

The value of the Second Brain for Software Developers and Technologists

Are your technology teams using “Second Brains” to boost productivity and reduce burnout?



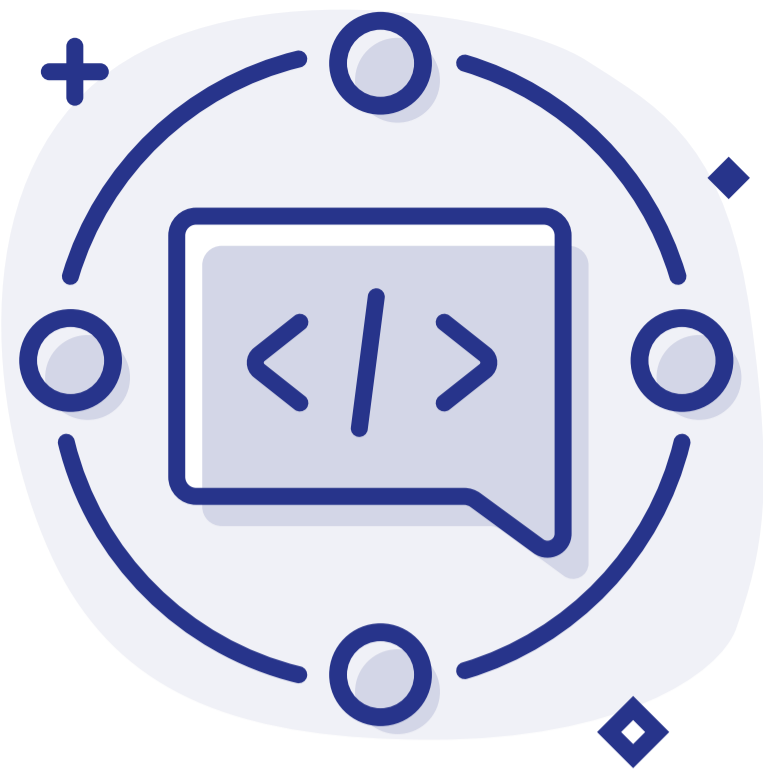
Introduction

While the internet can be a treasure trove of information, it's easy to get distracted when you need to find an answer to a question quickly. A software developer or technologist comes to their work with specific questions that need to be answered in an efficient manner. Apart from researching and memorizing a ton of new information, there are more productive ways to ensure that their projects can be completed efficiently. They accomplish this by creating and leveraging “second brains” that help them find the knowledge and experts they need whenever challenges and projects require solutions they do not have top-of-mind.



What is a second brain and why do developers and technologists need one?

A second brain is a personal knowledge management system that relieves software developers and technologists from having to remember huge amounts of technical information. A second brain works like an organized extension of the mind that allows a person or team of people to curate information from books, the internet, meetings, trainings, conferences, etc. The information is moved into an optimized system that is made specifically for the needs of developers and technologists to allow them to make informed decisions about what they need to know immediately versus what information can be set aside for another project.



What are developers using for second brains now?

Technologists use a variety of tools to organize and maintain their second brains. These platforms may be officially supported by their organization or individuals may install unapproved software they believe will help them find notes and knowledge more efficiently.



85%

of developers report visiting Stack Overflow at least every week

Source: Stack Overflow



Stack Overflow serves as a second brain for an international community of professional and enthusiast programmers. With 100+ million monthly visitors, it's one of the most visited websites in the world. 85% of developers report visiting Stack Overflow at least every week. It features a wide range of questions and answers related to computer programming and languages like JavaScript, Java, C#, and more. The site boasts over 21 million questions and 31 million answers. The most active users earn points and badges for their contribution to the developer community, making it easy to know what information is most relevant and up-to-date.



Reddit serves as a social news website and public forum where content is socially curated and promoted by members of the site through a voting process. The site has forums that are specific to developers. However, Reddit also contains information on just about every other topic under the sun. This may be a distraction for busy software developers who are looking for information specific to their issue.



Evernote is a tool designed for easy note taking, organizing information, managing tasks, and archiving. Notes can be saved as text, sketches, photographs, audio, or web content.

Each note can be stored in a virtual notebook and can be tagged, annotated, edited, searched, exported, and given attachments. The application is great for single users or even small teams. However, trying to use this tool across a worldwide community of software developers would prove challenging.

Notion

Notion is a project management and note-taking application designed to help an individual, team, or organization coordinate deadlines and assignments to improve efficiency and productivity. The challenge of using a tool like Notion as a second brain for software developers is that it is often made to satisfy the needs of an individual or small team, not the changing needs of distributed and remote teams or entire companies. Tools designed for individuals or small teams run the risk of creating silos of information that only benefit a small number of people, rather than allowing information to surface easily and radiate throughout the organization.



