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The Optimum Knowledge Base Software for Blanco Technology Group

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Tämän opinnäytetyön aiheena oli Blancco Technology Groupin käytännöllisimmän tietosivun tutkiminen ja vertailu. Tämä opinnäytetyö ei sisällä ohjelmistotestausta, vaan arviointi perustuu jokaisen ohjelmistoyrityksen sivuilta löytyviin tietoihin. Tietosivun ymmärtämisen parantamiseksi tässä opinnäytetyössä tutkitaan myös tiedon merkitystä ja tiedonhallintaa.

Opinnäytetyön toteutus koostui kolmesta päävaiheesta. Vaiheissa määriteltiin tieto (tietosivu, tieto ja tiedonhallinta), esitellään Blancco Technology Group ja verrataan tietosivu ohjelmistoja.

Tämän opinnäytetyön tärkeimmät havainnot olivat, että tieto terminä on erittäin hankala aihe. Opinnäytetyössä todettiin, että lähes kaikki tähän tutkimukseen valitut ohjelmistot voisivat toimia Blancco Technology Groupille.

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The topic of this thesis was researching and comparing the most practical knowledge base softwares for Blancco Technology Group. This thesis will not include any software testing, and the evaluation will be based on the information that is available on each software companies' site. To improve the understanding of the knowledge base, this thesis also studies the meaning of knowledge and knowledge management.

The implementation of the thesis consisted of three major stages. The stages define knowledge (knowledge base, knowledge, and knowledge management), present Blancco Technology Group, and compare the knowledge base softwares.

The most important findings in this thesis are that knowledge as a term is a highly debatable topic. It was concluded that nearly all of the softwares that were chosen for this study could work for Blancco Technology Group.

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1 Introduction

This thesis defines what kind of knowledge base softwares are on the market these days and which one of those softwares would be best suitable for a company named Blancco Technology Group. Blancco Technology Group is a company that specializes in data erasure and mobile device diagnostics. Their goal is to meet data protection requirements as well as lower data breach risk. Blancco Technology Group also aims to provide accurate diagnostic for device condition. The company intention is to use the result from this thesis as an information gathering phase (so called “first round”), to find out what the optimum knowledge base software would be available for them. Therefore, the analyzing of the software’s will be directly compared to the priorities that Blancco Technology Group has.

In addition to analyzing softwares, this study aims for having a closer examination at what knowledge and knowledge management is to have a better understanding of the knowledge base. Additionally, this thesis will also look at the benefits that the companies will receive when using knowledge base.

2 Knowledge

2.1 Knowledge definition

As a term knowledge is complicated to define. The theory of what is knowledge is debated a lot. As this point in time knowledge doesn’t yet have clear definition. According to Ettore Bolisani and Constantin Bratianu (2018) “knowledge is created by human brain and then it is amplified and integrated into organizational knowledge by social interaction.” (Bolisani and Bratianu 2018, 29). Additionally, Ikujiro Nonaka and Hirotaka Takeuchi introduces a concept from Plato that knowledge is “justified true belief”. When inspecting the concept from the logic point of view Nonaka and Takeuchi emphasizes the conflict that as long as there is a slight possibility of belief not being true, that is not considered as

knowledge. (Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995, 21.) In conclusion as a term, knowledge is understanding and/or receiving information that is based on the truth.

2.2 Organizational knowledge creation

Nonaka and Takeuchi clarify knowledge creation process by four modes of knowledge conversions (Figure 1). The four modes of knowledge are socialization, externalization, internalization, and combination. These modes interact between tacit and explicit knowledge (Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995, 62.)

