Planning & Deploying A Successful Intranet

Helpful guide to make your intranet a success
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Over the past few decades intranets have evolved from a way to put together a few documents to an essential business tool. Their globally recognized importance and ever increasing popularity in companies worldwide can be attributed to the intranet's ability to bring real bottom-line benefits to all industries by increasing efficiency, increasing morale and cutting costs.

Defined simply:

“An intranet allows people to communicate, collaborate, search and share information via a web browser.”

Intranets are far more than just a communication tool. Today's solutions are increasingly seen as broader productivity tools that include more process-specific business applications and management tools. User expectations are set by what they encounter on the web, as the Nielsen Norman Groups states “When employees switch between using the web and their company intranets, they shouldn’t feel like they’ve gone from driving a 2012 ZL1 Camaro to a 1989 Chevy Nova with faulty brakes—that is, the intranet experience shouldn’t feel slow, dangerous (when using inaccurate information), and tedious.”

Identifying the objectives of your intranet is your first key task. It will allow you to create a business case.

It is important that when planning your intranet you aim to develop a user centric intranet that not only provides employees with an indispensable tool to share information, manage knowledge and disseminate news but also equips them with access to business applications and management tools to further increase efficiency.

Frequently corporate intranets have difficult navigation schemes, unwieldy search results and are difficult to maintain and update resulting in information that is out of date. This confuses and frustrates people who soon lose confidence in the intranet; usage falls away as people find a quicker and more accurate way to do things.

A useful intranet requires an appealing, easy to use interface, the ability to easily access integrated external applications with appropriate security features, documentation that provides help for people and features that can be easily maintained and upgraded.

A well planned and thought out intranet can really revolutionize the way your company does business. It can certainly change the way your employees interact and positively impact all your business processes resulting in measurable business savings, streamlined work flow and a better informed more efficient workforce. It will also foster a more open company culture.

Intranets give companies the power to manage in new ways. However, taking advantage of these opportunities requires shifting views from managing things to facilitating knowledge and information flows. Creating an intranet that achieves all of your company’s objectives and meets your business requirements is a complex task requiring a wide range of skills.
Part 1: The Business Case

Let’s look at some key areas where Return on Investment (ROI) can be measured. As illustrated below, a successful intranet could pay you back in as little as ten months while supporting all the different areas within a business.

Business Benefits

The most challenging part of justifying purchasing or creating an intranet is that you are aiming to get management to invest hard cash for mostly soft returns. These soft returns come in the form of improved employee productivity and self-sufficiency, higher staff morale, a higher level of inter-departmental collaboration and communication and easing the process of information gathering and sharing.

Among the many intranet benefits, the most obvious are:

Reducing Time Spent Searching

The amount of time that’s spent searching for information within an organization or on the Internet (each worker spends 8.8 hours per week searching) can be drastically reduced when employees have a central ‘one-stop shop’ for organizational and work related content. This will allow employees to focus more on their jobs rather than digging for information.

Faster Solving of Business Problems

Traditional wisdom states that ‘two heads are better than one’ and modern research (The Wisdom of Crowds, Surowiecki, 2004) has established that a large group of independent thinkers working together can provide far more accurate answers than the same people working alone. Think of the problem solving potential residing within your workforce, all that company knowledge and experience waiting to be used and all it needs is a properly equipped intranet.

Reducing Duplication of Effect

Intranets can be used as an open tool to coordinate the efforts of various departments, workgroups and project teams, encouraging a social culture through open access to collaborative tools. This will have the potential of creating a unified knowledge community – a central environment for knowledge sharing and management – and will minimize duplication of both effort and content. 61% of organizations have at least one social media tool on their intranet according to Prescient Digital Media.

Keeping Knowledge within the Organization

Knowledge retention within your company can be a serious challenge. A good intranet should supply an organization with the assurance that when employees leave, knowledge stays. You will still need to employ someone with the know how to apply this knowledge but it ensures there are less hidden surprises. Employees come and go – they may transfer departments or leave the company entirely – and when they do, they will be taking all that knowledge they have accumulated over the years with them. An intranet allows an organization to collect and store the knowledge and expertise of its employees and gives it more permanence within the organization.

Promoting Employee Self-Sufficiency

Self Service tools allow users to get work and tasks done quickly and consistently. It takes away the delays that occur when waiting for others to complete actions.

Improving Morale

Staff morale is generally increased when employers are seen as good employers. Help people feel part of the team by using the intranet to keep them involved with company news, giving them the chance to provide feedback to proposed changes and decisions using a poll or forum.

Download the free template at: https://www.interact-intranet.com/resources/intranet-guides/building-an-intranet-business-case/

Feeling a little overwhelmed creating a business case for a new intranet? Want a little extra help?

The Interact Business Case Document Template will get you motivated and prepared. With a clear, compelling structure and lots of useful tips, creating your business case will be straight forward.
Create incentive schemes that run on your intranet. If staff do something well, reward them and promote it on the intranet.

“For every 2% increase in employee satisfaction, there’s a 1% increase in retention”

Don’t just use your intranet as a corporate tool - ensure you use it as a social networking tool as well. Organizations are increasingly encouraging social behavior with employees creating internal networks via the intranet to give greater exposure to the profiles and backgrounds of colleagues, so that the right people with the right skills and experience can be located internally quickly and easily. As we use social networks outside work, they start to become a more natural aspect of our at-work behavior. Employees are coming to work expecting the same types of networking resources at their desktop as they have at home.

There are a number of business benefits to implementing social networking facilities:

- Increased productivity
- Improve internal communications
- Improve internal collaboration
- Improve employee morale and retention

Ensuring that intranets features such as blogs, micro-blogging, @ and # tagging, discussion boards etc. are introduced and advocated by management will provide people with tools they need to share ideas and collaborate on, in an almost intuitive way.

“Our corporate values were changed to include Diversity recently… Following a general awareness drive, with the new Diversity Manager blogging and micro blogging and linking through to the Diversity area of the Allotment [our intranet], we started to advertise DiversityWeek…The online campaign caused a real buzz around the offices. The use of the intranet also spiked that week, with just over a thousand hits on the diversity sections and 20,000 hits overall.”

Affinity Sutton

Housing Association 1500 staff based over 7 main sites and over 100 estate offices.
“Since launching our award winning intranet we have seen a 30% reduction in internal emails and a 70% reduction in internal calls. In total our intranet has saved our organization $2.5million per year.”

Mark Entwisle, Intranet Manager Romec
Replacing Hard Copies

An intranet with a solid document management system replaces the rolling and cumulative costs associated with the printing, distributing, maintaining and storing of hardcopy documents. This ensures users are filling in the latest version of a form or following the latest processes and procedures. It also provides culpability when tasks are being done, users can see where the holdup is stopping an activity being completed.

How quickly will ROI be achieved?

An intranet will provide many benefits across any organization, but not all of these benefits can be evaluated with simple ‘bottom line accounting’. Sometimes the positive impact can be derived from improved performance that is difficult to directly measure and the significance of these benefits should not be lost in the rush to present ROI.

The main driving point for managers is the need to ensure significant benefits which can be gained through monetary savings, time savings or environmental savings (reduced printing etc.). However, intranets are more commonly implemented for their real ability to increase efficiency and promote tremendous cost savings by making common forms and tasks available centrally and online.

With an intranet, companies can cut down the time that employees spend on routine tasks. By putting information on an intranet, employees can quickly and easily access documents, saving time. This time is further cut if the employees spend on routine tasks. By putting information on an intranet, employees can quickly and easily access documents, saving time. This time is further cut if

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ROI – American Golf

“One of the main reasons for implementing a new intranet was that our current ways of working were old and mainly done via email. This was causing an issue with our email servers and as a business we were getting to the position of having to upgrade our email system to MS Exchange with all the associated costs involved.

In moving to Interact Intranet the need to upgrade our email servers has been rendered redundant therefore saving us a considerable cost plus associated costs in time and effort involved in the implementation of a new system. The internet has changed the way we communicate to Retail stores, shorter more precise communications are now the normal practice which has benefits in saving time etc.

Moving our paper processes into electronic forms has also had a huge financial benefit for us:

- Retail Stores: Each store completes their timesheet and Health and Safety forms online, a process completed once a week which is half an hour faster than doing so on paper. With an average wage of $26,000 for these form fillers, we save over $7,000 each year with the time saved and huge reduction in errors by the form filler. For example there are mandatory fields which were often missed on the paper based version.
- Head Office: Online forms allow Payroll staff to consolidate and validate figures automatically using the reporting feature saving $17,800 per year. Including removing the risk of over / under payments saves a further $8,500 per year.

In our first year alone we have achieved a ROI of $69,800 and a minimum guaranteed $102,500 year on year.”

Measuring value and return on investment for internal business systems has always been important, you need to be able to prove the business system is actually helping people do their jobs more efficiently, be that quicker, more accurately or better informed.

The following worked example should help you see the benefits and key areas where ROI can be measured.

Example is based on the following rough assumptions:
1000 staff / Average Salary: $39,500 / 37.5 Hours per week (7.5 hours a day) equating to $28.85 an hour per person (all figures are approximate.)

