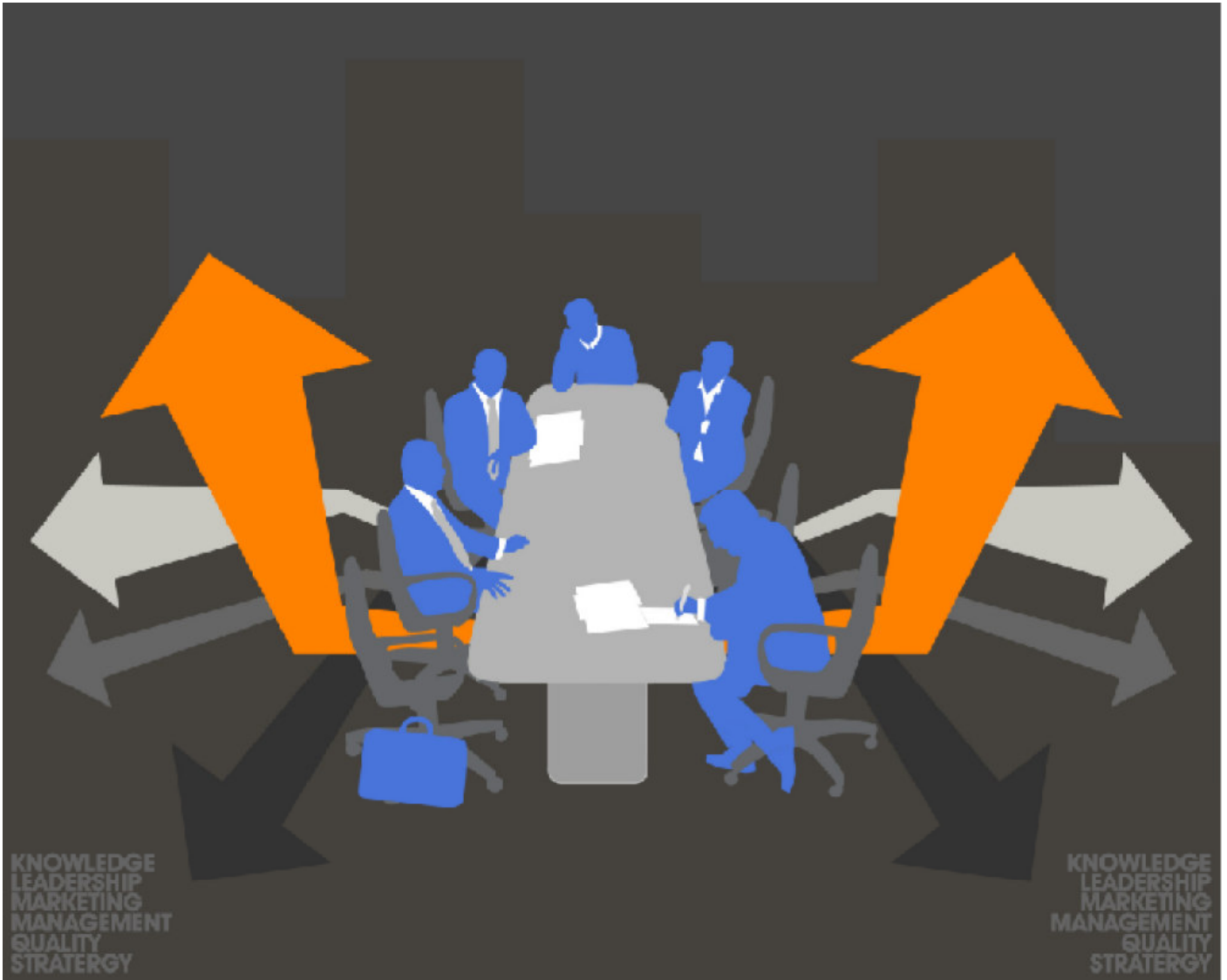




Premium reviews and analysis
for premium content users

Issue 44:: July 2007
www.vivaVIP.com



Log In

VIP catches a buzz

In Scope

Online information market growth

Insight

A book for Alacra

Insider

China's walled-off information

Tap the Wire

The online vox populi grows

Focus On

Happy birthday Emerald



*Insight- Opinions and
Perspective*

"Because we also tied the Alacra Book into the firm's intranet and customer relationship management systems, it had the added benefit of increasing traffic to these knowledge-sharing sites."

Case Study: Developing a customised Alacra Book

In 2006, I was working for a UK-wide professional services organisation of 10,000 plus staff and was a member of the project team developing a customised *Alacra Book* <http://www.alacra.com/products/alacra-book.asp> for the firm. For those unfamiliar with the product, the *Alacra Book* provides a single search platform for company data, linking together multiple, otherwise independent sources. The platform allowed us as the client to include products from information suppliers we already had contracts with, as well as additional pay-as-you-go databases. Our end-users could run a single search across all the databases simultaneously, refine the results and have the output consolidated into a single report. They could also upload their own documents to the final PDF.

