



**IN THE REAL WORLD**

## Exit Strategy

Knowledge Management initiatives are best started at a time of corporate stability, when knowledge workers can be motivated to provide the best-quality information to the system. However, this isn't always possible. For example, Northrop Grumman's foray into Knowledge Management was the direct result of the downturn of the defense industry in the 1990s and the massive layoffs of employees involved in the design and production of the B2 bomber. To capture some of the irreplaceable knowledge that was walking out of the door, the company instituted a KM program in which knowledge engineers worked to capture information about the B2 bomber from employees who had already been given pink slips. Today the company's KM system, known as Yellow Pages, supports over 12,000 knowledge workers through the Internet.

For the nonexpert knowledge worker, a KM initiative often brings the overhead of self-documenting personal interactions with customers, especially with those who call in for support. By having customer support representatives record customer questions and their solutions, a library of frequently asked questions (FAQs) can be built up over months and sometimes years of customer support, allowing new hires (nonexperts) to use the accumulated knowledge to serve customers.

Once the KM initiative reaches steady state, it may be possible to significantly reduce overhead by offloading support to automated programs running on the web. For example, customers may be allowed to access the company's FAQs and their answers from the web, bypassing the telephone interaction with customer support representatives.