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<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Savings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reducing the IT Burden</td>
<td>An easy to use intranet interface will result in the decentralization of content ownership enabling internet users with saving IT abilities to update content, thus reducing the burden in IT Team.</td>
<td>$5,3K per year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decrease Staff Turnover</td>
<td>Retaining one member of staff per save $550 an agency recruitment costs alone. Based on an average 500000 salary this is a £5505 saving plus an estimated £5600 per training and admin costs. Assuming engagement drops annual turnover from 15% to 10% a 2% increase in staff satisfaction leads to a 3% increase in retention.</td>
<td>$98.8K per year</td>
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<tr>
<td>Speed up Information Searches</td>
<td>Our studies show that intelligent searches on an intranet save considerable time. If 20% of the workforce able to save only 5 minutes per day searching for information such as staff phone numbers, resent policies etc. (assuming absence, expenses, POs saved) this would give the following savings.</td>
<td>$89.5K per year</td>
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<tr>
<td>Effective Management of Policies and Procedures</td>
<td>Policies and Procedures are stored on the Intranet. By average the Personnel Manager is answer a common question every day regarding a policy e.g. maternity if it takes 30 minutes per day to answer these questions and the intranet reduces this by 50% the Personnel Manager will save 75 minutes per week = $140 a week</td>
<td>$1,367 per year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example Streamlined Process: Absence Booking Process</td>
<td>Manually it takes 30 min to process an employee holiday. Each employee averages 5 holidays per year. Total time per year to process holidays is 50 x 5 x $80.00 = $2000 hours = 262 days. After implementing Interact each holiday now only takes 5 minutes to process. Total time per year to process holidays is 262 x 1400 = 47 man hours = $5 x man days. This saves 277 days of manual process.</td>
<td>$42K per year</td>
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A well implemented intranet can therefore save this organization just over £149,000 Per Year.
Some additional points for consideration when calculating ROI

The return on investment of an intranet is based not just on the time saving but the overall increase in performance that the intranet will provide the company, by making it more efficient, increasing staff morale and improving communication flow. Increased communication leads to widespread adoption of best practice, better problem solving and more engaged and informed staff.

• Without a centralized set of enterprise tools, it can take up to three times longer to perform the same tasks. Your intranet is the ideal place to centralize these.
• Communication barriers cause productivity losses on average of $23,000 per worker per year.
• An open communication culture moves your users from disempowered to empowered and therefore engaged. How important is this? In Gartner’s “The State of the Workplace” only 11% of employees feel engaged. However a massive 62% “are not engaged – that is, emotionally detached and likely to be doing little more than is necessary to keep their job” leaving 27% or one in every four employees creating a counter culture of negativity. This holds your business back from being great.
• An intranet can maintain a good company culture built on information exchange and collaboration, this is the crux of a social intranet. Intranets make it easier to move information within the organization. Departments that once rarely interacted can now collaborate on big projects. The cost of winning and maintaining good client relationships will decrease, while sales and bottom line profits increase. The open communication it fosters reduces the chance of identical projects happening due to lack of communication and transparency.
• The intranet enhances employee retention. Harris Interactive’s HR Poll says that 31% of employees plan to leave companies they feel have poor communications, while only 12% of companies are judged to offer excellent communications.
• McKinsey estimate an effective social intranet will typically increase knowledge worker productivity by 20-25% when the average knowledge worker spends 28 hours per week on emails, search and collaboration.

A social environment is likely to surface greater savings ideas from your users. They are likely to see inefficiencies every day, a social intranet gives them the opportunity to discuss and cure these.

A successful intranet is dependent upon many factors such as reliability, feature expansion, ease of use, business integration and scalability for your ever growing organization. All these factors are reliant on the solution you choose. However, to achieve success, the selected solution has to be backed by a superior supplier offering dedicated support, project teams, enterprise development resources, experience and future innovation. What’s more, that supplier’s solution is typically 43% cheaper than an in-house intranet development.
How will an intranet benefit different departments?

Time should be spent considering the different requirements of different areas/departments around the organization. The intranet should be flexible enough to meet diverse needs yet consistent enough to provide a seamless user experience.

Discuss current ‘pain points’ with departmental leaders, as well as with knowledge workers and field workers, to help create intranet solutions that solve real business problems and meet people’s everyday needs.

**Information Technology (IT)**

Software and Applications development

- User Documentation
- Technical Support – Help Desk Area
- Network Management
- Technical/Security Policies and Procedures

**Human Resources (HR)**

HR departments have been some of the most eager developers of intranet applications by trying to find ways to improve their practices, working at solutions to breaking down the large amounts of paper-based processes and documentation their department seems to generate

- Staff Directory
- Useful Links
- Employee Handbook
- Health and Safety Procedures
- Recruitment and Job listings
- Organizational structure charts
- Tax Rules
- Training Handbooks
- Holiday Booking
- Career Development and Training
- Online processes and compliance

**Customer Service and Support**

- Assign and track support cases
- Order entry and tracking
- Enable customer service personnel to resolve queries quickly and efficiently using knowledge base of frequently asked questions and issues
- Achieve consistent service by providing call scripts to deal with different caller profiles
- Speed up customer issue resolutions by matching customers to products, services and suppliers

**Sales and Marketing**

Fast access to the latest up to date information can be crucial for Sales and Marketing departments. It can make the difference between making and breaking a sale. Importantly it allows users to have fast and easy access to all marketing material and documentation

- Maintain consistent corporate identity by adding presentations, promotional materials and brochures
- Give consistent pricing to customers and potential customers with an online price book
- Keep staff informed by publishing internal news on the intranet
- Gain an overall view of sales performance using the homepage manager module to ensure these are the on the intranet homepage
- Increase staff motivation by publishing success stories and customer testimonials

“It has been quoted internally that Interact Intranet is the best value-for-money business solution that American Golf has invested in for a long time.”

Malcolm Payne, Management Information Manager
American Golf
Management & Executive

- Internal Departmental Information
- External Partnering Information
- Meeting Minutes
- Private Newsgroups to share ideas and discuss plans
- KPIs
- Online calendars
- Provide instant access to stock market information, business news sites using RSS newfeeds

Finance & Accounts

- Accounts Payable/Receive Support
- Policies and Procedures
- Budgeting
- Expense Reports
- Reporting and Forecasting
- Asset Management

As Accounting and Finance departments have some of the most crucial data it is critical that certain information remains secure. So ensure your choice of intranet has the built in Security and Permissions necessary to achieve this.

More Than Just a Document Store - Moving to a collaborative Platform

Intranets have evolved to be far more than just a communication tool and document store. Solutions are increasingly seen as broader productivity tools that include more process-specific business applications and management tools.

When planning your intranet it is important you aim to develop a user centric, single source portal. By solving the question “where do I go to do x?” you not only provide employees with an indispensable tool to share information, manage knowledge and disseminate news but also equip them with access to business applications and management tools to further increase efficiency.

Regular reports, departmental updates and the templates, reference materials and procedures can be quickly published so that people can ‘serve themselves’. Sensitive materials, such as profit and loss figures and account reports, could be presented in a secure area, accessible only by designated people, such as senior management.

Users can access specific information that is published on the intranet e.g., your Finance Department could publish key accounts information, such as profit and loss figures, monthly management accounts etc., which can be accessed securely via the intranet.

Collaborative ROI

The way we work is changing, with each new generation that joins the workforce, most recently the evolution of the Digital Workplace. More and more collaborative tools are being incorporated into working life. Such tools offer fundamental benefits, as collaboration is not a new approach to work, but rather the only way to work; but the return on investment is measured in less tangible terms than cold hard figures, such as:

- An empowered, contented workforce
- A company that can work on projects across departments, locations and time-zones
- Company experts that are easy to access
- Flexible, instantly reactive Teams
- An easy way to share best practice and ideas shared across the company

Organizations want engaged motivated staff, they want people who are clear on the organizations goals, willing to put their ideas and creative thinking towards solving the organizations problems and willing to offer advice and guidance based on their experience. Organizations want this motivated, empowered workforce, but often ask for it without providing a system to sustain it.

If you want to incentivize people to give you the benefit of their insight, then they need a central place that everyone can read, that will allow others to interact, refine and collaborate on their ideas. In short you need to give them a little power to see that their contribution is valued and appreciated. An easy to use, well governed intranet will provide this central place.

In the past teams were often restricted by location and language. Now this isn’t an obstacle, work is where people are and the most important thing is to have the right people involved, not the right job title. Skills tagging will make it easier to identify these people. Making it easy to create and run teams will see a decrease in your need to hire external resources and keep knowledge in your business once the project that team might work on, is complete.

This gives employees, and by extension your entire company, the flexibility to react quickly and easily to the demands of modern business. The ability to address a problem and then instantly create the best team from the people available to solve it is a powerful tool and something a well-run and functional intranet can provide.

This flexible approach to team working has the added advantage of shared expertise becoming company culture. Asking questions and having a qualified person, no matter who they are, answer, becomes an everyday thing. A dynamic Q&A system or task focused discussion forum will provide the platform for colleagues across the organization to help each other. Answers should be available to anyone who later has a similar query, via the search engine or browsing, reducing duplication of effort in a way that e-mail cannot.

