

Thinkwell Online Inc.

Introduction

Boards, committees and organizations are increasingly challenged to make sound decisions in a complex, always changing environment. Competing priorities vie for members' time, and the cost of holding face-to-face meetings can be high when members live far apart. Even scheduled meetings can have heavy agendas, and members are not always fully prepared and able to concentrate. Telephone conference calls are seen by many as a forum in which hurried people engage in a shallow conversation about too many topics. Thinkwell Online Inc. offers groups an effective and efficient alternative --- an online discussion forum, as a complement to strategically scheduled face to face meetings.

A discussion forum, also known as a conference system or message board, is widely recognized as one of the most useful tools for Knowledge Management (KM) networks and Communities of Practice (CoPs). This is especially true when the forum is supplemented by data-management, decision making and relationship-building capacity.

In addition, governments want to consult with and engage stakeholders and the public for input into public policy, planning and issue management -- and these processes can be both costly and time consuming. Thinkwell provides sponsoring departments and organizations with an effective and efficient tool that can enhance their ability to engage stakeholders and the public in a meaningful way.

Thinkwell Online Inc. was founded in 2001 to provide a safe, productive and easy-to-use platform for a 50 member committee working to achieve consensus in a national (Canadian) standards development process. Since then it has been used in support of groups with from 10 to 150+ members, located around the world, who want to exchange information, discuss issues, undertake planning processes and work toward consensus.

Thinkwell Online is available 24/7 providing support to groups and organizations.

THINKWELL ONLINE IS:

EASY. There is no software to buy and install, no updates to download. A registered user can access the Thinkwell Online discussion forum from any computer with an Internet connection. Each group member is recognized as they log on. A menu shows what has been posted since the member was last on the site, allowing individuals to quickly assess the activity in each discussion. A single click takes you directly to the unread posts.

PRIVATE. An online discussion forum is your own private online meeting room. Your board members, group, or committee can set an agenda, have meaningful discussions, review and share files and documents, reach conclusions and make decisions -- within a set period of time, and without leaving your home or office.

CONVENIENT. People are not required to be online at the same time, and have time for reflection before sharing their thoughts with the group. Individuals access the forum, read what others have said and make their comments at the time that best suits their schedule.

EFFICIENT. The Thinkwell Online forum is “linear”: discussion topics are based on client instructions and use text developed for or by the client. This avoids the confusion and tangle that often accompanies “threaded” discussions, where any participant can start a new subtopic.

FLEXIBLE. Multiple discussion topics can all be active at the same time -- like having a number of “breakout rooms”. The number which can be conducted effectively depends upon the capacity, available time and resources of the group. The discussions can be left unstructured, or they may be chaired, moderated or conducted with a facilitator’s assistance.

PROVEN. Thinkwell has been used by boards of local, regional and international organizations, committees and work groups, and sponsors of national multi-stakeholder consultations and dialogues. Some clients find a Thinkwell Online forum to be a simple and easy way to have a focused, limited-time dialogue among a large, diverse group of stakeholders. Others settle in and use a Thinkwell Online forum as a regular meeting place that serves their needs throughout the year.

Site Features

The Thinkwell Online meeting room has a number of simple and useful features.

- Each meeting room has its own library -- storing files, documents, policy manuals, position papers and other important references, including links to other sites.
- A polling/voting booth allows the chair, group leader or facilitator to develop and pose questions, getting a quick and accurate sense of the group's thinking on a specific issue.
- A participant directory allows group members to post their individual contact information, a brief biography, profile of their organization and website link.
- A group calendar shows details of upcoming meetings and events.
- Security and privacy are assured through a password entry system.
- Participants have the option of receiving e-mail alerts when messages are posted.
- There are permanent written transcripts of all discussions. The views, ideas and comments of all members are recorded in their own words. They are the property of the client, and full confidentiality is guaranteed.
- Participants can check their messages before posting them with a "Preview and Edit" feature.
- An Orientation Guide helps new participants find their way around the site, and offers ongoing assistance.
- A hands-on, personal technical support and help-line has been cited by participants as one of the most important Thinkwell features.

In Summary

The Thinkwell Online discussion forum is recognized and appreciated as a user friendly, effective way for a group to consult, share information, have discussions and make decisions on important topics without the cost and inconvenience of a face-to-face meeting. It is designed and maintained to be simple and functional. There are no “bells and whistles” -- just a combination of features and service that makes working online easy and productive.

An initial set up charge will provide your group with its own private online meeting room. A quarterly or yearly charge includes routine operation and maintenance such as adding or removing participants, setting up new discussions, archiving completed discussions, maintaining the reference library and group calendar, setting up the voting booth, and advising clients on routine browser, system and user issues.

Contact Thinkwell Online for cost estimates for specific projects.

Thinkwell offers additional online services, including group facilitation and strategic planning.

Visit Thinkwell Online at: <http://www.thinkwell.ca>

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