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Questions

A chat with Aaron Fulkerson, the man who's helping bring wikis to corporate America.

Former Microsoft software developers Steve Bjorg and Aaron Fulkerson started MindTouch, Inc. to tap into the exploding "wiki" marketplace. Based in San Diego with development and sales offices in St. Paul, MindTouch (www.mindtouch.com) has captured a growing audience of corporate users who have either purchased its DekiBox intranet application or downloaded the company's many free open source programs related to wiki creation. Fulkerson, who works in St. Paul, described the world of wikis.

1. What is a wiki?

What most people think of as a wiki is a Web site where you can edit any page of it. They're written in SML (simple markup language) or WYSIWYG (What You See Is What You Get) language for editing the content on the page. The most famous wiki is, of course, Wikipedia, the online encyclopedia. Interestingly, almost everyone I know has heard of wikis but the majority don't know what they do. When I ask, "Do you know that you can edit the pages you see?" they don't. But wikis allow several users to edit content.

2. Are corporations using them?

Yes. What's happening is departments in many companies are setting up wikis without the information technology department even knowing they exist. There's a ton of them out there. I read Intuit (Quicken's parent company) has more than 100 distinct wikis. It's like a free-for-all. We've placed our DekiBox product into a lot of different companies, from manufacturing to nonprofits to interactive agencies and health care companies.

3. How do they work in a corporate context?

We're seeing a lot of wikis first deployed in the marketing communications department; if that's successful, they get rolled out in other departments. We've seen human resource departments use them for hosting standard forms in PDF [formats] for employees. They're great for project management and asset management. Instead of sending out 85 MB [worth of] e-mail attachments to entire teams of people, you can have a Web site where team members can make changes to various documents in a variety of formats. Wikis can be shared with clients, who can view the progress of projects in a secure environment. In the corporate world there is too much siloing of content. We feel wikis help eliminate those barriers and create greater information sharing.

4. What's the advantage of your product?

Wikis are built on open source technology that can be shared by all, but many of those are pretty crude. Our product, the Deki-



Aaron Fulkerson

Box, gives users a much more polished and elegant way to create and maintain wikis and applications for versioning and audit control. It's basically a plug-and-play box you attach to your network. Since it sits behind the corporate firewall, it is a secure and scalable way for employees to use the technology.

What we've found is that when you put the technology in the hands of the end users the more likely they will be to adapt it. But if it comes as a directive of the IT department, they're not going to use it. We've been seeing plenty of end users who really like what our product does.

— Frank Jossi