This extends to the sharing of best practice and ideas. We see a behavioral shift from power for being a knowledge holder to power for being a knowledge enabler. You are not trying to undermine people’s specialist knowledge – often you will need to know how to apply a specialist knowledge but we want to let people self-serve with frequently asked questions. These are some of the things which traditionally hold experts back from being as productive or effective as they could be.

People see the aims and values of the company as a single entity – the power of ‘I’ to become an even more powerful ‘we’, no matter what role I or we do. This shift in perception from ‘my department’ to ‘my company’ has the long-term benefit of getting people working, talking and collaborating, allowing the company to tap the ‘collective intelligence’ of its workforce.
“Interact Intranet is making a big difference to the way we work at ADT. It helps us share information, news and knowledge and is helping to further develop our ‘One ADT’ culture. The Workflow and Forms Manager is an extremely sophisticated and powerful module that’s simple and intuitive to use and will dramatically reduce out process times.”

Megan Simmons,
Internal Communications Manager UKI,
ADT Fire and Security
Part 2: Planning

To help you make the best possible decisions when selecting your intranet let’s take a look at the planning process from deciding whether to develop an in-house solution or to buy an ‘off the shelf package.

Expensive, avoidable mistakes that can cost large sums of money, need to be identified and mitigated by your intranet plan. The key error is the failure to realize that an intranet is not a short term system but something that your entire organization is going to invest thousands of hours in, so your initial investment in the software is most likely a very small investment in the whole scale of things.

Areas covered include:

- Identify staff and business needs
- Determine intranet goals
- Build versus buy
- A word about Microsoft SharePoint
- Intranet structure
- External versus in-house hosting
- Establishing an intranet project team
- What to expect from an intranet supplier
- Key features of an intranet
- Ongoing support, training and guidance
- Branding your intranet
- Linking to other systems

Choosing the wrong approach or product for your intranet will cost large sums of money, so take advice and look at what similar companies are using. There are pros and cons to all of the approaches outlined, but consider how your needs may grow and change in the future. An intranet is a long term system, and the smallest investment you will make in the whole system is the software. Choose wisely!

**Identify Staff and Business needs**

An intranet must be useful and easy for staff if it is to be successful and ultimately essential. The information and services it provides must match staff and business needs. Techniques that can be used to identify staff needs include:

- Stakeholder interviews
- Surveys
- Focus groups
- Workplace observation
- Usability Testing
- Usage statistics and search engine logs of intranets to be redeveloped

**Determine Intranet Goals**

Based on the needs of users and the identified benefits of your business, a set of intranet project goals can be identified and documented. These may underpin the structure and development of the intranet, form the basis for the internal marketing and communications activities and outline the strategic direction for the intranet into the future.

Goals may include:

- Increased staff engagement, efficiency, productivity and satisfaction
- Improved decision making
- Improved collaboration and better access to experts
- More efficient Team working
- Access to the corporate ‘collective intelligence’
- Improved customer service, providing accurate and consistent advice
- Supporting internal communications and collaborations
- Reducing duplication of effort and costs
- Building corporate identity
- Improving corporate governance

When setting these goals it’s also important to consider how you will measure them. If your goal is to increase staff engagement, how will you know you’re achieving this? It might be useful to take what statistics you can before you install your new intranet, even if it’s just a questionnaire you send round to people asking them for feedback, that you can send round after installation to assess how things have improved.

**Build versus Buy**

An intranet is not a website

The first thing to remember is not to get your intranet system confused with your website as they have very different aims and audiences. Many web design companies advertise that they also provide corporate Intranets, but very few have the experience and expertise to understand and advice on building a successful intranet.
Although a website and an intranet work off the same technology, your intranet is closer to your ‘business management system’ than it is to your website. When looking to procure an intranet always find a specialist provider or an individual with significant experience in the intranet field. This will maximize the return from the intranet as the selected software house will use their experience to advise on the best areas to invest efforts and finance for maximum return.

Many companies believe the cheap and easy option is to build an intranet in-house. This is normally promoted by an individual within an organization who is keen to develop the intranet. The great advantage of this is that you could develop a solution that is an exact fit to your business requirements; however developing an intranet in-house is only for those companies that have an experienced development and IT project management team. These companies are normally larger businesses with dedicated development departments. It is very rare indeed to find an intranet that is seen as a long-term solution that has been developed in-house. Many companies end up replacing an in-house developed system with an out-of-the-box solution from a specialist provider, which normally proves very expensive and disruptive.

Unless you have the development personnel, development standards and project management skills in-house, an internally developed intranet will expose you to significant business risk.

“The launch of your intranet is just the beginning of an engaging and very beneficial journey.”

Jo Warburton, Intranet Manager, Affinity Sutton
“After researching for months, testing over a dozen platforms - and with no chance of ever going back to SharePoint - Interact not only proved to be the best, but the most user friendly, adaptive and intuitive socially collaborative platform I have come across - ever.”

Oraine Godfrey, Manager, Digital Communications, Cable and Wireless
Intranets that have started to make significant positive impact in a business, only to have the only in-house developer resign for a new job, can leave the company high and dry.

Lone developers also often develop poor software, because they are less familiar with coding and documentation standards and thus this exposes the business again to significant risk.

There are several specialist intranet solution providers and consultants across the UK and each of these can provide you with a wealth of very valuable experience learned from many other clients; this may initially look more expensive but is normally the most cost effective medium to long-term solution.

“At Interact we’ve been living and breathing intranets for over 10 years. We are an agile company, able to develop new features and releases based on customer feedback, with upgrades coming out every few months, not every few years.”

**Considering an out-of-the-box intranet**

For a medium sized business an out-the-box solution is probably the best option. Most intranet solutions provide you with a large array of features, but be careful to check in detail the features and compare them between suppliers, one intranet providers ‘Online Forms’ can be very different to another’s despite having the same name. A sensible approach is to compile a list of the core functions that you require now and give some consideration as to the likely direction of the intranet in the future.

For example, companies initially require a staff directory, security system and means to publish policies and procedures in a very simple manner. Often, companies choose to introduce more HR related features in a second phase of implementation or improvement, including rolling out Absence Booking, Resource Management, Training Management or Expense logging.

**What to expect from an Intranet Supplier**

Use a supplier who offers a complete package of services such as initial consultation, project management, ongoing support, training and help with maintaining the success of your intranet.

There’s no better way to determine the quality of consultants’ work than by reviewing what they have previously accomplished. By speaking with your potential consultants’ existing clients, you get an unbiased opinion of their services.

Some of the questions you need to ask are:

- Did they have a firm understanding of the core aspects of the company’s business processes?
- Did they produce project deliverables and meet milestones on schedule?
- Was there a steady stream of communication between the internal team and the consultants?
- Did they provide adequate technical support and training?
- Look for a long-term relationship - find a supplier that will grow as you grow. Find a supplier that has the same commitments that you do whether that is in technology or philosophy. Make sure that the vendor will be around in six months and can support your long-term needs.

**A Word About Microsoft SharePoint**

You may think that in this Microsoft dominated world it seems obvious to use SharePoint, especially if you have a nonprofit status as the licensing is so cheap. SharePoint is a nice product; it integrates neatly with the very latest versions of Office and provides a good solution for version controlling documents. However, experience suggests that ‘your average user’ finds it difficult to use. It is probably a good solution for IT department’s document control or for companies where everyone has considerable IT skills, but it’s hard to expand SharePoint beyond document management. An intranet should be about people, not just documents.

The advantages and disadvantages of SharePoint become obvious when an Interact Intranet installation was compared against a SharePoint installation by Nigel Danson in his in-depth report: Interact Intranet V’s SharePoint.

Download the report at: https://www.interact-intranet.com/resources/intranet-guides/interact-intranet-vs-sharepoint/

**Hosting versus In-House**

An intranet is typically stored on a computer called a webserver, which all intranet users have access to. Intranet servers are typically either stored in-house (on a server that resides within your organization’s Local Area Network), hosted on a dedicated server (outside the building, with access to it being via the internet) or hosted ‘in the cloud’ on a server where resources are shared with others. When it comes to deciding which option is right for your intranet, you need to consider the advantages and disadvantages of all three.

In-house intranets are the obvious choice, and they are typically the most popular method of delivering the software. The advantages of this option are primarily to do with security and control. With the intranet hosted on a webserver within your company network, you can be assured that any data stored on it is on your own machines, and stays, for the most part, within the organization.

That’s not to say that an intranet hosted on a dedicated or cloud webserver is necessarily insecure - firewall, SSL and VPN software can ensure that only specific computers at

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<th>Cloud Hosting</th>
<th>Dedicated Hosting</th>
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<tr>
<td>Security</td>
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<td>XX</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
one of your office locations can access the site, and that the data is sent as an encrypted stream of data between the two points so it cannot be intercepted. There is, however, an additional cost involved to implement these additional layers of security that is not required if the site is not accessible to the internet in the first place.

