

CANADIAN TIRE KEEPS THE WHEELS ROLLING WITH KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

Don't be fooled by its modest name: Canadian Tire sells a lot more than tires. This company is actually five interrelated companies consisting of petroleum outlets, financial services, and retail outlets selling automotive, sports, leisure, home products, and apparel. It is also one of Canada's largest companies and most-shopped retailers, with 57,000 employees, and 1,200 stores and gas stations across Canada. The retail outlets are independently owned and operated and are spread across Canada. Canadian Tire also sells merchandise online.

Obviously, a company this big needs efficient and effective ways of communicating with its workforce and dealers, and arming them with up-to-date information to run the business. The company created two different systems for this purpose, a dealer portal and an employee information intranet.

The dealer portal was based on Microsoft Office SharePoint Portal Server, and provided a central online source for merchandise setup information, alerts, best practices, product ordering, and problem resolution. The money saved from reducing daily and weekly mailings to dealers saved the company \$1–2 million annually. Customer service improved because the dealers no longer had to wade through thick paper product binders. Now product manuals are all online, and dealers are able to automatically find accurate up-to-date information.

The employee intranet called TIREnet was initially more problematic. It was based on Lotus Notes Domino software and had been poorly designed. Employees complained that the site was disorganized, brimming with outdated and redundant material, and lacked effective search features. People spent more time than necessary searching for administrative and human resource-related documents.

Canadian Tire upgraded TIREnet with a new interface that was more streamlined and intuitive. The foundation for the new TIREnet was Microsoft SharePoint Server, and the company reorganized the internal Web site so that it was easier to use and find information. SharePoint provides an option to freeze specific content, such as human resources documents, so only staff with appropriate clearance can post changes.

Canadian Tire catalogued more than 30,000 documents from the old system and transferred them to the new system. Employees no longer have to browse through TIREnet to locate a document. SharePoint's Enterprise Search technology lets employees search for documents by typing their queries into a search box, instantly providing more up-to-date information for decision making.

It is also much easier to keep documents current. Employees and managers archived up to 50 percent of old TIREnet content that was irrelevant and outdated. Documents are now automatically updated according to who has reviewed each, and the last date each was accessed. This information helps Canadian Tire management identify and remove outdated and time-sensitive material, further reducing the time required to find information.

