



CASE STUDY

Connecting content and expertise at a people-centric company: Viva Topics simplifies knowledge sharing at Avanade

New business exposes age-old challenges

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In March 2020, much of the world began shutting its doors, driving workers out of their collaborative workspaces and into their compact home offices, equipment in tow. And as employees transitioned into their new physical workspaces, businesses around the globe looked for solutions to keep them productive, creating a boom in demand for leading knowledge and collaboration technologies and their service providers, like Avanade.

But in this new world, how do consultants and sales and account teams keep up? When we can't rely on tapping the shoulder of a team member or pulling a colleague into a whiteboarding session, how can employees quickly find the information they need, such as subject matter experts, the best and most recent examples of projects or deliverables, or approved and reusable templates?

Avanade is a leading provider of innovative digital and cloud-enabled services, business solutions and design-led experiences, and it relies heavily on the power of people. Avanade believes in taking advantage of the knowledge and experiences held by each individual to build and provide the best offerings and services for its customers. Because of this, sharing expertise, project or deliverable examples, templates and other knowledge among one another is key to the company's success and the success of the businesses it serves.

As an organization whose services are built on and around Microsoft technologies, Avanade's workforce of 50,000 professionals are experienced, heavy users of collaboration solutions like Yammer and [Microsoft Teams](#). But even with top-notch approaches to collaboration, finding the right people, the best examples of deliverables or the best templates often required some digging and building what some employees refer to as a "chain of experts." Many knowledge experts are familiar with this concept, in which an employee starts a conversation with one expert and is then handed off down a chain of people until the correct team member is identified.

In addition to the traditional "chain of experts," Avanade also has multiple knowledge hubs or Centers of Excellence.

"We have various communities across the company," explains Doug Stalter, Senior Solution Architect at Avanade, "and we see people broadcasting through Yammer, email or Teams chats asking, 'Who knows about this offering?' We have multiple knowledge hubs – some are Centers of Excellence or community-specific and are quite valuable, whereas others are old and pollute our search results."

As requests for innovative digital workplace solutions surged, Avanade employees wanted a solution that eliminated the need for extensive email threads or cumbersome searches and aligned with their "Teams as the experience platform" approach. They wanted a solution to quickly provide businesses with the right digital offerings and remove the need to sift through emails, Yammer communities, or Teams sites and chats to find the exact expert, example or template they required.

The opportunity to join a Microsoft private preview program couldn't have arrived at a better time.

Private preview opens the door to new opportunities

Microsoft launched a preview program in January 2020, which was limited to approximately 60 customers around the globe, to test out and provide feedback on powerful new AI-driven knowledge solutions prior to their release. As program participants, Avanade team members were able to attend product demonstrations, get exclusive updates to the roadmap, test products as they were developed and provide feedback, and give key insights on how they felt the solutions would be best utilized.

In testing the capabilities of Microsoft Viva Topics, which uses AI to automatically reason over an organization's data and then identify, process and organize it to make knowledge easier to discover and use, Avanade found the tool it needed to help reduce its discovery challenges. "The value of Viva Topics is really about placing information that people need in the places they're hanging out," says Marci Jenkins, workplace IT executive at Avanade.

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“As you’re chatting or exchanging information with someone or looking at a SharePoint site, the ability to have topics highlighted and then display the best-of-the-best information about the topic and the experts on that topic is really exciting. It’s a way for the user to learn and start to explore in the moment—the moment that matters.”

Marci Jenkins

Workplace IT Executive, Avanade

“As one of 50,000 professionals across the organization, we often don’t know where all the different assets are,” explains Jill Hannemann, workplace advisory consultant at Avanade. “A lot of it is about who you know and how you get connected to the right people. My intention for searching usually isn’t for something I’ve authored—it’s usually content beyond my immediate sphere that I’ve never seen before or clients I’ve never worked with. Viva Topics connects me to those resources and experts.”

Viva Topics: Open for all

Unlike most organizations where new technologies are gradually rolled out from one department to another, Avanade chose to offer Viva Topics to the entire company, enabling all employees to contribute to the curation around topics.

“The power of Viva Topics is in bringing together AI and the smartness and experience of our people,” says Jenkins. Crawling the documents in SharePoint, Viva Topics has begun identifying thousands of topics across the company’s Microsoft tenant, including Avanade offerings, Microsoft solutions, industries, customers and even strategic initiatives.

For employees like Hannemann, Viva Topics has become an excellent tool for quickly finding the project examples she needs when creating new pilots for customers. And for employees like Dalinda Peña, change enablement manager

at Avanade, Viva Topics has become invaluable for helping make content such as news articles or internal support pages more accessible to those who need it.

“Viva Topics makes it easier for us to supply information in a more consumable way so that you can, for example, find a support page from wherever you’re collaborating about that topic.”

Dalinda Peña

Change Enablement Manager, Avanade

But the product’s usefulness at Avanade doesn’t stop there. “We need to make it easier for employees to get their jobs done while sharing their expertise and knowledge with others in our organization,” explains Jenkins. “We want them to stay focused and accomplish their most important work—helping our clients—and enable them to find information they need to do that job as quickly and easily as possible.”

With Viva Topics, employees can do that. Rather than broadcasting pleas for help on a Yammer site or initiating a chain of experts through Outlook, employees can search in SharePoint or see topics they’re interested in highlighted on the SharePoint page they’re already viewing. And they can quickly find experts or assets for their projects or subject areas without being bombarded with pages of search results.

“I’ve started going to SharePoint and searching on some of the questions that I have or the type of asset that I’m looking for across the organization, and it’s really cool to see what pops up in my search results,” says Hannemann. “Not only is the topic page suggested to me if there’s a match, but it will also present different documents and highlight the presence of the keyword that I’m searching for.”

And soon, Viva Topics capabilities will expand even more broadly, extending to Yammer, Teams, Outlook and more, allowing users to view topic cards in any [Microsoft 365](#) application they’re using. As Viva Topics continues to grow as a product and as internal contributors increase the

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knowledge network alongside AI-powered insights, Avanade employees know the tool will only continue to strengthen their capabilities as a collaborative, people-centric organization. "Viva Topics has been a vast improvement to our knowledge sharing for the short period we've had it," says Hannemann.

Over the next few years, Avanade looks forward to the generation of topics for the more than 600 clients it's worked with. Each will highlight the key account team members as experts and document successful proofs of concept as tagged content, which will further help us provide the best offerings and services to our clients.

About Avanade

Avanade is the leading provider of innovative digital and cloud services, business solutions and design-led experiences on the Microsoft ecosystem. With 50,000 professionals in 26 countries, we are the power behind the Accenture Microsoft Business Group, helping companies to engage customers, empower employees, optimize operations and transform products, leveraging the Microsoft platform. Majority owned by Accenture, Avanade was founded in 2000 by Accenture LLP and Microsoft Corporation. Learn more at www.avanade.com.

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