In cost terms, over the lifecycle of the intranet, an in-house solution is likely to be the cheaper option. Server hardware and storage is cheap nowadays, and intranets typically have very modest server requirements. A hosted solution will typically be charged on a monthly rate—offering you zero or low initial cost, but tying you to a hosting and maintenance contract for the long term.

For some companies—particularly smaller operations with a limited number of IT staff—this is a very attractive proposition, with little up-front outlay and the reassurance that they will never need to see or maintain the machine their intranet lives on. For medium to large companies with dedicated IT staff, an in-house server is a simple addition to the existing services they offer.

Another downside of hosting your intranet on the web is the fact that all traffic will go through your company’s internet connections. There are three points of impact:

• Most importantly, the speed of accessing the intranet will invariably be slower than if it were stored on a local machine. The difference will not be huge, but it will be perceptible and can prove annoying over time.
• Secondly, the ability to access your intranet will be vulnerable to network problems. Internet connections now are many times more reliable than they were just a few years ago, but connectivity issues are still known to happen, for example in freak weather conditions.
• Finally, there may be a cost factor in the bandwidth you use, whereas files transferred across internal networks have no associated costs.

For some companies the flexibility in access of a hosted intranet may outweigh many of the perceived negatives.

To summarize, the default method of providing an intranet is to store it on an internal server, as there are more advantages and a lower cost across the project lifetime. However, if you are a small company, are looking to lower the initial outlay for your intranet, or have no IT staff, a hosted solution may be ideal for your situation. You should make sure that the intranet platform you select is compatible with the hosting location that’s right for you.

Interact partners with Amazon Web Services, a leader in hosting and cloud solutions, to securely host Interact Intranet in the cloud. Amazon Web Services offers cloud website hosting solutions that provide businesses, non-profits, and governmental organizations with a flexible, highly scalable, and low-cost way to deliver their websites and web applications.

For more information visit the Amazon Web Services web page: https://aws.amazon.com/

Establishing an Intranet Project Team

While your intranet is not just a project, it is a business as usual tool, it’s crucial to define the governance and leadership for your intranet, and form a cohesive project team and on-going team to manage the intranet up to launch and beyond.

Sponsors

Having the right senior sponsorship is vital and often one of the trickiest things to acquire. Once an intranet is up and running, many senior decision makers may well not be daily users of the intranet. The intranet is often one step away, with their teams accessing the information for them. However, an intranet is a truly cross functional tool and needs sponsorship from a level which can solve cross functional disputes and set priorities across departments.

Steering Committee

Ideally there should be a central leadership for the intranet working with a Steering Committee and Governance Group which can ensure the wider organizational needs are reflected. Typically the Steering Committee includes representatives from Communications, IT and HR, plus other leading functions specific to your organization, this group needs to own the intranet strategy.

Project Manager

You might choose to use a Project Manager before go live to allow your Intranet Manager or Intranet Team to focus on content and specific user elements. Your Project Manager is likely to pick up IT infrastructure requirements and other tasks which would dilute an Intranet Manager’s / Team’s focus.

This area of responsibility is at the heart of maintaining an effective intranet. Whether the intranet is managed by a lone intranet manager, a central team or a dispersed team, the same skills are required. The intranet management element needs to manage all the day-to-day tasks, highlighting small change
The ideal Intranet Installation Team

Senior Management Sponsor

Governance Group

Steering Committee

Intranet Manager

Project Manager

Intranet Champions Group
Forum Owners
Team Owners

Content Authors

IT Team

Training Team

Community Manager

INTRANET PROJECT BOARD

INTRANET MANAGERS

INTRANET WORKSTREAMS/FEEDBACK GROUPS

USERS
Top 6 Features every Intranet Should Have

Easy to use, manage and control by non-technical users

Some solutions are highly dependent on a few key staff for managing site content and user activity. Wouldn’t it be easier if internal communications or marketing were able to take control of the day-to-day running of the intranet because it was that easy to use? Choosing a solution with decentralized administration to relieve pressure on one or two key members of your IT Team, is often a wise decision. Also, ensuring that the selected intranet is easy for non-technical users to add and edit content can go a long way to reducing the burden of the long-term running of an intranet.

“98% of our customers say the number 1 buying criteria when choosing an intranet was ease of use.”

Intelligent Search Engine and Content Promotion

Poor search functionality is the most cited source of frustration for intranet users. If staff can’t find what they need when they need it, they will lose confidence in the intranet and usage will decline. Searching is a critical business tool for an intranet – it’s more than just a way to find documents; a good intranet search can directly support staff in their day to day work.

Choose an intranet solution that searches all content, including the staff directory, intranet categories, comments, status updates, sections and managed documents. Information should not be isolated, but rather be a connected part of the greater whole. Intranet content is an all-encompassing body of information and knowledge that has some very specific elements. It is a collection of information; of articles, best practice and events, a communication database for a who’s who, discussions, comments and blogs. While these are separate items, they are not isolated. Connections exist between each and every one. These connections should be identified, created and promoted.

All data is interconnected and in an ideal intranet, users would have been ‘linked’ content related to the information they are reading so they are able to expand their knowledge base and find information they didn’t know they needed without even having to search for it.

This happens every day on some very popular websites. Consider a visit to Amazon; it welcomes you back and it recommends things to you… Why? Because it wants you to spend money, it has identified previous behavior and has an intelligence to recommend something it thinks you will like. The same happens on iTunes; you purchase a song and based on your choice it will recommend the top five songs by the same artist and based on the genre – via the ‘Listeners Also Bought’ function it will suggest five other artists and tracks you might like. You follow any of these suggestions and five more suggestions are made.

The selected intranet should also have functionality to enable authors to ensure certain content will be read by the right people and then be able

Each item of information is not isolated, but is part of a greater whole: The ‘Intranet Information Store’

All data is interconnected, and an intranet should present these links to the user – helping them to navigate through the data without having to search for each part themselves.

For example, a user viewing a news article should be able to move seamlessly to:

- The profile of the user who created it
- Papers they have published
- Discussions the author has taken part in
- Events in the organization in the near future

With your new intranet information should be easier and faster to locate and should be understood in the context of the rest of the intranet’s content.

Read more about Interact Intelligence Store: https://www.interact-intranet.com/product/features/intelligent-intranet/
Content is king, but a wise king rules with the crown of governance.

Sara Burgess,
Intranet Evangelist,
Interact

People Directory with Collaborative Tools

For a large percentage of organizations, the people directory is the ‘killer App’ for their intranet. Every directory should offer quick and easy ways of filtering and searching for the person required. With contact information such as the employee’s department, manager, phone number, job title etc. A good people directory should also enable staff to search for people they may not know, but who may have the skills or knowledge required.

However, the best employee directories also incorporate elements of the popular social networking sites, such as micro-blogging, blogging, rich profile information, status updates and the ability to follow the activity of other selected colleagues. These additional tools mean that the people directory will then act as an interactive ‘hub’ which becomes a key business tool, enabling people to build a solid internal network, share ideas and best practice and collaborate effortlessly.

These collaborative tools are vital for any organization looking to empower and engage their employee’s, reduce staff turnover and gain access to the collective intelligence of their employee’s. Look for a simple and intuitive interface so that people will find getting involved an easy step, providing the organization with a powerful problem solving and idea generation tool.

Usage Analytics and User Feedback

Your intranet is big investment in time and resources. It’s natural to want to protect that investment. The wise intranet manager knows the only way to do this is to get feedback. What’s working on the intranet? What isn’t? What are people looking for and failing to find? How, in short, are people interacting with your intranet?

A good analytics package for your intranet will provide this information, laying it out in easy to understand ‘at-a-glance’ tables and charts, with drill down and greater depth of information if required. By analyzing what people expect, you can make intelligent and informed decisions about how to ‘fine-tune’ the structure and content of your intranet. You’ll be able to confidently identify missing content, improve inadequate content and get rid of useless content.

Also, when looking for a new intranet, don’t forget the role the users of your intranet can play in monitoring content. Look for a system that enables and encourages users to give content feedback, such as notifications to authors when content is out of date or inaccurate and the how highly they rate the usefulness of the document. This will ensure that intranet content is always kept up to date and relevant.

Electronic Forms

Another massively popular ‘killer app’ for many organizations is the ability to transfer expensive, frustratingly slow, difficult to monitor and manage paper forms, into electronic media that work seamlessly through the intranet. Intranets that offer this functionality are desirable because moving paper processes onto the intranet not only makes the process more efficient, it also provides a very compelling reason for people to use the intranet, increasing adoption.

Electronic forms should be easy for even non-technical people to create, customize and use. The forms should also offer built in workflow, security and alerts, so that the correct people can initiate, approve and reject forms. A flexible reporting function is also a must have for a comprehensive and effective electronic forms system.