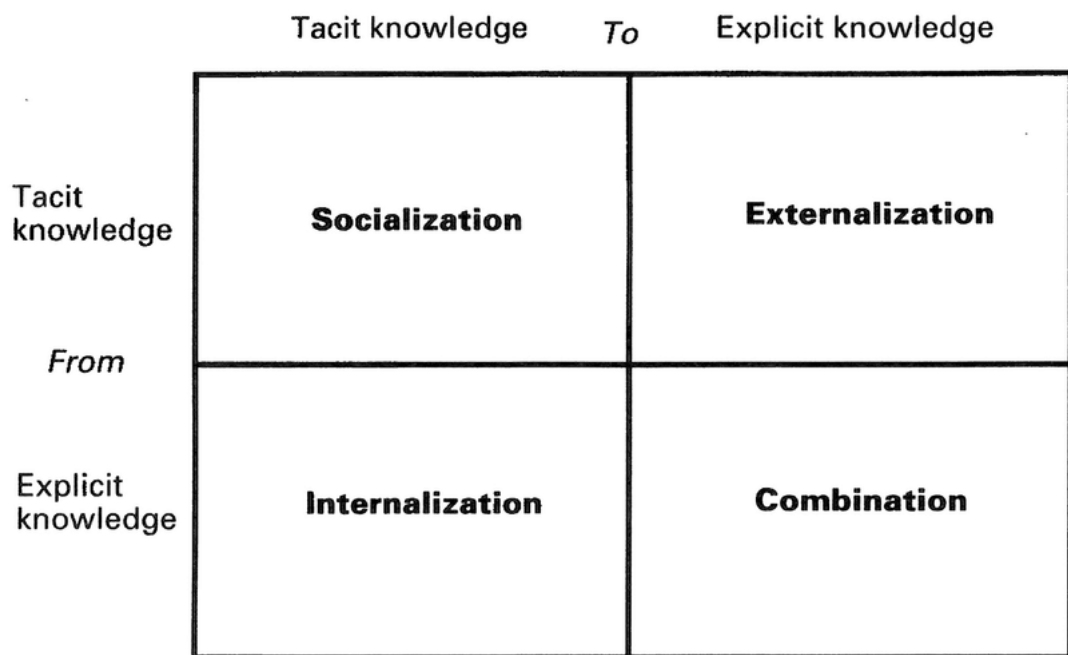


Figure 1. Four modes of knowledge conversion. (Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995, 62.)

2.2.1 Tacit and Explicit knowledge

When Nonaka and Takeuchi studied the difference between Japanese and Westerners view about knowledge, they found out that Japanese see knowledge more as tacit while Westerners see knowledge more as explicit.

"Tacit knowledge is personal, context-specific and therefore hard to formalize and communicate." (Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995, 59). By personal Nonaka and Hirotaka are aiming that the knowledge is gained through personal experience and the learned knowledge is difficult to explain as well as write down. "Explicit knowledge refers to knowledge that is transmittable in formal, systematic language" (Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995, 59). Explicit is opposite to tacit knowledge. Explicit knowledge is easy to write down and store in documentation such as knowledge base. (Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995.)

2.2.2 Socialization

Socialization is from tacit to tacit knowledge conversion. Nonaka and Takeuchi emphasize that "The key to acquiring tacit knowledge is experience." (Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995, 63). This process focuses fully on knowledge that is required by experience. Nonaka and Takeuchi introduced a method called "brainstorming camps" that are widely used in Japan as an example of socialization. The brainstorming camps are held outside the workplace, to accomplish more relaxed atmosphere. In these meetings employees try to solve difficult problems concerning work. It is encouraged to share own opinion as well as suggest alternative options to others' opinions. Through discussions the employees gain experience from each other and additionally they enhance their trust among one another. Many Japanese firms have gotten from the camps new products, new service, and corporate strategies. (Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995, 63.)

2.2.3 Externalization

Externalization is from tacit to explicit knowledge conversion. In this process tacit knowledge develops into explicit knowledge. This knowledge can be seen as metaphors, analogies, concepts, hypotheses, or models. It is common that the process begins with dialogue or with a collective reflection. Nonaka and

Takeuchi states that “Among the four modes of knowledge conversion, externalization holds the key to knowledge creation.” (Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995, 64.)

2.2.4 Combination

Combination is from explicit to explicit knowledge conversion. This process organizes concepts into a knowledge system such as knowledge base. The organizing can be combining, exchange, sorting adding and categorizing explicit knowledge. (Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995, 67-68.)

