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E-BIZ

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Build a base of information

For several years, one of the hottest trends in the world of big business has been the concept of knowledge management. Large companies have come to realize that the collective knowledge of employees represents something of value.

The result is that they have been scrambling to put in place technology that allows them to capture the accumulated wisdom of the organization, such as might be found in various documents, files and information systems.

Of course, many of us wonder why it took so long for them to discover a need that seems glaringly obvious. Big business can afford expensive solutions that allow them to archive and access electronic knowledge. But is the entrepreneur doomed to a future in which knowledge management is a nice concept, and nothing more?

Not at all. Through the past 15 years, I've built a base of information for myself that is instantly accessible and researchable. I realized in 1985 that much of what I typed into my computer might one day be of value — and so I began to save most of it. Over time, I discovered various computer programs that allow me to instantly find useful information within this massive set of documents.

By doing so, I've developed my own sophisticated method of undertaking knowledge management.

The logic behind my pack-rat mentality has been that even though there might be a lot of junk in these various files, there is probably some extremely useful stuff as well.

I've kept about 80 per cent of the E-mail messages that I have sent and received since 1984. I've also kept most of the word processing and other documents I've typed or received since I started my company in 1990.

Of course, having such a large database of information is next to useless unless you can somehow extract knowledge from it. That is where a little-known program, AskSam from AskSam Systems in Florida (**www.asksam.com**), comes in. It takes every single E-mail message, document and file, and prepares a searchable database of what it finds. You can then search it, looking for particular words or phrases.

Recently, a fellow called me to see if I might be able to help him with a client project. In a second or two, I was browsing through some of the E-mail messages that mentioned his name. This helped me remember who he was, and what he does. In this case, knowledge management involved the instant retrieval of useful information.

I've been in many situations in which I have been working on a report, project or document, and remember working on something similar in past years. AskSam helps me locate the document, which saves me valuable time. Knowledge management means knowledge recycling.

Can you accomplish the same thing? By all means. First, become an information pack rat. Starting today, keep every single electronic computer file that you generate — E-mail messages, word processing documents, presentation files, spreadsheets or other documents. Anything you delete is a bit of knowledge gone forever.

Then, try out the AskSam demo — it's available free at its Web site. You might also explore programs such as Altavista Discovery (**discovery.altavista.com**) or Enfish Tracker (**www.enfish.com**). Both examine every single file found on your computer, and build an index of what they find. Like AskSam, you can then query your computer to find particular information of importance.

The key is that with the ever-decreasing cost of hard disk and other means of computer storage, saving every single document, file and scrap of information that you generate or receive is not only cost effective, but extremely smart.

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