Security and Content Control

You need to be able to define access control levels and protect confidential content by enabling or restricting access by groups, departments and individuals if necessary. Your chosen system should offer you flexibility in the permissions you can apply, allowing you to tailor the look, feel and functionality of your intranet to certain groups or roles if you wish to, so that this unparalleled business tool fully reflects your organization’s culture.
Interact Intranet Features

Interact Intranet has 100's of features to create an essential intranet, such as:

- An Intelligent Search that ‘learns’ over time
- Easy to use content management system
- Integrated Electronic Forms
- Interact Suggests pushing tailored content to users based on their interests
- Unique Clever Linker making it easy to link any content
- Interact Answers – a question answering and expert sourcing feature
- An easily filtered people directory and rich profile pages
- Interact Recommends – a dynamic system to ‘pushing’ content to users
- An integral and powerful suite of reports and intranet statistics
- Built in micro-blogging, status updates and comment options

For more information, visit: www.interact-intranet.com

Intranet Structure

When structuring your intranet, due consideration must be given to the ‘architecture’ that underpins and supports the content. While the maxim ‘Content is King’ remains true, the accessibility of content can be helped with a well thought out structure or hindered by an ill-conceived or ineffective structure. While there will be those who’ll predominantly use the search to find the information they need, there will be others who will navigate using the intranets structure and beyond this. Your structure informs the way your organization stores different types of information and will aid in the adoption of your new intranet.

It’s important, before you start building your structure, before you start planning it, in fact, that you first consult the experts. Who are these structure experts?

The answer…Your employees.

Who better to guide and advise you on where end users would expect to find information on your proposed intranet than the end users themselves. Consulting your employees can be done in many different ways, but one of the most effective is with ‘card sorts’ with several different groups of end users, preferably groups with different information needs for the intranet. For the best results these card sorting exercises should be carried out under the watchful eye of an external professional, to provide prospective and analysis of the results. Be sure to ask your proposed intranet provider what sort of consultancy they provide.

Your top navigation menu benefits from being short and sweet, like that created by coca-cola enterprises for their intranet.

Home | company | Workbench | life and career

Jonathan Phillips, Senior Manager Digital Communications

While you’re consulting people about the proposed structure of your intranet, you might also want to ask them about the terminology you will be using. Upper management may refer to the “Field Nourishment Delivery Facility”, but calling it that on your intranet is just going to confuse everyone if end users call it the “Cafeteria”!

It’s important to remember that an intranet is about fluid communication across the company, use descriptions, menu titles, words, and phrases that are most commonly used within your business. Make sure they are in simple, clear, and easy to understand English. Look for intranet solutions that allow you the flexibility to alter not only menu items, but also system text to the terminology that is critical in your business, as this will help people feel more comfortable in the new environment and speed up adoption.

When deciding on a structure, time should be spent on considering the pros and cons between developing a task based configuration or structuring around departments. Many intranets will be a blend of the two.
“When we re-launched [our intranet] compass, I took the opportunity to revise our menu architecture by collating feedback from a survey and asking a focus group to devise their ideal structure/look. As a result compass was really well received by end users.”

Ayesha Graves,
Intranet Manager,
Waterstones and winner Interacts Best Intranet of the Year
A functional intranet will have a simple and consistent navigation system. There will be clearly understandable and visible links between where a user is and where a user can go. There should also be an easily accessible and understandable site map to further aid orientation. Tooltips, visual clues and structural clues all need to be considered, ensure you select an intranet. There are many ‘best practice’ concepts around setting up the optimal structure for your intranet. Permanent navigation options, a prominent search box and area specific navigation in a simple, easy to follow and consistent style is a good start.

Overly long top menus, too many options nested several levels deep, menus that take forever to scroll through and can’t be contracted and icons and image blogs that are not consistent are all intranet no-no’s. Make sure your choice of intranet supplier will take the time to cover these important points and guide you through the designing and setting up of your structure.

Great intranet software will offer you the flexibility to easily create a tailored solution that fits the expectations and needs of your end users. A great intranet software provider will offer you the benefit of their knowledge and experience during the creation stage.

Branding Your Intranet

Many organizations who replace a failed or outdated intranet with a new system find it difficult to motivate and re-engage staff with the new tool. No matter how different the software is, it can easily be ‘tarred with the same brush’.

A great way to help people differentiate is to use the tried and tested marketing strategy of branding. If you give your intranet a brand – a name which uniquely identifies it – and only refer to it as that, you will find that people stop thinking of all intranets as being equal.

Some of the names that have been used by our clients include anagrams such as:

- ‘Yeti’ (Your Electronic access To Information)
- ‘Elaine’ (Electronic Accessible Information Network),

To more concept driven names such as:

- ‘The Passion’
- ‘Connect’
- ‘The Hub’
- ‘The Group Vine’

Through to purely fun names such as:

- ‘Westie’ (with their character being a little white westie dog)
- ‘Merlin’,
- ‘The Fridge’

Although the award for the most... unique . . . name has to go to the company who have named their intranet ‘Trevor’.

Glasgow Housing Association – Holmes

Glasgow Housing Association (GHA) is one of the largest social landlords in Europe, dedicated to creating better lives through better housing. With a large number of staff, working from many offices, effective internal communication was a challenge. Implementing Interact Intranet has enabled them to facilitate more effective and efficient Communications, enhancing staff experience, saving time and improving customer services.

Holmes was launched in 2012 and quickly became a success across the business. It is seen as an opportunity to share ideas and information, no matter your job role. This has sparked their Think Yes campaign, using collaboration to eliminate obstacles to excellent front line service.

The sheer scale of adoption and impact it has across the GHA estate saw them win Interact’s Intranet of the Year 2012.

The intranet has become a place to regularly share ideas and has allowed management the opportunity to not just implement, but to continually learn.

Superdrug – The Hub

The Hub has united Superdrug’s retail and office locations across 12,500 users. It is the chosen method for all of Superdrug’s campaigns from product awareness to training and improvement.

Their Operations Director led the way with simple social actions, @tagging the people he was meeting and #tagging themes of those meetings. Leading by example has seen this behavior quickly picked up across the organization.

Retail employees log in from home to conduct training. When they pass, a photo of them with their certificate is shared on the intranet, raising the prestige of passing.

Bauer Media – Media Vine

Bauer Media are better known by their publications including Grazia, Heat, FHM, Match Magazine, Empire, Q and a host of interest magazines. They also run a host of radio stations such as Magic and Key 103. They wanted to encourage knowledge sharing and collaboration across their various online, print and radio
divisions. They opted for a vibrant look which would instantly be recognized as the Media Vine brand. They ran a naming competition pre-launch which was unveiled on launch day.

Media Vine has been a huge success; anyone can add company news, blog, ask the business a question and answer other people’s problems. They saw in a very short period of time a new form of connections emerging between people with a similar need rather than the traditional trend of departmental links.

From sharing the latest live recordings on their radio stations to gaining enthusiast opinion for their specialist interest magazines, Media Vine has made this quick and easy.

Waterstones – Compass

Waterstones chose the name Compass for their intranet so they could drive home the message that with this new software, internal communications had a new purpose - to help their 1000+ staff ‘find their way’ back to the corporate brand after many years of store communication being reduced to erratic, brief email updates.

Compass is now an immensely active intranet with 75% of users visiting it daily and is now the first place people turn to when they need information.

Training, consultancy and Support

Training

When considering the resources and budget that your new intranet will need don’t forget to include the training. This shouldn’t just mean the staff who will be directly involved with setting up, maintaining and adding content to the intranet, although training these people should be your primary concern. Training in the new system should also be extended to everyone who will use it. Well trained staff can turn a useful intranet into an absolutely invaluable tool for your business.

Hopefully you will have chosen an intranet that is easy and intuitive to use, so you are probably wondering why training for all your staff has being suggested, the answer is ‘so you can get the most out of your new software’. Your new intranet will have loads of exciting functionality and features built into it, many of which may not be evident to your staff (why would they look for something they didn’t know was there?) so may be missed. A little training will help them feel...
“I don’t think the launch of our intranet would have been anywhere near as successful without the consultancy days. During the pre-launch sessions we carried out user testing, worked with ‘champions’ from around the business to determine the new layout and structure, and brainstormed ideas for launch and company-wide engagement. Interact’s expertise meant the workshops we held with members of staff were informative, well-organized and productive. Following the launch, we had another evaluation session – and what an eye-opener that was! We looked at internal survey results and statistics and carried out more user testing – and I think we learned a lot from the results! It really does go to show there is always room for improvement and I intend on holding sessions like these with Interact on a regular basis.”

Sarah Farrand,
Internal Communications Executive,
BCS – The Chartered Institute for IT
more comfortable and confident with their new software helping to increase adoption.

Many companies include intranet training as part of a new starter’s induction, however for a new intranet you may need to consider a new approach. Here are some of the ways you can give people training.

Establish ‘Intranet Champions’ among your staff, give them some quick intensive training every so often and task them with spreading this information through the company.

Have a blog/forum/page on ‘Useful Intranet Tips’ where people can post features and functionality they have found useful in the system. You could even offer a monthly prize for the best suggestion. This encourages people to explore their intranet, with the added benefit of their discoveries being recorded for others.

As part of your launch, have ‘lunchtime’ drop in sessions where users are encouraged (free lunch?) to learn how the new intranet works, fill in their profile details and ask any questions they might have.

As you can see there are lots of options to training your staff that don’t involve an hour out of their day in a ‘class room’. Remember to give your overall training plan some consideration when you are evaluating the more in-depth training your intranet software company of choice will be providing for your key intranet staff. Ensure your intranet is a success by making certain that the people administering it are up to date with the latest knowledge, tips and tricks.