2.2.5 Internalization

Internalization is from explicit to tacit knowledge conversion. Nonaka and Takeuchi explain that an employee will come valuable asset when he or she has experiences in socialization, externalization and combination and can internalize the tacit knowledge into to shared mental models or to technical know-how. When transform explicit knowledge to tacit knowledge it is recommended to use documents, manuals, or oral stories. Nonaka and Takeuchi mention that

Documentation helps individuals internalize what they experienced, thus enriching their tacit knowledge. In addition, documents or manuals facilitate the transfer of explicit knowledge to other indirectly. (Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995, 69.)

(Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995, 69.)

2.2.6 Knowledge spiral

Nonaka and Takeuchi realized that the four knowledge conversion processes cannot work as individual. “Organizational knowledge creation is continuous

and dynamic interaction between tacit and explicit knowledge (Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995, 70.)” To achieve this the interaction must shift between different modes of knowledge conversion, these interactions are caused by triggers (Figure 2).

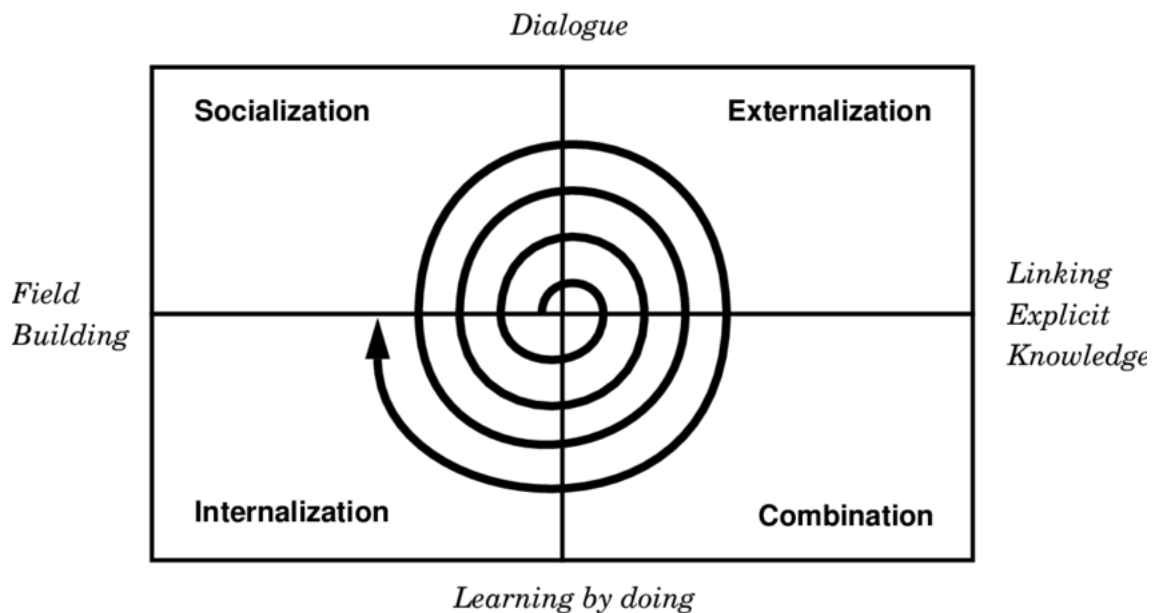


Figure 2. Knowledge spiral. (Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995, 71.)

The spiral generally begins at socialization as it is the process where interaction is built. The trigger to the externalization process could be for example a purposeful dialogue or a collective thought. The second trigger and the transition to combination process appears when newly created knowledge and/or existing knowledge produces a new product, service, or management system. The trigger to the last process, internalization, develops when the employee gains the know-how from previous stages. (Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995, 70-71.)

3 Knowledge management

3.1 Knowledge management definition

As mentioned, knowledge as a term is challenging to define and therefore the understanding of knowledge management (KM) is also difficult. Kimiz Dalkir (2011) definition of knowledge management is the following: “Knowledge management is the deliberate and systematic coordination of an organization’s people, technology, processes, and organizational structure in order to add value through reuse and innovation”. (Dalkir 2011, Chapter 4).

