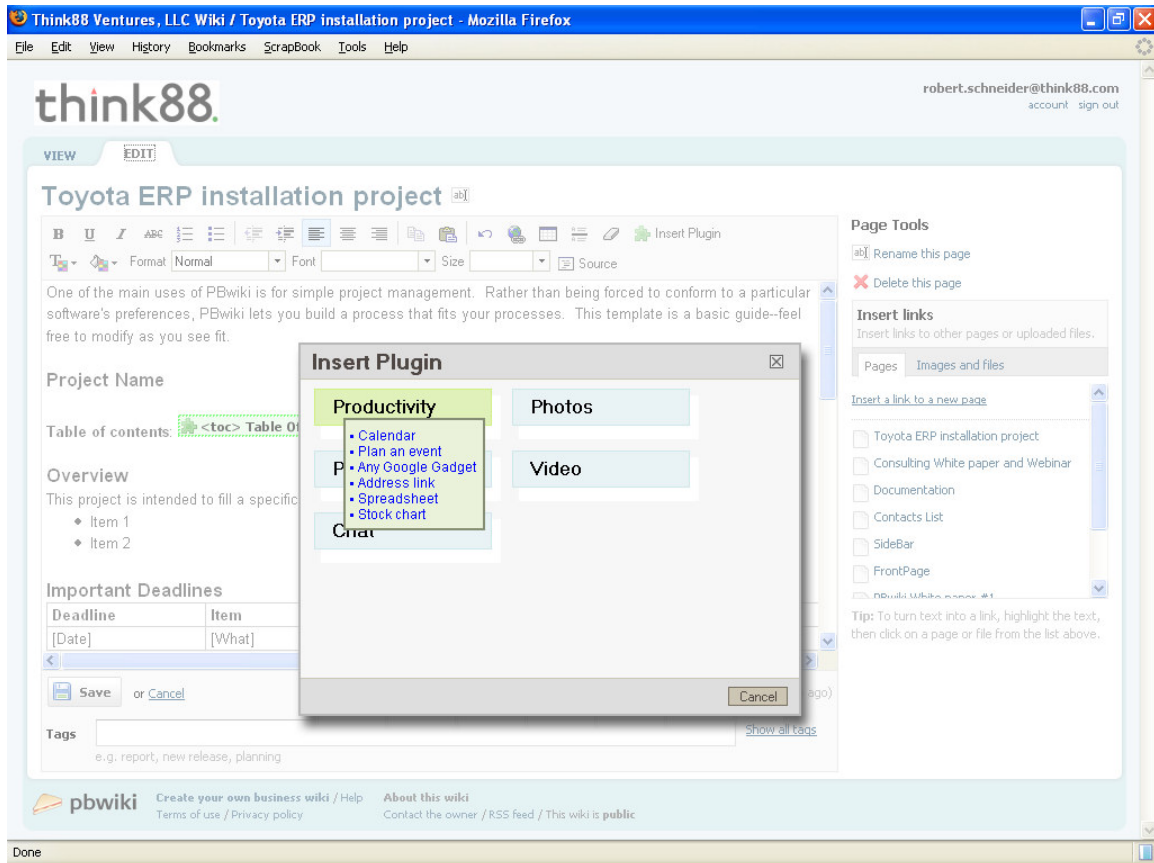
### Templates

As part of its standard offering, PBwiki provides a series of templates aimed squarely at the needs of a consultancy. These include project, project tracking, meeting, and training templates. In addition, authorized PBwiki administrators are free to create their own, customized templates.

### Multimedia support

As a Web 2.0 application, PBwiki offers solid multimedia capabilities. Specific consulting-oriented plugins include spreadsheets (extremely useful for consolidating timesheets and expense reports), calendars, and any one of the tens of thousands of available Google Gadgets. Most importantly, adding a plugin is simple and requires no coding expertise.

Figure 2 illustrates the wealth of available plugins, as well as how easy it is to incorporate one into a project page:



## Conclusion

Consulting engagements are being squeezed by margin, schedule, and personnel pressures. Cost-effective hosted collaborative solutions such as PBwiki can deliver dramatic benefits to professional services organizations without the need for IT approval, expensive hardware outlays, or lengthy training commitments. PBwiki's collaborative capabilities can strengthen the relationship with customers and partners. Finally, projects can be delivered and managed more effectively, which yields higher profits and more satisfied clients.

## About PBwiki

PBwiki is the world's leading provider of hosted collaboration solutions for businesses and education. Leading companies and organizations like Oracle, DePaul University, and the FDA choose PBwiki to collaborate across geographic and organizational boundaries with employees, customers, partners, and vendors. We host over 600,000 wikis, serve millions of users per month, and 94% of users would recommend PBwiki to a friend. Over 40,000 businesses have chosen PBwiki to implement knowledge management, extranets, project management, and a host of other business processes and workflows. PBwiki's investors include Mohr Davidow Ventures, Seraph Group, Sippl Investments, and Ron Conway.

## Contact PBwiki

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