Consultancy

Analysis and review should be corner stones of a well-run intranet. Without regular structured investigation, comparing the intranet you have against the intranet you need becomes an impossible task and this comparison is vital for keeping forward momentum in an intranet and ensuring its fulfilling its potential. If you don’t know where your intranet has been how can you make informed decisions about where it’s going? This analysis and review comes in many forms, depending on your intranets age and your business needs, working out the best way to get the feedback you require can be a daunting task.

Look for a supplier that offers consultancy to help you get the most out of your intranet.

As recognized market leaders, Interact has been advising companies on the structuring, creation and maintenance of their intranets for over a decade. This has furnished us with a wealth of knowledge and practical experience about just what makes an efficient and successful intranet.

We draw on extensive experience in our consultancy sessions. Working closely with your intranet team, our dedicated professionals understand the complexities of implementing and maintaining successful intranets and will help you ask the right question of your users, your stakeholders and sponsors to determine the best way to get the most out of your intranet.

Our comprehensive consultancy covers four key stages:
• Review – Research and Analysis
• Planning – Content and Architecture
• Engagement – Governance and Launch
• Evaluation – Reviews, Analysis and Metrics

Highlights of these four stages include:
• Analysis and review of your currently intranet
• Best practice advice covering intranet adoption, engaging users, structuring your intranet and much more
• Mentoring of your ‘Intranet Team’
• Examples of how other intranets have faced the same challenges you face and overcome them

For further details please contact our Consultancy and Training Team: training@interact-intranet.com

Consultancy should cover three distinct areas:
• Pre-Launch Consultancy – such as establishing the overall aims for the intranet, working out the structure and content details and how this will fit and benefit your business.
• Launch Consultancy – how best to launch (or re-launch) your intranet into its business environment and how to set up governance and guidance for those who will use the intranet.
• Post-Launch Consultancy – this could take place soon after launch or many months or even years after launch, this sort of consultancy should review and evaluate your intranet. The findings should be backed up with detailed research and analysis. This intranet ‘health check’ should be done on a regular basis to ensure that you are getting the most from your system and should include tips and advice to help fix an ailing intranet if this is what the analysis shows.

Support

It can be tempting to do without software support, but this often proves to be a false economy. It is crucial that once your intranet is up and running you have the necessary back up to keep it operating efficiently.

Support is a very general term in the IT arena, and any support contract you enter into should offer as wide a scope as possible to make sure you get the most out of your software.

Questions you need to consider:
• Will you be able to get both telephone and email support?
• Is there an online, self-service option?
• Will your support contract cover bug fixes and software updates?
• What response times should you expect?
• Will your support contract include any value added services e.g. Access to a client extranet area or User Group Newsletter, discounts on training etc.
• Does your supplier offer a variety of support packages to suit your needs e.g. annual contract (usually based on a percentage of the software cost) or pre-paid support (where you can purchase a certain number of cases in advance for a fixed fee)
Part 3: The launch

In this section we look at some ideas for the launch of your intranet as well as creating on-going enthusiasm for your intranet once it has launched.

Ideas for launch:
Make Your Intranet a Success from the Very Start

The key to success is in the promotion of the intranet – an intranet must be constantly advertised to staff. Without this, many staff will remain unaware that the intranet even exists. Others won’t recognize the full value of the intranet, or use anything but a tiny corner of the site.

The best time to raise the profile of the intranet is right at the outset. An intranet launch can take many forms, both large and small scale. Many of the ideas outlined here can be used in a coordinated fashion during the intranet launch. This ‘big bang’ approach works best when the intranet is able to deliver on the high level of expectation generated.

Even a small launch can be effective in making staff aware that a new method of finding answers is now available.

Launch Videos

Teaser videos and launch videos instantly engage people. It makes it easy to watch and follow as well as giving an impression of being cutting edge, clicking play to watch a video is as simple if not simpler than using YouTube. Glasgow Housing Association and Bauer Media made excellent launch videos to encourage both launch and sustained adoption.

Intranet Treasure Hunt

Another way to get your new users to tour your intranet is to run an online treasure hunt competition.

Romc launched their intranet with the opportunity to win a weekend away in New York. Remote workers were sent their log in details through the post on the back of a New York ‘Wish You Were Here’ postcard. The competition was advertised across over 2,500 sites and the message was consistent through cascaded communications and the company magazine.

Giving presentations

The visibility of the intranet must be maintained at every level of the organization. For management and executive, presentations are typically the most effective way of communicating messages. These may cover the intranet at a high level, explain specific initiatives, or new functionality. Ensure these presentations are well-prepared and to the point. Keep talking about the intranet, as often as you can, to as many people as possible.

Don’t Just Name Your Intranet But Give It Character

We’ve seen an increase in the number of Intranets with a character. Glasgow Housing Association’s intranet Holmes has a Sherlock...
Holmes character who talks to customers and discusses user’s ideas.

Swagelok named their intranet after a long serving employee who was due to retire. He had been the ‘go to person’ for all queries so they decided to create their new intranet around him in tribute and included a character called Knowlesy.

G4S had a life size version of their intranet image Hari walking around the office plus a host of competitions and gifts to raise awareness and excitement.

**Email links to intranet**

A very effective marketing method is to replace email attachments in global emails with links to the relevant page on the intranet. In this way, the emails act as ‘push’ marketing of intranet resources. It also reduces the load on the email systems. This works well, for example, with news items and other announcements. Some education is required to encourage email senders to reduce their reliance on attachments.

**Using the communications team**

Internal communications or internal marketing teams are professionals who specialize in conveying targeted messages to the organization. Use this group as a resource to promote the intranet, and to further increase usage.

“We launched clubhouse in time with our Peak Season christmas promotion. With all the communication regarding the promotion it created a huge pull to it, which really got staff engaged with the intranet from the off-set.”

*Malcolm Payne, Management Information Manager, American Golf*
Brochures
Every intranet should be supported with a simple brochure outlining the key features and benefits, along with screenshots and URLs. Beyond this, there are benefits to professionally producing a full-color brochure. This presents a more compelling image, and is more likely to be noticed by staff. Many organizations have an internal graphic arts department who can prepare such materials. American Golf created brochures explaining the goals of the new intranet, its installation time line and gave easy to follow instructions to get people started.

Automatically loading homepage
Throughout the organization, every browser should have its homepage set to the intranet. That way, when the browser is opened by the user, the intranet is immediately presented.

Beyond this, some organizations have chosen to automatically launch the browser on login. This puts the intranet in front of users at the beginning of every day. Many of these organizations have found this approach to be very successful, particularly when the intranet homepage changes frequently (such as presenting news, etc.).

Football Predictions
In those cultures where sport is an important institution, competitions such as ‘football predictions’ are commonplace. Implementing such competitions on the intranet have been listed as ‘killer applications’ by some intranet teams. Once staff access the intranet, they are more likely to browse to other areas.

Some of the most unusual ‘killer apps’ turn out to be the most effective.

Displays in foyer
Posters or other displays in the main foyer of offices can attract the attention of staff arriving each morning. These should feature high-impact designs that can be easily read from a distance. Large-format color posters can be a practical way of achieving this.

As part of their launch strategy, Bron Afon set up ‘Intranet Café’s’ where people could drop in during their breaks or lunch and explore their new intranet, Buzz, with help at hand to answer questions and offer guidance.

Letterhead and business cards
The intranet should be listed on all internal stationary and newsletters, along with all internally printed material that provides information. In this way, the intranet is promoted as the primary source of information in the organization. This ‘ever-present’ advertising can be quite effective over time.

Gimmicks and novelties
A wide range of promotional products have been used to increase awareness of the intranet.

These include:
- Mouse mats
- Stickers
- Balloons
- Masks
- Lollies and other confectionery
- T-shirts

While these can be effective, make sure you understand the culture of the organization. Not all staff may be keen to be bombarded with such gimmicks.

Migrating key applications
By migrating key applications, staff can be forced to access the intranet. Examples often include vacation or sickness forms and other HR functions. Always ensure that the replacement web-based application is at least as capable and usable as the system it replaces. Otherwise, considerable staff frustration will be generated.

Killer apps
Many successful intranets have a few key ‘killer applications’ that drive overall interest and usage. What these are depends entirely on the organization and its staff. While some ideas for killer apps have been listed in this article, many others are possible.

Keep a look out for opportunities to develop these plug-in applications. It may be possible to meet a widespread need in the organization, with only a few hours of development. (Killer apps don’t have to be large, in fact, many are small systems that target a very specific requirement).

Promoting via the business
The business owners of specific sections can be co-opted to launch and promote their content. As the advertising comes from within the business, it can be more effective than that conducted by the central intranet team. It also shares the burden of intranet marketing more widely.

Quote of the day
Any daily-changing information on the intranet that is of general interest is a good way of promoting the intranet. One organization uses a humorous or controversial ‘quote of the day’ feature on the intranet to generate increased usage. XML/RSS feeds are an easy way to automate this process.