As an addition to Dalkir’s definition, below are presented alternative definitions of knowledge management:

“Knowledge management is essentially about getting the right knowledge to the right person at the right time.” (Knowledge Management Tools 2021).

“Knowledge Management is the process of capturing, distributing, and effectively using knowledge.” (KMWorld 2018).

“Knowledge management is the process by which an enterprise gathers, organizes, shares and analyzes its knowledge in a way that is easily accessible to employees.” (TechTarget 2021).

As seen, knowledge management can be interpreted in many ways. Knowledge management is understanding what knowledge is valuable and then using this knowledge in the best possible way.

3.2 Integrated knowledge management cycle

Kimiz Dalkir studied four different approaches to the knowledge management cycles. Through those discoveries he created an integrated knowledge management cycle. (Figure 3). This integrated knowledge management cycle provides a framework in which information evolves to a valuable knowledge asset.

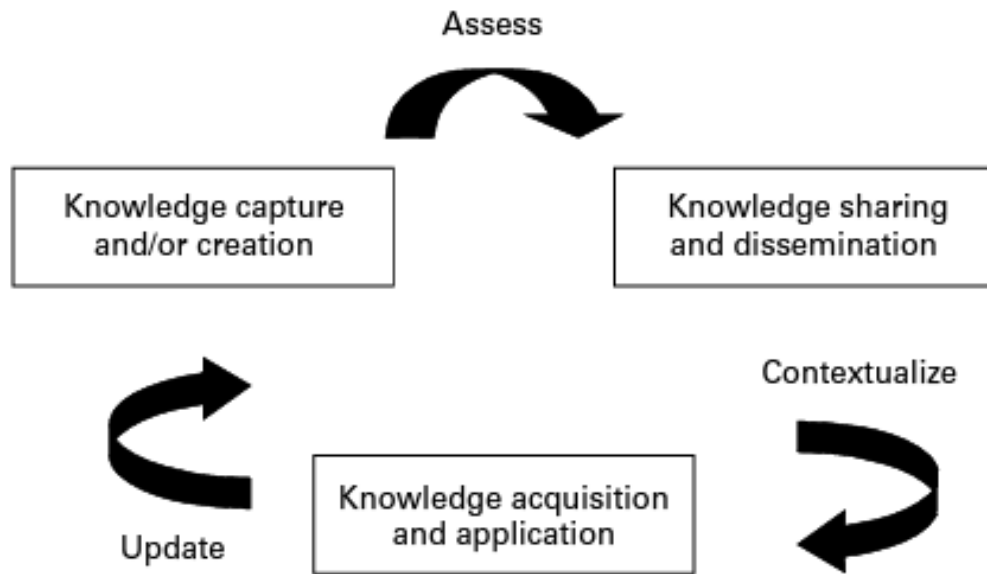


Figure 3. An integrated knowledge management cycle (Dalkir 2011, Chapter 2).

Knowledge capture and/or creation -stage can be divided into two. When a company notices internal knowledge existing that has previously been unnoticed it is called knowledge capture. When a company develops new knowledge themselves it is called knowledge creation. (Dalkir 2011, Chapter 4.) This stage can be seen as the socialization knowledge conversion (Figure 2.).

In the knowledge sharing and dissemination -stage the main goal is to spread the new knowledge as efficiently as possible throughout the company. It is easy to put newly learned information out, however, it is important to take notice on how easily employees will find this information. Dalkir emphasize that a company may not even realize how much time their employees waste when they are trying to find out certain information. (Dalkir 2011, Chapter 5.) in knowledge conversion this stage can be seen as the externalization and combination (Figure 2.).

Knowledge acquisition and application -stage is the most important step as Kimiz Dalkir states “unless this step is accomplished successfully, all of the KM efforts have been in vain, for KM can only succeed if the knowledge is used.” (Dalkir 2011, Chapter 6.) This stage can be seen as the internalization knowledge conversion (Figure 2.).