Microsoft SharePoint is a web-based platform built to encourage collaboration amongst teams using the Microsoft Office platform. The tool manages and stores documents and can be configured for the specific use of any organization. The application is not specifically made for the needs of software developers who need to go in and find an answer to their specific questions. While it stores documents and other pieces of information, there is no deliberate way to have discussions about topics relevant to the software development community. It's left to developers to discern what information is relevant and what is not.

Microsoft has attempted to help end users organize their own content and assets with SharePoint Syntex, an AI-based add-on for Office 365. However, teaching the system what is important to the end user is a heavy lift, and there isn't a clear way to share that knowledge with others on your team.



How are individual second brains scattered throughout an organization problematic?

Siloed knowledge poses a problem to software development teams because it hinders business as a whole. Siloed information limits the ability for teams to use data to manage workflow processes and make informed decisions. It also prevents the information from being shared with other teams that interact with software development teams like product managers, customer service, marketing, and more.

There are several specific ways in which data silos can harm an organization:

Incomplete data

A second brain becomes more valuable when more people and teams use and build upon the data that is available. If the information is locked away only for the use of a specific person or small group, it results in inadequate business intelligence which leads to poor decision-making.

- 3. Duplications in data platforms and processes**

Organizations experience an increase in IT costs with the increase in software licenses, servers, and storage needed to house data silos. There is also a cost to manage and operate each data silo separately by each department. None of these systems are designed to sustain each second brain dispersed throughout the company.
- 4. Missed opportunities for innovation**

When data is siloed, there is less collaboration between end users across departments. The organization misses out on efforts that can lead to creative problem solving.
- 5. Data security issues**

Individual data silos are often stored using tools like Excel spreadsheets, Google Drive, or mobile devices. Data that is not controlled or regulated is at an increased risk for data security hacks. Siloed information also complicates any effort to comply with data privacy and protection laws.



What are some qualities to look for in a second brain application to improve productivity and engagement?

Now that you have some knowledge about what a second brain is and how siloed information is possibly hurting your software development team's productivity and creativity, let's talk about what qualities you should be looking for in a second brain for your organization.

1. Relevant, trusted, up-to-date content

The life of a software developer is fast-paced. Getting stuck on a problem slows down the development process. This can be problematic for other teams who are depending upon developers in order to meet their deadlines. Developers also don't have time to stop progress to participate in formal training programs or online classes. Having access to a standardized, centralized source of knowledge allows for developers to have easy, just-in-time access to the knowledge they need.

2. Provides integrations that help keep developers in their workflow

Your development team's second brain should integrate with tools they're already using, including collaboration and development tools like Git repositories. These are the tools they use to enhance team communication and productivity. Built-in efficiency across tools enhances decision-making and creates a smooth workflow. It also allows space for knowledge to be scaled across teams, whether you are working in-person or remotely. Look for tools with familiar user experiences and interfaces that improve adoption rates and reduce distractions.

3. A transparent, centralized knowledge base that promotes discovery and content creation
Software developers should feel that a knowledge tool is easily accessible at the time they need it. This promotes creativity and discovery that can be used for the development of thought provoking content. A second brain should stimulate innovation and growth across teams while at the same time promoting active learning with one another. Avoid platforms that limit knowledge contribution to a few experts or admins, as this inhibits adoption and places a high burden on senior staff. Having a second brain that promotes high levels of collaboration eliminates barriers to finding and contributing knowledge.

4. User-driven, recognition-based community that encourages participation
Formal learning environments depend upon the availability and expertise of the teacher or facilitator to impart knowledge to participants and capture knowledge at a fixed time. In contrast, the best active learning environments promote continued learning amongst peers. This allows all software developers to share their expertise in a space that is made specifically for their interests and abilities. When teammates have insight into what their coworkers think is important enough to capture, it can trigger their own additions or improvements upon the original idea. Community crowd-sourcing drives greater collaboration across distributed teams and continues to iterate on past contributions to ensure knowledge evolves over time.

5. Actionable insights to assess and foster community health and engagement
Your software developers should have access to a second brain that allows them to learn from past experiences. Recreating the wheel is expensive and time-consuming. Worse, it can lead to repeating mistakes that could have been avoided. Creating a healthy sense of engagement and collaboration increases the visibility of work, rewards colleagues for helping one another solve challenges, and reduces the wasted effort that occurs when developers work in isolation.



Stack Overflow for Teams provides organizations with a familiar, easy-to-use knowledge capture and sharing platform.

Unlike one-off second brains created by individuals, knowledge within Stack Overflow is accessible to your entire team.

[Try Stack Overflow for Teams for Free.](#)