Staff profiles
Each week, some intranet teams post a profile of a staff member, selected from across the organization. This may be a senior executive, down to a junior staff person. This increases the sense of community within the organization, and is an interesting talking point.

As variation on this, one organization provides a number of hints, and runs a competition to guess who the staff member is. With the unusual nature of many of the hints, this generates wide interest.

Bulletin boards, discussion groups, blogging and micro-blogging increase the interactive aspects of an intranet and can considerably boost usage and visibility.

Discussion groups, bulletin boards and other collaboration tools provide staff with a new mechanism for keeping in touch. While the majority of these online forums are likely to be devoted to serious work issues, less formal areas, such as a ‘buy and sell’ area often prove to be very popular.

These collaborative tools also have the benefit of reducing the over-reliance on emails.

Staff induction
New starters are unfamiliar with the way the organization works, and where to go for answers. By including a meaningful section on the intranet in staff induction materials and activities, new staff can be trained to see the intranet as the primary information source in the organization.

Sending a welcome message: Related to the previous idea, one intranet team automatically sends a ‘welcome’ message to all new staff, introducing them to the intranet.

Fixing browser settings
Depending on the state of the IT infrastructure, some users may not be able to access the intranet, due to incorrect proxy or other network settings. Without a bookmark to the intranet, or having it set as the
homepage, users are also likely to have difficulty. While this is strictly the domain of the IT support desk, some intranet groups have found it valuable to spend time fixing the settings on individual workstations.

Over time, this considerably increases the potential audience for the intranet.

Management support

If senior management see the intranet as a strategic asset, they will naturally promote its use. A number of studies have shown that lack of management support and sponsorship is one of the largest causes of project failure. Conversely, if the intranet does have the required support, this will have a huge impact upon levels of usage, and long-term viability.

Spend time ‘selling’ the intranet to management, and ensuring that they understand its role within the organization.

Training managers’ PAs

Many senior staff rely entirely on their personal assistants (PAs) to look up information, and to use computing equipment. For these key staff, training the PAs in how to make use of the intranet is the best way of having an impact.

Maximizing the value of the homepage

The intranet homepage is the most valuable ‘real-estate’ on the entire site. Use this to present the most recent, and most useful, information on the intranet. By maximizing the value of the homepage, overall intranet usage can be increased.

Coordinated marketing plan

Finally, all of these activities should be integrated as part of a single marketing plan. This spells out what the message is, who it is targeting, and how it will be delivered.

Bring all your ideas together into a single coordinated marketing plan.

The role of organizational culture

As a final note, it is important to recognize the role of your organization’s culture in the success of any promotional initiative. While in one organization, novelty value might be very effective, the level of cynicism of similar projects in different organizations may demand a more low-key approach.

Creating Enthusiasm for Your Intranet

It’s easy to make mistakes when implementing an intranet if you don’t have the proper support from your team, which can ultimately reduce the effectiveness of the system.

Generating enthusiasm for the intranet project is important. It is obvious that having the buy-in from management is vital to getting the project launched, but at what other levels should you look for input and enthusiasm? If you don’t get that excitement for the intranet, how can you generate it?

If you can’t create the right culture for information sharing, no software will help your project succeed. With the right culture in an organization, an atmosphere will be created where an intranet can thrive.

Enthusiasm is a big contributor in many aspects of life, and a level of excitement can do wonders for your intranet strategy. Staff who have made an emotional investment in a project will care more about its continued success, they will feel proud and have a sense of importance.

There are two main phases where you need to generate enthusiasm as a project leader. The first as discussed earlier is getting the buy-in of the management team for the project. This is the passion to get a system installed, and to see it through to the go-live date. Most projects need this in order to get off the ground, but interestingly this alone will not make your intranet succeed.

The most important people to get excited are the staff – the content managers, department heads and administrative staff who will be responsible for making the system a continuing success. The key to this is making a difference to their jobs by identifying common bottlenecks and daily irritations, and including these in your key objectives.

Here are some ideas for creating enthusiasm among staff...

You’ve heard the saying “familiarity breeds contempt”? Well it applies to intranets too. If you don’t update or add to your intranet then users will often assume it is going stale and momentum can be lost. This is the reason we often suggest a phased approach to the intranet – start with the basics and keep adding functionality every month or two. By gradually adding tools to the intranet over time, you can keep users coming back to it.
Another technique is to look for those who will take on the task of helping to keep the intranet updated, and promoting their new responsibility in the company. It is vital that your content managers see this as a way for them to contribute to the company directly, and make a difference to their colleagues, rather than as ‘yet another hoop to jump through’.

The culture of the company will often determine how the intranet is used, and whether it is still in use 18 months after installation. Organizations with little or no culture of information and knowledge management face many more hurdles to success.

In old-style business, knowledge equals power. If an employee had a vital set of information, the tendency was to keep it to themselves in order to make their position in the company invaluable. In modern business, knowledge is still powerful, but the truly enlightened are those who know where to find the information they need at any given time. Nobody is expected to “know it all” any more - the real skill is knowing where to find the information. Ensuring this change in your staff’s mindset has occurred will reap huge rewards.

So, what is a ‘good’ culture? Your staff should form a “trust relationship” with the intranet, which means that:

- Users trust that the information they need is available on the intranet
- They trust that the information on the intranet is correct and accurate
- They also trust that the information is the most up-to-date version available

If your staff have this relationship then they will be far more likely to remain enthusiastic, excited and active on the company intranet.

As we have seen, internal marketing and promotion of your intranet will affect its success as much as the software itself. It’s far easier to keep people enthusiastic about the intranet by ensuring it is kept fresh and exciting than it is to get staff excited all over again after letting the intranet go stale. Also, making sure the intranet contains information that is both accurate and up to date will reward you with a culture of trust and responsibility. This will lead to greater usage of the intranet which will positively impact companies’ efficiency and profitability.

These two stories are instructive:

One intranet client sent round a box containing a fun-sized Kit Kat and a message saying “take a break”. Everybody got this and were given authority by management to take half an hour out just to familiarize themselves with the new site, and have their Kit Kat. Apparently it was very successful.

They also included a ‘Place the Face’ competition, encouraging staff to use the People Directory on their new intranet to look up the answers.

Compare this to another experience:

“Part of our launch was that we didn’t launch. We just rolled it out, and did not create any expectation that it was coming. That was actually part of its success, because we had so many things roll out that didn’t meet expectations, and didn’t meet the deadline that they were supposed to be rolled out on.”

While they both came from companies with very similar organizational structure, there are clearly big differences in the culture.
Part 4: Maintaining Effectiveness

In this section we look at ways you can keep users coming back to your intranet.

After you first launch your intranet you will notice a great deal of interest and participation. In our experience there is a novelty effect which helps raise the profile of your intranet for the first few months, leading to high usage, increased awareness and productivity as staff find new information and online tools. However after a few months, staff often creep back into old habits and the intranet usage falls as shown in the diagram below:

Intranet Usage Graph
Launch and Forget Approach

Set targets for increasing efficiency

Your intranet is not like your website and you should not judge its success purely on the number of hits that it achieves. As a far more complex business tool, you must define how you’ll measure success. For example, rather than simply looking at hits, you should set targets such as saving each person in the company 5 minutes per day by using the intranet. Although this is more difficult to assess and measure than “hits”, it provides a direct return to the business.

Who isn’t using your intranet is as important as who is

Consider if you could save just 5 minutes per day, the whole company would be 1.1% more efficient immediately:

\[
100\% / 8 \text{ hours per day} = 12.5\% \text{ per hour}
\]

\[
12.5\% \times /12 (5 \text{ minutes is one twelfth of an hour}) = 1.1\% \text{ increased productivity}
\]

To many companies, that will be worth many tens or hundreds of thousands of dollars on their bottom line. Put another way, save just 5 minutes per day in a company of 500 people and it would be the equivalent of having an extra 5 1/2 people working, for free, everyday:

\[
5 \text{ minutes} \times 500 \text{ people} = 2500 \text{ minutes} \times 60 = 41 \text{ hours} = 5.5 \text{ days}
\]

increased productivity per day

Setting and achieving these goals is not as hard as you may think; the beauty of an intranet is that you can add facilities which benefit everyone by just a very small amount, but the cumulative effect of that across the entire organization is massive.

Making the intranet the hub of communication and information is key. Then you can keep it moving with new information and features, so that your staff comes to expect everything to happen first on the intranet.

Phase the Intranet

We often classify ideas using MoSCoW for both pre and post launch:

**Must Have | Should Have | Could Have | Won’t Have**

Most companies start by putting policies and procedures on their intranet, which is great for the company but the staff aren’t going to be excited by the fact that the Health and Safety Policy is now more accessible. These sort of content related features are rarely ’A’ ideas, so once the novelty of the new intranet has worn off, usage amongst some staff may fall.

If you phase these features over time then you will ensure that the intranet is a success and starts to positively affect your bottom line as well as improving communication and efficiency, i.e. instead of just launching the intranet and leaving it, you launch a new feature every 2-3 months. You will then find that the general usage of the intranet increases with every feature.

Launch and then add new features regularly

So what are these Must Have features?