4 Knowledge base

One of the many ways how company can share their internal as well as external information is through knowledge base. Atlassian describes knowledge base as a “self-serve online library of information about a product, service, department, or topic.” (Atlassian 2021.)

4.1 Knowledge base benefits for company

From the company’s internal perspective, as mentioned previously the company’s may not realize how much working time their employees are spending on trying to find information. If companies would have information gathered in one place and that place (application) being easy to use, the employees would work faster and more efficiently. This would also increase communication and cooperation between employees. Additionally, Kimiz Dalkir states that new employees would have a much easier time to start working when they already have access to all needed templates, information, etc. (Dalkir 2011, 185).

From the company’s external perspective knowledge base usage has the same reason as internal usage: to minimize information searching time. However, in addition to employees, the knowledge base is also visible to anybody that the company allows to. Commonly, the companies offer the knowledge base for potential buyers, customers, or business partners. According to Christina Comben “Consumers today don’t like to call for support. Most of them prefer self-service over the human interaction (Comben 2018).” This confirms that it is important for a company to focus on their knowledge base appearance, functionality, and content.

4.2 Ideal knowledge base content

The most important matter when creating external knowledge base is to know your customer. The company needs to observe and listen to customers' needs and begin creating knowledge base by fulfilling the customers' requests (Ceta 2018).

The most commonly used features that you can find in a knowledge base are the following

- Frequently asked questions
- Tutorials & how-to guides
- Community section
- News and updates section
- Reference documentation

Frequently asked questions -section clarifies topics that are regularly asked. These topics should not be too complex or need of a technical support. Tutorials are in depth posts that can provide wide range of processes while how-to guides focus more on providing mostly short instructional that demonstrates in detail a single step. Community -section is a forum where communities can post their own work as well as help others. News and update -section can consist of community announcements, product updates, new version releases, known issues with the platform etc. Reference documentation -section is aimed at more technical audience. The documentations can be useful for product user who wish to know more in depth about the product. (Ceta 2018.)

5 Blancco Technology Group IP OY

5.1 Company

The company was founded in 1997 in Joensuu, Finland. Blancco Technology Group has offices across the Europe, North America and India. At first the company's focus was providing erasure products, later they expanded their product functionality to diagnostic. (Blancco Technology Group 2021.)

5.2 Customers

Blancco Technology Group customer base is broad and can vary from a private user to large enterprise. Blancco Technology Group products offers to public and private sector enterprises assistant to guard against vulnerability. Blancco Technology Group also encourages enterprises to use Blancco Technology Group products as way to analyze and sanitize their devices. (Blancco Technology Group 2021.)

The customers can have different reasons to use the Blancco Technology Group products when managing data assets. These reasons can be re-selling, re-purposing, or disposing. Customers may also use Blancco Technology Group products as a tool in their company's services. (Blancco Technology Group 2021.)

Blancco Technology Group has over 20 years of experience in IT Asset Disposition. IT Asset Disposition is a business that focuses on disposing of obsolete or undesirable equipment in a safe and ecologically-responsible manner. (Tech-Target 2021). It is important for company such as Blancco Technology Group to have experience in IT Asset Disposition as it might be meaningful for some customers. (Blancco Technology Group 2021.)

5.3 Products

The company has many different types of erasure products. The most popular products are Blancco Drive Eraser (BDE) and Blancco Mobile Diagnostics and Erasure (BMDE). Blancco Technology Group also have Blancco Management Console (BMC) product where customers reports are stored.

The rest of the products are listed below:

- Blancco File Eraser

- Blancco Lun Eraser
- Blancco Network Device Eraser
- Blancco Removable Media Eraser
- Blancco Virtual Machine Eraser

To help with the installation, Blancco Technology Group provides erasure products tools. These tools are Drive Eraser configuration tool, Blancco USB creator and Blancco HASP Tool. (Blancco Technology Group 2021.)

5.3.1 Blancco Drive Eraser

Blancco Drive Eraser is a sanitization solution for PC, laptop, and data center environments. The product permanently erases sensitive data from HDDs and SSDs, including NVMe in desktop/laptop computers, servers, and data centers. (Blancco Technology Group 2021.)

