

Wiki warehouse

How St. Louis Maintenance employees apply Web 2.0 technology to save costs

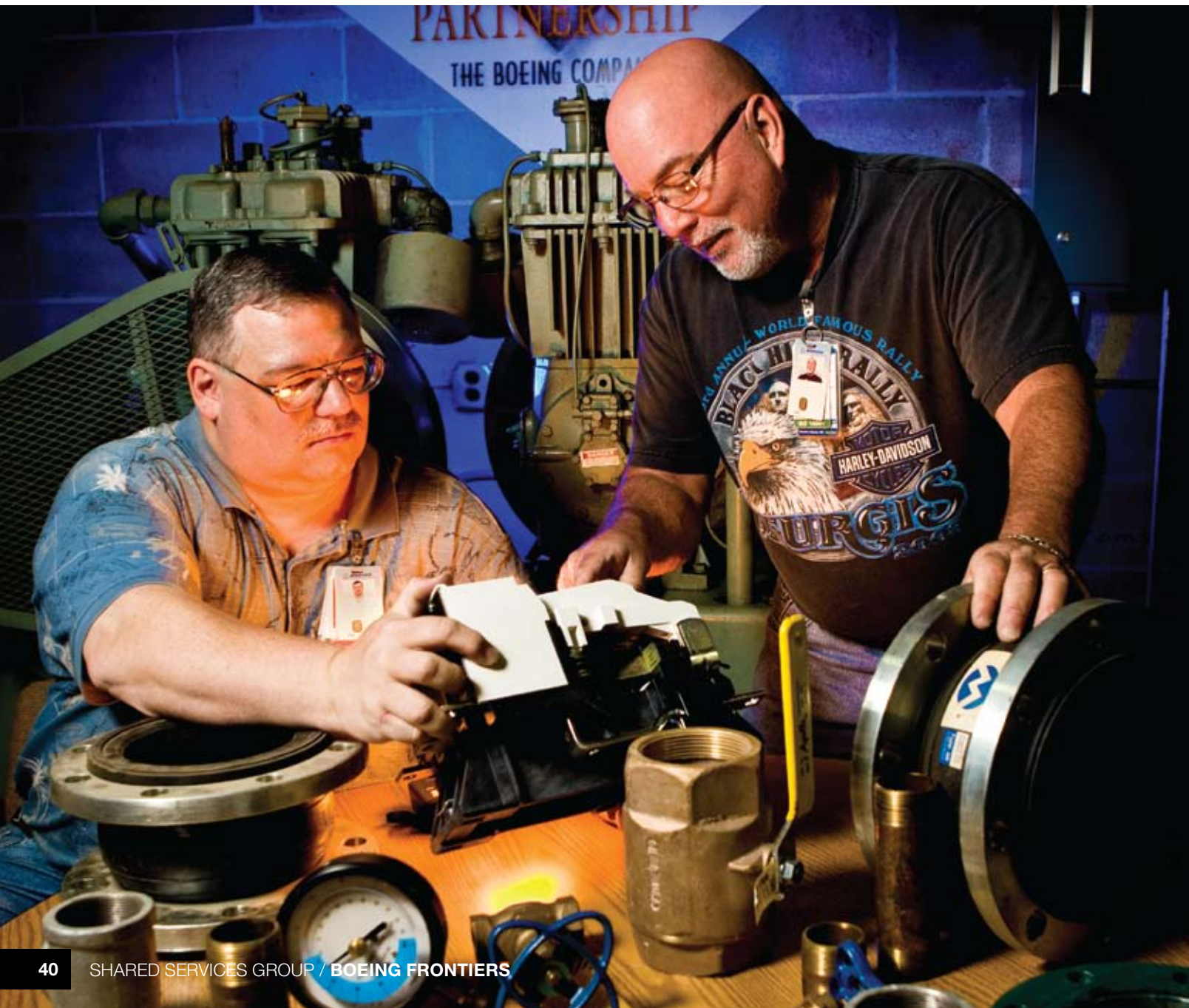
By Bill Seil

Two Boeing Shared Services Group Maintenance employees in St. Louis recently responded to a call to reduce costs by exploring the world of Web 2.0 technology. The result: a new online tool that is helping to shrink a budget gap and sparking ideas for new applications across the enterprise.

A “wiki,” or collaborative online tool, created and populated by Joe Traversey and Michael Day, allows Site Services employees

at Boeing St. Louis to list their excess Boeing-owned inventory—from light bulbs to expensive machinery—on a well-organized Web site. Cataloging these items is no small feat, since many of them are hidden away, and sometimes forgotten, at the huge plant.