In our experience, there is not a magic solution as each business is different, some ideas are complicated and some are incredibly simple. Here are some real world examples. Some are simple ideas and some are additional functionality (all of which can be achieved with Interact).

Planned small bursts of new functionality can improve this:

However an essential intranet bridges those gaps:
Staff perks booking

One company that we work with allows their staff to book a certain number of free tickets each month, all through the intranet.

Access to flextime reports

A lot of the NHS and public body organizations give users of the intranet access to personal HR information through the intranet such as flextime reports. This is a big hit and a real reason for employees to come back to the intranet week after week.

Vacation booking

Numerous companies use this and it quickly becomes a key system, making everyone’s life easier. Staff regularly check holiday calendars and how many free holidays they have left.

Expenses management

Again, used widely, for those that submit regular expenses, making the intranet a mission critical tool.

Live graphs of sales

One organization charts their latest sales figures using the Home Page Module (linking through to excel), another shows their membership targets.

Key Performance Indicators

These may be key targets, customer feedback results, latest share prices or lead time on support issues and could all come from different systems – collated on one page in the intranet for ease of viewing. A number of companies may have ‘scorecard data’ that they can share on the intranet.

Many companies find the staff directory to be a Must Have feature. Some have even extended it to include extra search facilities such as staff skills search. Several other companies use the SMS module to send messages to staff.

Other simple things include: • Database of products, • Other in-house data, • Collection of useful links, • Employee of the month, • Automatic links to Multi-map on addresses.

These are just a few ideas, each organization or business is different and you need to find that Must Have feature that is right for your organization. Once you have found it, you will find that the effectiveness of all your other content will increase as well as usage and the skills to find specific information will become more widespread. When a member of staff goes to book their holidays on the intranet, they may well notice a new company announcement on the home page, which they would never have read otherwise.
Summary

Embarking on an intranet project requires more than just writing a couple of database applications and putting them on a network.

A useful intranet requires an appealing, easy to use interface, integrating applications with appropriate security features, the ability to integrate new applications easily, documentation and governance that provides help and guidance for people, and applications that can be easily maintained and upgraded.

In fact, a well-planned and thought out intranet can really revolutionize the way your company does business. It can certainly change the way your employees interact and positively impact all of your business processes.

Intranets give companies the power to manage in new ways. But taking advantage of the opportunities requires shifting views from managing things to managing knowledge and information flows.

Over recent years there has been a real transfer in thinking. From just another technical ‘buzzword’ to jump on the .com bandwagon, to a tool that significantly improves efficiency while driving down costs.

In a world where time is money, many managers still worry about the costs of implementation of an intranet, but it seems that no other approach can bring so many opportunities by decreasing wasted time while offering massive efficiency gains and significant Return On Investment.

But creating an intranet that achieves all of your company’s objectives and meets your business requirements is a complex task requiring a wide range of skills. But with tremendous ROI, how can companies seize all of the opportunities available without the painstaking, costly task of implementation?

Intranet Planning Checklist

The following checklist brings together a range of considerations for establishing and maintaining an effective and sustainable intranet.

Building a Business case for Your Intranet
Consider the potential of the intranet to enhance the operation of your organization.
• What business benefits will your intranet achieve?
• How quickly will ROI be achieved?
• How can an intranet benefit the different departments/areas of your organization?
• What benefits to envision beyond the ROI in terms of collaboration and communication enhancements across your company?

Consider the Specific needs of the Organization
• Key Features
• Branding Your Intranet
• Linking to Other Systems
• Identify User Needs

Determine Intranet Goals
Effective intranet goals generally focus on business outcomes and benefits such as:
• Increase staff efficiency, productivity and satisfaction
• Improve decision making
• Improve customer service by providing accurate and consistent advice
• Support internal communications and collaboration
• Reduce duplication of effort and costs
• Build corporate identity

Establish an Intranet Project Team
The planning and on-going development of an intranet requires a diverse skill set as well as the consideration for issues from different viewpoints:
• Appoint intranet sponsor/s - senior intranet sponsors can drive the adoption and growth of the intranet
• Intranet Management - a single manager or team to manage the intranet on a day-to-day basis and market it to users
• Content authors - usually representatives from different areas of the business who take responsibility over managing the content of particular intranet sections

Design and content
• Build or buy? Consider the pros and cons of building your own solution or purchasing an out-of-the box solution
• Your intranet should be easy and efficient to use for all users, regardless of their IT literacy
• Carry out regular evaluations and usage monitoring to ensure that the site remains effective
• Incorporate ‘killer applications’ and make the intranet a place for ‘doing things’ e.g. booking holidays, staff directory with professional networking groups, online forums
• Ensure high quality content – if the information on your intranet is not consistent, accurate, comprehensive and appropriate, staff will seek the information from alternative sources
• Information architecture – consider the more appropriate structure for the intranet, e.g. task/subject based structure
• Establish content review processes – can these be automated through the content management system?
• Ensure the intranet meets accessibility standards – intranets are required to be accessible by disabled users and users of assistive technology. These requirements have been outlined by the Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI)
• Ensure that the intranet administrators and authors receive adequate training

Launching our Intranet

Marketing the Intranet
• Name the intranet – consider a naming competition
to determine a suitable name. This can generate awareness and knowledge of the new (or redeveloped) site
• Establish clear intranet branding – this can help distinguish the intranet from the corporate website
• Develop a communications plan – this outlines the ‘message’ about the intranet that will be conveyed, who the target audiences are and how and when they will be contacted
• Plan other promotional activities:
  -Presentations
  -Emails linking to intranet
  -Automatically loading the intranet home page on log-in
  -Gimmicks and novelties
  -Staff training/induction

Build trust in the intranet. Staff are more likely to use and support the intranet if they have confidence in its content and management. Users will trust the intranet if they feel that:
• Content is complete, accurate and up-to-date
• The intranet will continue to be viable into the future
• It is worth devoting time learning how to use the intranet
• The intranet is being supported and taken seriously by senior management

Plan to phase in new functionality over time – this gives you the opportunity to repeat some of the marketing initiatives above and will help you maintain interest and usage in your intranet
Interact Cloud

Work no longer means being tied to a desk in an office 9 to 5. People now work from anywhere be that a coffee shop, in between customer meetings, or on a train whilst travelling to a different office. So they need to be able to access all of the information they require, regardless of their location. Interact cloud provides that access securely by making your intranet available to employees wherever they are, on any device.

Interact understands that reliability, security and recovery requirements vary between organization and industry sector when using cloud solutions.

All our intranets use SSL (HTTPS) to encrypt traffic between the end users browser and Interact’s servers ensuring all communication is secure.

Authentication

Interact cloud offers a variety of authentication and identity services to ensure only authorised users can access your solution.

LDAP - Synchronisation and Authentication with Active Directory. Easy to use with access to the intranet with your existing windows username and password.

SAML 2.0 - Authentication through a third party identity provider. Out of the box support for ADFS with support for other providers such as One Login and Okta.

Local Directory - Locally stored credentials for the intranet where each user has their own username and password for the intranet. Quick setup with no IT involvement and Immediate Provisioning. Easy Management tools including Forgotten Username / Password, Password Strength Rules and Password Reset.

Data Centers

Interact cloud is provided by Amazon Web Services (AWS) in their world class, highly secure data centres in multiple geographic locations including Europe, North America and the rest of the world. With multiple geographic regions and Availability Zones, Interact Cloud can remain resilient in the face of most failure modes, including natural disaster or system failures.

Interact cloud is designed and managed in alignment with best security practices and a variety of IT security standards including:

- SOC 1/SSAE 16/ISAE 3402 (formerly SAS 70 Type II)
- SOC 2
- SOC 3
- FISMA, DIACAP and FedRAMP
- PCI DSS Level 1
- ISO 27001
- ITAR
- FIPS 140-2

Backup and Recovery

Backups are taken of customer data on an hourly basis and held locally, daily backups are also taken and held at a secure remote location.

- Disaster Recovery: Interact have a recovery time objective of 8 hours in the event of significant disaster
- Data Recovery: Interact data recovery objective is 4 hours
- Data Loss: Customer data can be recovered within 24 (working) hours
- Backups are retained for a minimum period of two months

Service Commitment

Interact is committed to meeting a Monthly Uptime Percentage of 99.7% of service availability. Interact cloud consistently exceeds the Monthly Uptime Percentage of service availability which currently stands at 99.9% for the 12 month period to November 2015.

Software Configuration

Software updates are managed and implemented by the Interact cloud team including application releases with new features, security updates and bug fixes pushed on an ongoing basis.
Interact, the intelligent intranet

Interact is intelligent intranet software. The flexible and scalable solution has more than 750,000 users and has revolutionized the way companies communicate, collaborate, share knowledge, and streamline internal processes. Interact promotes a culture of collaboration and idea sharing by using corporate social networking and micro blogs. Non-technical users can quickly and easily update the intranet.

About Interact

Founded in 1996 with headquarters in the UK, Interact operates globally and is one of the fastest growing intranet software companies. Interact has built a strong reputation of delivering successful and collaborative intranet solutions to leading companies such as Make A Wish, ADT, ASPCA, and Chevron Financial Credit Union.

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