

**SMALL BUSINESS**

## Online biz library is a labor of uploads

● A Minneapolis consultant curates one of the world's biggest, busiest online business resources.

By TODD NELSON  
Special to the Star Tribune

Carter McNamara was uploading documents to the Internet before most of us had heard of it — before browsers, before Google and way before Facebook.

The uploading habit stuck. As McNamara continued gathering and posting more and more business-related articles and resources he realized, at some point in 1995, that he was building and curating an online library.

Today, his Free Management Library is one of the world's largest and busiest collections of "free resources about

personal, professional and organizational development," as McNamara describes it.

The Twin Cities-based site ([www.managementhelp.org](http://www.managementhelp.org)) serves users in dozens of countries. It ranks among the Top 10 in Google searches, receives up to 1.5 million visits a month and offers more than 10,000 resources — books, links, articles and more recently blogs — on more than 700 management topics. Professors from Harvard and other universities assign students to readings on the site.

McNamara, founder and partner of

Authenticity Consulting, a Minneapolis management consulting firm, has run the online library largely single-handedly, bringing in technical or design help as finances allow. The site gained a graphical interface only in 2005, when a former client made a \$30,000 grant. That improvement boosted traffic from 3,000 visits a month to 300,000. A search engine added in 2008 pushed the total to more than 1 million visits a month.

Unlike Wikipedia, where countless contributors dig deeply into topics, McNamara himself vets most articles

**Small continues on D4 ▶**



Carter McNamara, founder and owner of the Free Management Library, a repository of business and management information, posed in another free business resource: the James J. Hill Reference Library in St. Paul.

DAVID BREWSTER  
Star Tribune

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## ◀ SMALL FROM D1

and resources and keeps the focus on practical, how-to information aimed at everyone from entrepreneurs seeking to launch a business on a shoestring to executives exploring, say, how Six Sigma management strategy relates to lean manufacturing principles.

"I always thought that if you can help people with the important stuff, the crises don't occur," said McNamara, who founded Authenticity Consulting in 1998 with his wife, Teri McNamara. "The other thing too is, kind of the old hippy in me, I thought if organizations are healthy, it'll help people be that way too. It's more the top-level stuff that would make an umbrella that the more tactical stuff would fit in."

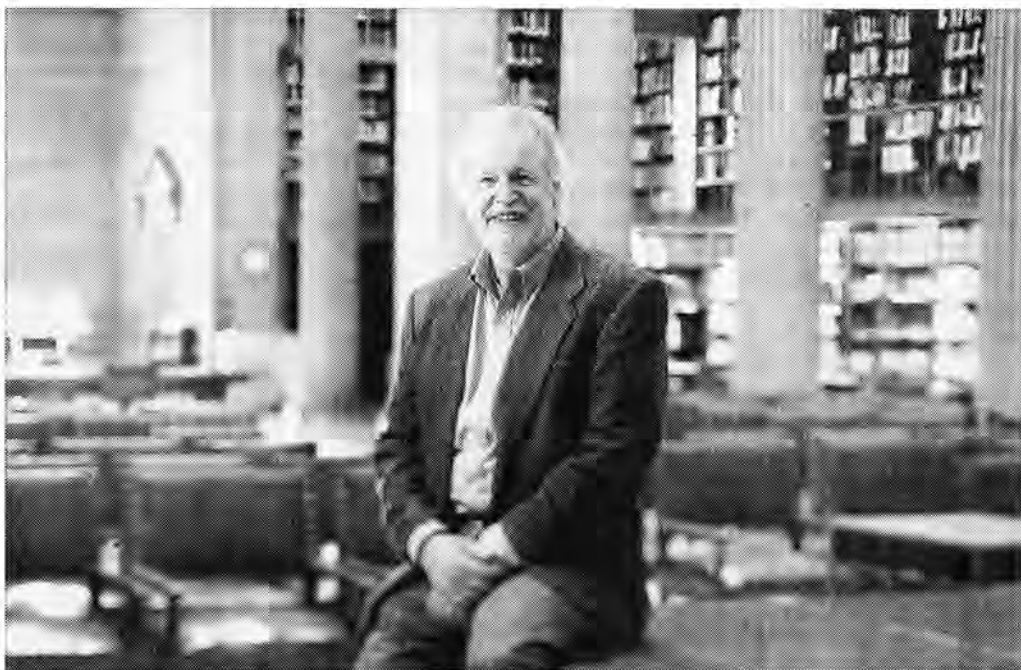
While Wikipedia prominently seeks donations, McNamara has insisted on keeping the free in Free Management Library, turning down offers to sell it for up to seven figures. His one concession has been a small Google ad that helps offset server and maintenance costs.