The Driver Eraser works across the entire data lifecycle management to ensure secure data sanitization (Figure 4). “Data life cycle management is a policy-based approach to managing the flow of an information systems data throughout its life cycle: from creation and initial storage to the time when it becomes obsolete and is deleted.” (TechTarget 2021).



Figure 4. (Blancco Technology Group 2021.)

5.3.2 Blancco Mobile Diagnostics and Erasure

Blancco Mobile Diagnostics and Erasure is built for warehouses and resellers that process high amount of mobile devices. It allows customers to process used devices. With the product customers can erasure iOS and Android devices as well as execute diagnostics tests. The product can track mobile devices across their full lifecycle, this helps customer to define and determine mobile devices overall value. (Blancco Technology Group 2021.)

The Blancco Mobile Diagnostics and Erasure product also has Workflows. Workflows are used to grade, valuate and sort each device according to customers' requirements. Custom workflows can be created as simple or as complex as the customer desire. (Blancco Technology Group 2021.)

5.3.3 Blancco Management Console

Blancco Management Console is a product that provides data erasure management to internal users, administrators, and support staff. The product has many management functionalities. To name few, with Blancco Management Console customer can view data erasure licenses, monitor erasure activities, and collect reports. (Blancco Technology Group 2021.)

5.4 Current knowledge base

Currently the Company knowledge base is built with Atlassian Confluence (Figure 5). The knowledge base site has information, instructions and known issues about all the products that they have. The primary reason of Blancco Technology Group for building the external knowledge base is the customers easy access to the information about the products. (Blancco Technology Group 2021.)

When Blancco Technology Group support team receives a ticket (a customer that has an issue with the product and is asking for help) they can easily refer to the knowledge base site. By doing this the support team encourages self-driven troubleshooting. Blancco Technology Group aspire to encourage customer towards self-driven troubleshooting because self-driven troubleshoot method benefits customers as well the support team. (Blancco Technology Group 2021.)

When customer is practicing self-driven troubleshooting, can he or she find an answers to the issue faster and might not even need to leave a ticket request. Customer can also learn more about the products when exploring the knowledge base. The support team will help every customer that creates a ticket, however, when customers practice self-driven troubleshooting and solve small issues themselves, it leaves more time for the support team to attend more difficult issues. (Blancco Technology Group 2021.)

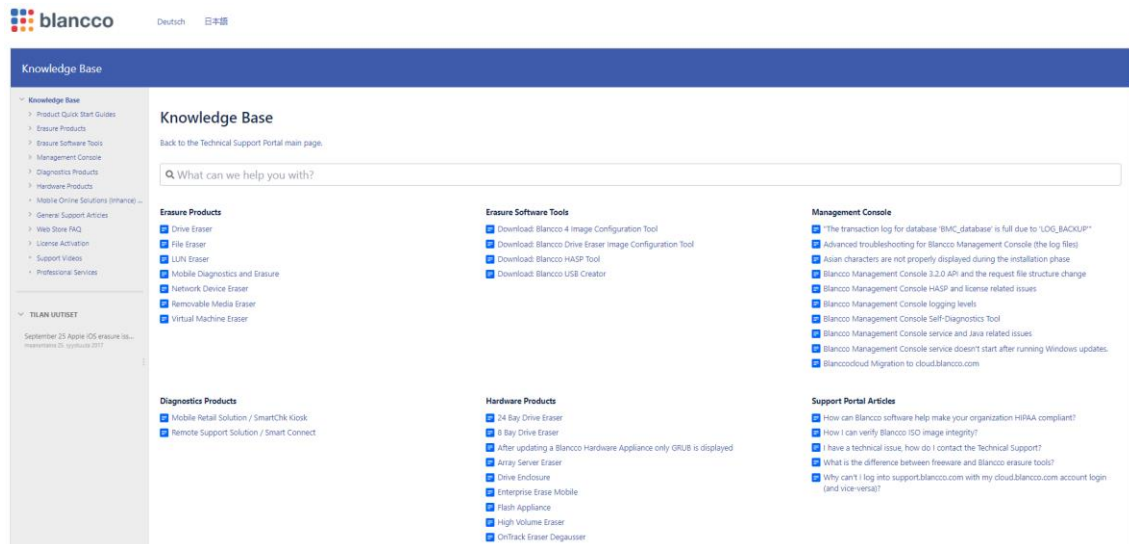


Figure 5. Blancco Technology Group current knowledge base site. (Blancco Technology Group 2021.)

