



Do Best Practices Set Us Up for Failure?

By CHELSI NAKANO | Published Apr 26, 2010

When the CEO of [The Human Factor](#), Holly Green, asks her audience if best practices are their worst enemy, she says she always gets the same reaction: "They look at me like I'm nuts!" And so perhaps the title of this article brought you here to find out if CMSWire had finally fallen off its rocker. On the contrary, we're intrigued by the number of people that agree with Green's notion.

Don't Freak Out...

We're not telling you go ditch your practices completely—it's mostly a terminology problem. Luis Suarez of [Elsua.net](#) points out that the word "best" implies perfection, and concepts that are static, unmodifiable or fixed. The problem with that is knowledge should be dynamic and flexible.

This truth feeds all the way down to the basics, such as conducting research in order to determine where opportunities and threats lie. It seems silly to argue against something so elementary and seemingly necessary, but Green feels there are two bad roots in this method: experts and offbeat threats.

Experts, she says, bring in a lot of preconceived ideas and assumptions that often don't apply to tech for more than two years. The terrifying truth is that we're living in an age where areas not even remotely related to the industry in which we do business can come out of the woodwork and steamroll our good time. Her example of the fax machine hits the spot:

Do you know anyone who uses a fax machine anymore? Fifteen years ago, the makers of fax machines didn't worry about a little blip on the horizon called broadband Internet. They were too focused on important industry issues like baud rates, printer quality, and the cost of replacement ink. They never even saw e-mail coming.

We're Moving, And We're Moving Fast

Plain and simple: These opinions suggest we're moving too fast for anchored customs of *any*kind. Oscar Berg of [The Content Economy](#) puts it like this:

By the time a best practice has been transferred from one company to another, it's most likely no longer a 'best' practice. In a static world maybe, but not in the world we live in. At best, it will be a 'great' practice, but more likely it will just be a 'good' practice. And as it is transferred to more and more companies, it will eventually turn into a 'common' practice, which can mean anything from great to bad - it's just something a lot of companies use.

Again, is not to say that you shouldn't have them at all, just that you should be open to changing them, and changing them often. Green says a good way to detect blind spots is to have a fresh set of eyes (e.g. a non-expert) look at the information in question. "Have the CFO look at customer data," she says. "Or have the sales manager look at purchasing practices."

Buzzkill

The ol' adage "There's always room for improvement" is quite fitting here. Although, there are those that historically disagree. ZDNet's Enterprise 2.0 expert, Dion Hinchcliffe, wrote a post late last year called "[Going beyond the hype: Identifying Enterprise 2.0 best practices](#)" which points out the problems living in our most recent (social media-related) methods. Though he admits suggestions from experts such as Andrew McAfee and Stewart Mader are "laudable and often extremely useful when designing social software or structuring online communities," Hinchcliffe claims they lack what he calls "enterprise context."

Risk, Control, Community Management and Cost Reduction are just a few of the basics Hinchcliffe says best practices should continuously address. [Incidents in recent times](#) suggest such concepts have been left behind.

Will be be able to sort out a happy medium? Let us know what you think.