A North Dakota native, McNamara has an MBA from the University of St. Thomas and a doctorate degree in human and organization development from the Union Institute in Cincinnati. He got early exposure to the Internet as an engineer at Honeywell in the 1980s. From 1988 to 1995 he worked at what is now the University of Minnesota's Supercomputing Institute.

He started posting management- and business-related documents as early as 1992. The more he posted, the more people wanted him to post.

"I retyped a lot of stuff on a Macintosh in my backyard drinking Leinenkugel," McNamara said. He began to formalize the collection in 1995, while working at MAP for Nonprofits, a management consulting agency in St. Paul. He dubbed it the Nonprofit Managers Library, which stuck until he renamed it the Free Management Library in 2005.

Mel Gray, professor of business economics at the Universi-



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Carter McNamara is founder and owner of the Free Management Library, a collection on the Internet of business and management documents. In order to expand its online resources, he hopes to monetize the site while keeping it free and open.

ty of St. Thomas Opus College of Business, who said he uses the library regularly, has known McNamara since he was an executive MBA student.

"Carter stood out from the group," Gray said. "He just has a distinct personality and a distinct style. You might say he was something of a social entrepreneur before social entrepreneurship became a byword. The benefit of his knowledge accrues to hundreds if not thousands of nonprofit managers."

### Twin Cities hub

The Twin Cities area, for that matter, is something of a hub of free business-related resources. The private, nonprofit James J. Hill Reference Library in St. Paul, considered one of the most comprehensive business libraries in the county, offers reference assistance to visitors and callers at no cost. PartnerUp.com, a Deluxe Corp. company, provides free online networking and resources for registered small business owners and entrepreneurs.

"We just got lucky here with the Hill family contributing to the betterment of society and Carter contributing," Gray said. "Maybe there's some-

## BUSINESS INFORMATION RESOURCES

Free Management Library: [www.managementhelp.org](http://www.managementhelp.org)

James J. Hill Reference Library: [www.jjhill.org](http://www.jjhill.org)

PartnerUp: [www.partnerup.com](http://www.partnerup.com)

thing about the water and the atmosphere here. It worked out to our advantage, whatever it was, and it works to the advantage of the rest of the world now that it's online."

Longtime library user Vic Massaglia said he used its free "Micro-eMBA" program to expand his business knowledge.

"I was working on my master's in human resource development and wanted to beef up my business acumen without getting another degree," he said. "The Free Management Library helped me get the lay of the land in various categories in business."

For all its widespread use, the Free Management Library today is at crossroads, McNamara said.

Demand is growing to translate its online resources into Spanish, Chinese, Russian, Hindi and other languages. He wants to post videos and podcasts and possibly develop library-based mobile apps. He added near-

ly two dozen blogs last year and is considering a handful of others. The question facing him now is how to monetize the site while keeping it free and public. His focus on the practical rather than the social aspects of information exchange distinguishes him from the likes of Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg.

"It started as a hobby and it became a utility," said McNamara. "I'm not Zuckerberg ... but I kind of relate."

**The expert says:** Jack Militello, a management professor at the University of St. Thomas' Opus College of Business suggested McNamara consider using videos to introduce subject experts, which might help "placate the more visual generation." The finance section would benefit from virtual blackboard drawings showing other ways of explaining how to perform certain calculations.

Translating some of the documents into other languages makes sense, Militello said, and Chinese likely would be a good starting point. But he questioned how many languages would be necessary, pointing out that English still is the language of business internationally.

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Prof. Mel Gray at the University of St. Thomas Opus College of Business

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