6 Possible knowledge base softwares for Blancco Technology Group

6.1 Atlassian

Atlassian is a software company that develops products for software developers, project managers and other similar teams. For external as well as internal knowledge base software solution, they offer their Confluence software product. Atlassian advertise that “Confluence is your remote-friendly team workspace where knowledge and collaboration meet.” (Atlassian 2021.)

6.2 Kayako

Kayako is a software company that provides customer service and help desk software. Their Self-Service Portal is aimed to function as external knowledge base. The products advertisement speech is as following: “Sometimes, your customers don’t want to talk. With Kayako, they don’t have to. We make it easy

for you to provide your customers with the resources they need to help themselves.” (Kayako 2021).

6.3 Zendesk

Zendesk is a software company that offer products for customer support, sales, and other customer communications. The company’s Help Center Software works as external knowledge base. Zendesk states that the software is “A smart knowledge base for better self-service and empowered agents” (Zendesk 2021.)

6.4 MadCap Flare

MadCap is a software company that creates tools for technical writers and documentations teams. Their MadCap Flare software provides the functionality to work as external knowledge base. The company describe that MadCap Flare “Maximize content reuse and streamline the creation of technical documentation and learning & development programs.” (MadCap 2021.)

6.5 Document360

Document360 is a company that fully focuses on offering a product that helps customers build their internal or external knowledge base. Document360 declares that their product is “The Knowledge Base Platform, engineered for growing companies. Instantly create an online Self-Service Knowledge Base for your Customer and Employees.” (Document360 2021.)

7 Comparing the possible knowledge base softwares

In order to create the suitable assessment for Blancco Technology Group, provided the company list of demands that they wish to know about the softwares. These demands are focusing on roles & permissions, statics, localization, maintenance, price, and user management. Table 1 presents an overview of all softwares and how they meet the demands.

With roles & permissions demand Blancco Technology Group aim to find out if the software provides article and site role management as well as permission management. With roles & permissions company can effortlessly manage who can view, edit, publish, delete etc. Statistics demand focuses on discovering what statistics can the software offer about the knowledge base. Key statistics features that Blancco Technology Group needs are article visiting rate, article customer rating, and overall customers search patterns. With these statistics the company can analyze what customers thinks about the knowledge base. In addition, the company can acquire insights on what customers search the most and with that they can create new necessary articles. Blancco Technology Group has customers around the world therefore software that supports localization is important. Maintenance demand includes article version history and review remainder. Article version history is essential for reviewing how article has changed during time and review reminder is crucial for maintain the articles up to date. When it comes to price demand, Blancco Technology Group does not have a price limit, however, the company are interested on knowing what the price would be if the software company hosts the knowledge base site or if Blancco Technology Group (or other third-party provider) host the knowledge base site. In the Table 1 the price is shown as 1 year for 10 users. Lastly, the company is interested on finding out if the software offers user management for Blancco Technology Group customers in their knowledge base. Although the company does not currently need this functionality, they would still like to discover if the possibility is there.

Demands	Atlassian	Kayako	Zendesk	MadCap Flare	Document360
Roles & Permissions					
Articles	provided	provided	provided	Provided in Mad-Cap Central	provided
Whole site	provided	provided	provided	information not found	provided

