



## Technology and the Global Supply Chain AMR Research

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# Next big land rush: believe it or not, is knowledge management

Posted by Kevin O'Marah @ 8:11 am

This sounds silly for anyone who has ever been involved in the typical hapless library exercise of a digital “knowledge management” initiative. The lasting image for most of these efforts is of a black hole - everything goes in, nothing comes out. But get ready for a change of tune.

The root of this is an exploding need among all players up and down the global supply chain to harness and leverage their intellectual property without giving up control or worse, having it hijacked and used against them. An example is the kind of engineering intensive knowledge stored in the heads of thousands of soon-to-retire manufacturing process guys in the chemicals industry. [I talked to ExxonMobil about this](#) and found they're keen to solve it before the IP ends up sitting on a beach in Florida somewhere. At the exact opposite end of the spectrum is the issue of managing IP for a company like Hasbro. They have pure entertainment images that will manifest as profitable toys like Barbie, unless someone raids the files and dumps a load of cheap counterfeit knockoffs onto the market.

How do you capture, catalog, update, distribute, and otherwise collaborate on knowledge (i.e., IP) when it ranges from expertise to trademarks? It turns out practically every technology vendor category has an answer for you. Collaboration vendors from little guys like Jive to big guys like OpenText have a story. B2B and EDI guys like Sterling Commerce, GXS, and Inovia are part of the puzzle. PLM guys like Dassault, PTC or Siemens are certainly in the mix. Digital Rights Management vendors have been thought of largely in terms of media and entertainment uses, but players like Adobe, EMC, and even Oracle (with its Stellent property) deserve a look on this front. Plus the security vendors like Symantec, EMC and RSA need to be considered.

And finally, all the platform guys figure into the equation - IBM, Microsoft, and Oracle all appear across the board with “solutions” in each of these categories.

The net of it all is that manufacturers and retailers across sectors will absolutely need to handle the question of [how IP works its way around the global supply chain](#). One worry: letting Microsoft Sharepoint creep in as the defacto standard for management of IP in interenterprise collaboration. Its so easy to set up and start using... it naturally links to your most familiar workspace, namely Excel, PowerPoint, and the rest of MSOffice. But where is the control and scalability? I'm not saying Microsoft can't do it, just that renegade groups of employees doing it on their own will almost definitely end up making a mess, and possibly and expensive one.

Missing from the list of vendors with a solid pitch here is SAP. The ERP backbone of choice for so many companies may have a stranglehold on transactions, but they lack punch when it comes to interenterprise collaboration, relying on partners like Seeburger and Crossgate. This may seem a sideshow in Walldorf, but every industry is beginning to see the value of stuff that is presently flying around the [digital supply chain](#), largely unsupervised.

I'd love to hear ideas on how best to map out a strategy for this problem.

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