What were the benefits to us, the client organisation, of using the system? Our information team's portfolio of sources had been put together with careful consideration of issues such as data quality and value for money. The average end-user, with an eye to speed and ease of use, usually preferred to use a single aggregator system. The *Alacra Book* allowed our team to acknowledge both priorities: it provided aggregation of approved data sources and improved the usage of the databases in our portfolio. Because we also tied the *Alacra Book* into the firm's intranet and customer relationship management systems, it had the added benefit of increasing traffic to these knowledge-sharing sites.

The key strength of the *Alacra Book* platform is just how customisable it can be, ranging from an almost 'off the shelf' product to highly tailored, client-specific Books. However, this very flexibility means that the successful development of an *Alacra Book* can rely as much on robust internal project management by the client as it does on work by the Alacra team. The complexity of the project depends on many factors, including how extensive the customisation will be and how closely you plan to tie the product into your own internal systems. For example, will access be available to all as a white label link from your CRM system, or restricted to trained information workers?

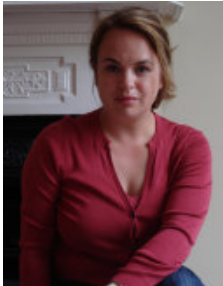
Key points to remember if you're running a similar *Alacra Book* project:

1. Involve key internal departments from the start. The project may well need input from those involved in IT services, intranet, legal, purchasing, risk management, finance, operational reporting and others. You may need advice on issues ranging from data protection to copyright agreements. Liaise with these departments regularly, keeping them up to date on project changes and timetables: ideally bring colleagues from these departments into the wider project team

continues ...

Insight

-- continues --



Alexia Miller completed a Masters in Information Science at City University, London before joining professional services firm Deloitte & Touche LLP where she worked for six and a half years in the knowledge, research and intelligence team.

"Any platform that brings together multiple sources, each with their own search interface and output format, will require some compromise on points such as appearance or functionality."

2. Speak to your suppliers to let them know you're working with Alacra. This should help if you're using their products in the *Book*, or may encourage them to make their products available on the platform

3. Spend time on the design of the *Book*, working closely with Alacra and with your end-users. Consider how and when the *Book* is likely to be used and by whom. The scale and type of company your users are likely to be gathering data on will affect everything from source selection to search criteria; a small private firm will bring back very different results than will a quoted multinational. Questions about workflow, user access, report layout, cost recovery, usage reporting etc should be raised early on as all of these will impact the project. If your team (or firm) has Web design or usability expertise, you may want to bring these people into the project team

4. Plan for sufficient testing. If enough time has been spent on the design at an early stage the number of issues identified during testing should be reduced, but you may need several test groups so that you can gather 'first use' opinion for a number of test iterations. Make sure that you have maintained detailed, end-to-end workflow plans so that each stage of the functionality can be tested for usability, IT compatibility etc. Plan for a full range of test cases and consider all the issues that have been raised during the project when scripting the tests

5. Be realistic. Any platform that brings together multiple sources, each with their own search interface and output format, will require some compromise on points such as appearance or functionality. Keep in mind the primary goals of your particular project and make your decisions based on these. For example, in databases where searching is less easily automated - a key example being press databases - the reduced search functionality could hamper output. You could completely automate the output, or you might opt to let your users construct their own search. Consider also how these issues will impact promotion and training.

And, as with the introduction of any other information source, don't forget other major project points such as:

- Planning for the communication, training and promotion of the new product
- Gathering management reporting evidence such as usage statistics and end-user surveys, both before and after the launch of the product. Has the project been worthwhile? What changes may need to be made in a second project phase? Can you justify your decisions to your management?
- Documenting and reviewing the project, both as a learning exercise and to inform any future updates. You should be considering these points throughout the lifetime of the project.

-- continues --

Insight

-- continues --

"...early discussion of problems makes the solution easier to implement."

Finally, make sure that your Alacra contact(s) are kept up to date on the status of your internal project as appropriate. Don't forget that your project is also theirs: on the one hand they may be able to resolve issues for you; on the other you may find that your apparently ideal solution is not technically possible. In either case, early discussion of problems makes the solution easier to implement.

With thanks to my colleagues on the Alacra project team and the team at Alacra.



Premium reviews and analysis
for premium content users

This article original appeared in VIP No. 44, published July 2007 and is reprinted with the permission of the publisher.

For further information on Alacra, please contact:

Email: info@alacra.com

Phone: (212) 363-9620 (US)
+44 (0)20 7743 7180 (London)

Online: www.alacra.com

-- Ends