Statistics					
Article visiting rate	provided	Compatible with Google Analytics	Provided as well as Compatible with Google Analytics	Provided in Mad-Cap Central	provided
Article customer feedback	not provided	Compatible with Google Analytics	Provided as well as Compatible with Google Analytics	information not found	provided
Search patterns	information not found	Compatible with Google Analytics	Provided as well as Compatible with Google Analytics	Provided in Mad-Cap Central	provided
Localization					
Language support	not provided	44 languages	40+ languages	Provided in Mad-Cap AMS	provided
Maintenance					
Article version history	provided	not provided	provided	Provided in Mad-Cap Central	provided
Review reminder	information not found	information not found	provided	information not found	provided
Price					
Software company hosts the site	909€	3 120€	5 880€	not provided	51 828€
Blancco Technology Group (or third party) hosts the site	Provides Data Center solution. Price information not found	not provided	not provided	Flare: 17 352€ MadCap AMS (includes Flare and Central): 25 968€	not provided
User management					
Login demand for customers	information not found	provided	provided	information not found	provided

Table 1. Overview of all softwares.

8 The results

The goal of this comparing was to find if the softwares fulfill the demands. The collected information for each softwares were collected only from software companies own sites as requested by Blancco Technology Group. Blancco Technology Group considers this study as “first round”. The idea behind the first round was to gather the softwares that shows the most potential, compare them, and

select the one that appears to be worthy for “second round”. In the second round Blancco Technology Group would do a trial test for each software and based on those results the company would pick the new knowledge base to use.

As seen from the Table 1, not all demands were found. The reason for that was because the available information varied greatly between the software companies’ sites. Each company highlighted and advertised in their websites the features that they valued. It is very possible that some of the results in Table 1 marked as “information not found” is in the product, the company just has not said it in their website.

Another highly important fact to take in consideration when observing the Table 1 is the price demand. As observed, the price varies greatly between the different softwares. This is because all except DocuMent360 provides additional features or functionality that are not associated with external knowledge management. Atlassian, Kayako and Zendesk are companies that offer more complete solutions for managing a company, workflows, tasks, internal documentation, service desk etc. On the contrary MadCap Flare is a company that main focus is to provide a software that supports single-source publishing, the goal is to be able to use content once across different medias. MadCap also offers more in depth help for writing an article than any other software company included in this study.

9 Reflection to results

When observing the Table 1 the one that stands out negatively for me from the other softwares is Madcap Flare. If the main focus was to create the most successful article and sharing that article to multiple different medias, would I pick Madcap Flare. The software offers many functionalities that assist user in writing. Unfortunately, in my opinion MadCap Flare is not worth to consider for second round as it is on the expensive side in the price category and it lacks information on more than few demands.

Atlassian the software that Blancco Technology Group currently uses fulfils mostly the demands. The only department that Atlassian seems not to provide, or information of that department wasn't found was the statics. It could be possible to use Google Analytics, but Atlassian doesn't confirm this on their site. In the price scale Atlassian is clearly the cheapest, but it is also the simplest.

Kayako is the software company that Blancco Technology Group used before changing to Atlassian. From Table 1 it is seen that Kayako mostly fulfils the demands. Kayako does not have their own analytics for the article and the site, however, the company provides a feature that can be used to incorporate Google Analytics to the Kayako Help Center.

Document360 met every demand of Blancco Technology Group. This result is not surprising as this company's only focus is providing external and internal knowledge base solution, but the price that need to be paid to acquire these benefits might just be a bit too much for Blancco Technology Group. The other software that also met all the demands was Zendesk. The key difference between Document360 and Zendesk has is that Zendesk is lower priced, and it offers a solution for customer service.

When evaluating which softwares should be chosen for the "second round" it is important to take in consideration if the software provides ticket system when purchasing the knowledge base feature. This is the case with Kayako and Zendesk as they primary sell their product as customer service tool. In this situation Blancco Technology Group needs to estimate if they will change their current ticket system as well, when purchasing Kayako or Zendesk. Changing ticket system to the same software as the knowledge base can be useful. I would not advise purchasing Kayako or Zendesk for only the knowledge base features as Blancco Technology Group would lose money on features that they would not use.

If Blancco Technology Group are willing to change their ticket system, should they in my opinion consider Kayako and Zendesk for the "second round". If

Blancco Technology Group aims on using only the knowledge base features, would I highly recommend choosing Document360 for the “second round”.

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