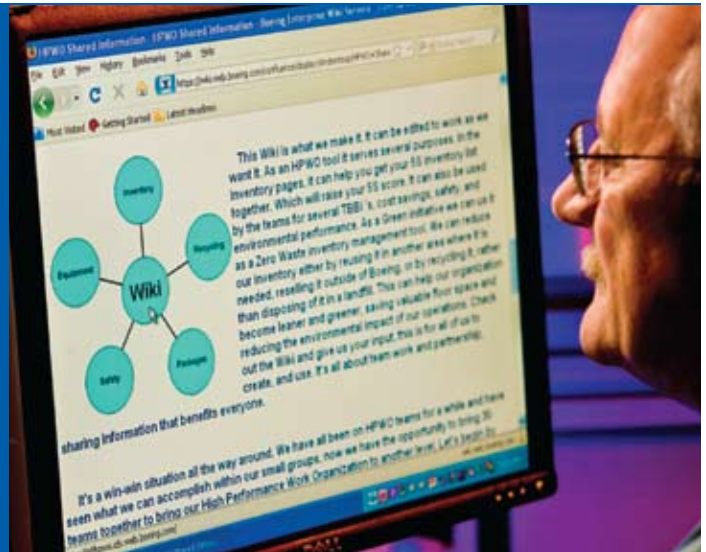
Now, instead of immediately ordering new parts or equipment, St. Louis employees check the wiki, called HPWO Shared



What is a wiki?

A wiki is a collaborative online tool that allows multiple users to make additions and alterations. It takes advantage of the collective knowledge of interested parties to provide comprehensive information on various subjects. Like blogs, wikis are part of a new collection of online tools often referred to as Web 2.0.

PHOTO: Frank Szwarz, a Maintenance electrician in St. Louis, reads information on the St. Louis Site Services wiki. In addition to listing excess inventory, the HPWO Shared Information wiki stores locations of routinely needed equipment. **RON BOOKOUT/BOEING**



Information, to see if the items are available from another group. Employees listing items can even insert links to photographs of the equipment they have available. Individuals viewing the site can request an item simply by typing in its name. Some of this now-visible inventory, no longer needed by the company, can be sold to outside businesses.

"It just kind of clicked that a wiki could be applied to the problem of excess inventory," said Traversey, a Maintenance pipe fitter in St. Louis. "Instead of sharing information individually, we could all communicate in a single forum."

While the financial impact of the wiki is still being calculated, the results are impressing management and Finance personnel. Craig Oberle, Business Management manager for Site Services, Midwest Region, estimates that the savings and cost avoidance benefits could exceed \$500,000 this year alone.

As use of the tool spreads and becomes more sophisticated, the financial impact will be significantly higher, Oberle said. Maintenance crews are just beginning to enter data on excess equipment. Another feature of the wiki, documenting Maintenance facilities and procedures, will reduce the amount of time needed to complete jobs.

The wiki also will preserve essential information and practices by documenting the knowledge of experienced employees. Maintenance personnel are entering the locations of pumps, valves, electrical breakers and other equipment that Maintenance personnel routinely need to access. Photographs of the equipment also are posted. This allows new employees—or employees helping out from another location—to locate these items without tracking them down on foot.

Day also is excited by the wiki's prospects for making an environmental contribution. As excess inventory is identified and transferred to people who need it, there is less chance it will be thrown out. He said discussion around the wiki has helped to strengthen the group's environmental culture.

PHOTO: Michael Day, left, and Joe Traversey, Maintenance employees in St. Louis Site Services, examine equipment listed on the wiki they developed. **RON BOOKOUT/BOEING**

"We've got it set up now where nothing useful is likely to go in a Dumpster," he said. "If we can't find a use through the wiki, we're going to send it to Boeing Surplus."

Traversey admits he had little prior knowledge of wikis. He started researching Web 2.0 and online tools after attending a November 2008 all-employee meeting. At that meeting, Steve Gill, St. Louis and St. Charles Site Services director, announced the group was facing a major budget reduction. While management was able to identify more than \$15 million in cost reductions, more cuts were needed. Jobs were on the line.

Gill challenged employees, particularly the site's High Performance Work Organizations, to propose ideas to reduce costs. HPWOs are employee engagement teams developed jointly by the company and the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers.

Before stepping forward, Traversey took the idea to his longtime co-worker and friend, Michael Day. Day quickly started working on a concept and soon the two had a workable approach.

"The wiki is basically set up as a common-knowledge database," Day said. "The beauty of it is, anybody can go into it and add or remove information. That's not the case with a traditional database."

Their next step was to take the idea to their first-level management, as well as their colleagues in the HPWOs. They wanted to make sure that the wiki would not conflict with the activities of other groups within the company. When the time came to demonstrate the wiki to Gill, the tool was sufficiently developed to show its potential.

Gill said the wiki, along with other ideas proposed by the HPWOs, are making a major contribution to bringing the St. Louis Site Services budget in line. He said Traversey and Day went beyond their job descriptions to plan and develop the tool.

"They did all this on their own," he said. "All we did was give them a challenge." ■

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