CASE STUDY

Knovel®

Middle East Technical University

Connecting academia and industry

SUMMARY

Knovel is used by METU’s technically-savvy community of students and researchers to extend engineering knowledge and productivity.
Regional technical expertise goes global.

Since its founding in 1956, Ankara-based Middle East Technical University (METU) has been a leader in higher education within Turkey and throughout the world. With a student population comprised of the top 0.1% of nearly 1.5 million applicants, METU produces influential scientists, physicists, engineers, public figures and business leaders. As advances in global networking have made international engineering communities ever more interconnected, embracing technology and resources that can support the global needs of its more than 100,000 alumni and current students has become a primary focus. One such resource is Knovel.

Emre Hasan Akbayrak, associate director of the Middle East Technical University Library, describes Knovel’s extensive web-based technical references and analytical tools as “complete.” “METU has no medical school,” he exclaims. “METU has no law school. METU is a technical university, so Knovel is a really good fit for METU.”

Akbayrak began his work at the university in 2001, bringing research-level expertise in the areas of library assessment, databases and e-resources. With a master’s degree in library and information science, the associate director also plays a role with ANKOS, a 163-member university consortium, and serves on the steering committee of the Turkish Librarians’ Association.

Connecting students and industry

METU’s 25,000 students, including 7,000 in its graduate program, make the university the leading academic institution in the region. The campus plays host to METUtechnopolis, Turkey’s first science and technology Research Park. METU-Tech was established to connect companies with the advanced skill sets of METU’s students, faculty and alumni as they conduct research and development work on advanced materials, energy, automotive, chemistry, biology and environment technologies and ultimately high-tech products. Beyond providing students with early exposure to industry, a further result of this collaboration may be the university’s recent top 100 ranking from Times Higher Education, whose rankings employ 13 separate performance indicators designed to capture a full range of university activities, from teaching and research to knowledge transfer.

Seeking the latest tools and technologies

METU students are, in Akbayrak’s words, “very smart and very persistent at times. They are ready to use new technologies and want the latest tools.” To address the needs of these students and to make sure that tools are implemented across multiple platforms, Akbayrak has expanded the library’s presence on social media. That’s where the students are.

The library has its own blog, Facebook and Twitter accounts and plans to branch out into additional channels such as Flickr, Delicious and Pinterest. The librarian himself has several social media accounts and his own blog, as he strives “to reach [METU’s] end users everywhere.” Social media is how Akbayrak first learned about Knovel, having read about it on several blogs in 2008. Shortly thereafter, METU contacted Knovel and launched a trial. Now, “Knovel is one of the [university’s] most used databases,” says the librarian. Students use it “for multiple purposes such as research, fact-finding searches, problem-solving and assignments.”

EMRE HASAN AKBAYRAK
has been associate director of the Middle East Technical University Library since 2006. Previously between 2005 and 2006, Mr. Akbayrak held the position of Head of Serials and E-Resources Department at METU Library, and between 2001 and 2005, he was Reference Librarian in the Library. He has been working for ANKOS (Anatolian University Libraries Consortium) since 2002.

“Knovel is one of the best databases in engineering.”
— Emre Hasan Akbayrak at Middle East Technical University Library
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— EMRE HASAN AKBAYYRAK
MIDDLE EAST TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

**Engineering the ideal database**

“The infrastructure of Knovel is very user friendly,” adds Akbayrak. “I have talked to many of our students and faculty members, and they always say that Knovel is a really good product, and that it’s really easy to use. Moreover, it’s not very complicated. Users don’t like complex databases or infrastructures. [A database] should be very, very simple, but the information within should be very, very customized and tailored to users’ needs.”

“That’s why Knovel is one of the best databases in engineering. I can say that because we’ve got more than 350 databases at the moment and we are in trials with many more. Every year we evaluate more than 200 databases. The infrastructure of Knovel is really good.”

**Supporting career goals for faculty and students**

Moreover, Knovel also has a direct impact on faculty research. As academic institutions worldwide pursue innovative research, a strong focus is placed on making the needed tools and information readily available. Professor Dr. Gencer of METU’s Electrical and Electronics Engineering Department says, “I love Knovel and its new search widget. I can quickly access a large number of resources focused specifically on my area of research. I recommend it to researchers in all fields of engineering. Knovel also gives METU students skills they will need beyond academia—a key goal of METU’s faculty and staff—and helps create their careers and their future.”

The results have been very successful. As Akbayrak describes it, “Middle East Technical University students are highly sought after upon graduation, both by Technopolis companies and in the world at large. Most of the students can easily find a good job before their graduation.”

In part, this is due to the advanced skills students receive in applied research with state-of-the-art resources such as Knovel. Associate Director Akbayrak puts it more succinctly. “METU is a trendsetter; Knovel is another trendsetter.”
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