

## SiteScape Forum Provides Innovative Approach to Innovation



Borax, a product known for cleaning, disinfecting and deodorizing, is a household name. It is just one of many applications for borates, a complex group of approximately 50 minerals that contain boron and oxygen, usually in combination with metals. Borates have a broad variety of domestic and industrial applications, ranging from cleaning agents to insect control to flame proofing. Who came up with many of these borate applications? Rio Tinto Borax, an international leader in borate technology, research and development.

Rio Tinto Borax is committed to finding new uses for borates and, as a result, has created an Ideation Group whose mission is to gather new ideas for using borates. Ideas for new borate uses come not only from the Ideation Group, but also from a variety of staff and departments spread out internationally among different offices in the company. Until recently, it was not easy to share and organize those ideas; they had relied on emails, faxes and phone calls.

In the spring of 2002, Borax realized they needed a geographically transparent method to share, investigate and execute ideas. Bob McBroom, who was the Ideation Manager at that time, looked to collaboration technology as an answer to this problem. At first, he struggled to find the right one to accommodate the specific needs of the company. It wasn't until a colleague visiting from Borax's parent company, Rio Tinto, which had been successfully using SiteScape Enterprise Forum for a couple of years, that McBroom made his decision.

Borax began using SiteScape Enterprise Forum in June 2002. "There are vast numbers of people out there in the Borax community who know things that you don't know they know," McBroom said. "That's why we looked for a product that offered threaded discussions. We were trying to engage people who work throughout Borax, since ideas come from many sources in Borax. Our job is to screen those ideas and cultivate the good ones."

Previously employees were using shared folders in Outlook, but that was too difficult for people to search and find information. Moreover, shared folders didn't offer a means to move ideas from concept to completion. Borax opted for SiteScape Forum because it offered a way to share, store and search information with colleagues internationally. "It's not as intrusive as e-mail, and you can decide for yourself which ideas you want to read," said McBroom.

Originally the Forum usage began as a pilot program that included the business development group, but Borax gradually included other staff so that roughly 60 people, including project management staff, now use it.

**Organization:** Rio Tinto Borax

**Industry:** Chemical technology, research and development

**Business Problem:**

Needed a way to connect geographically disparate employees to cultivate new ideas for borate usage and manage projects

**Website:** <http://www.borax.com/>

**Problems Solved:**

- Facilitated information sharing
- Improved project management
- Stimulated idea generation
- Provided online community of practice and project management areas

**The Forum Implementation:**

SiteScape Forum

**The Bottom Line:**

SiteScape Forum enables Borax to share, explore and execute ideas among a geographically disparate workforce.

### SiteScan

Although the Forum was quickly embraced, McBroom invited SiteScape's Consulting Services department to do a "SiteScan" of their overall collaboration efforts and advise them on how to get the most out of their Forum installation. "SiteScape's Director of Consulting Services made many good suggestions, and he asked the right questions," said McBroom. "Since then, we have implemented most of his suggestions, resulting in better user adoption and retention and better organization."

Prior to the SiteScan, Borax had combined an Ideation forum with a Community of Practice forum. This was problematic, since everything posted was automatically placed into a workflow, and a Community of Practice is meant to contain miscellaneous information that is of general interest to the staff. The SiteScape consultant suggested that they use the Ideation forum strictly for submitting new ideas, and create two additional, separate areas: a Project Management workspace for actively working on ideas that have been vetted and accepted, and a Community of Practice for sharing information. The community of practice discussion forum is intended as a "free-form" place to post ideas, publications, documents, and other articles of interest to the group. To distinguish it from the Ideation Forum, Borax named it the Science Forum.

In the Ideation Forum, ideas are submitted, evaluated by the Innovation Manager, and available for comment and discussion by Forum members. It features an 'Add an Idea' custom command that launches a workflow, allowing the Innovation Manager to accept, reject or put an idea on hold. Once an idea is accepted, the Innovation Manager creates a separate forum for it in the Project Management workspace.

The Project Management workspace contains ideas that the company has accepted and is committed to exploring, where each "Idea" is a separate forum. Each "Stage 1" Idea is a separate project and therefore has its own forum to contain all the documents and discussions related to it. Because the users can be different for each Idea, this structure allows Borax to easily control the access and membership, and keep all the information in one place. "Instead of having different folders, we created different forums, because it is easier to move or copy information into different forums, and better for long-term planning," said McBroom.

Borax also had numerous folders in Forum that were related to either markets for borates or projects for borates. Since that folder structure was confusing, they have since whittled those folders down to two folders. They use these folders more like a library, a source of static information that is not meant to be discussion-oriented. Borax also uses the shared calendar feature in SiteScape Forum to track project dates. By merging these calendars into single view, higher-level managers can easily see an overall set of project dates.

### Tapping into quality and quantity

Borax colleagues are increasingly populating the Forums with data and information, which McBroom attributes to a "snowball effect." That is, the more Forum is used, the more valuable it becomes as a source for information. With Forum "we get an expertise resource," says McBroom. "The number of ideas created has tripled, and we're running with those ideas." In addition to this quantitative result, McBroom believes it is "a much better way to go" compared to their old methods of sharing information and cultivating ideas. "There's a certain amount of efficiency in collaboration," he said. "You capture more knowledge; you get more input from a wider variety of people, and by sharing ideas you increase the quality and quantity of ideas."