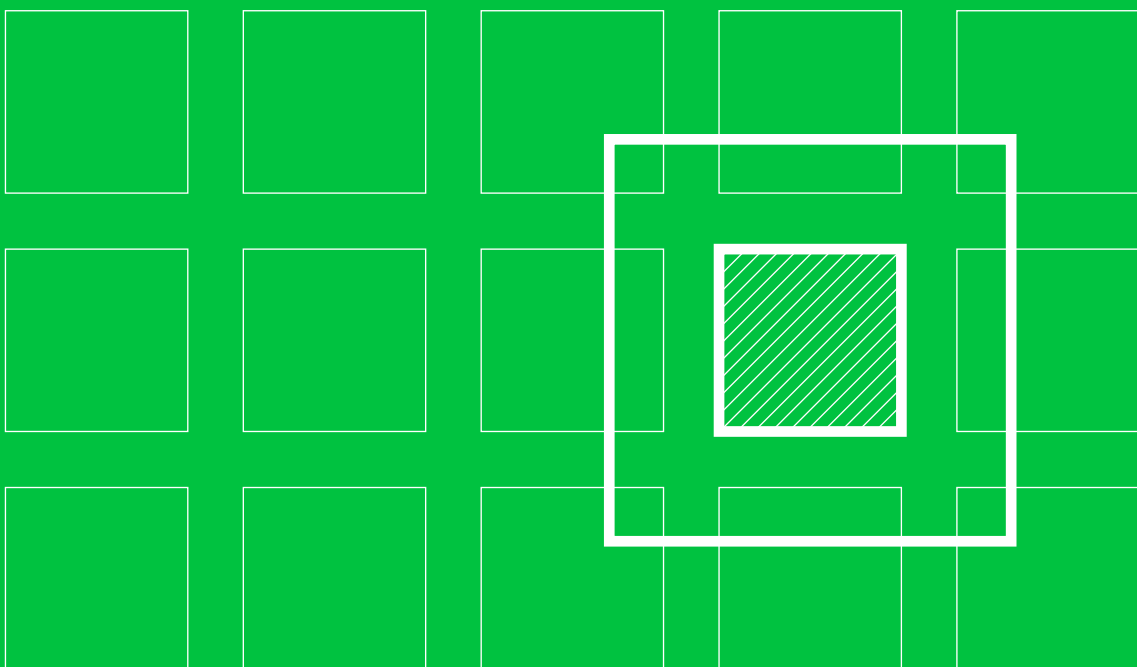


Intranets: are they still relevant?

Exploring the role of the intranet
in today's digital workplace





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Intranets: are they still relevant?

As early as 2010, business commentators have been forecasting 'the end of the intranet'.

In a digital age, new tools pop up almost daily. We're connected 24/7 via social media platforms and smartphone technology, we have information available at the tips of our fingers and the modern-day consumer expects more from technology than ever before. In such a competitive landscape, can the old-faithful internal communications platform still deliver value? Given the competition, are intranets even relevant to modern-day business?

With buzzphrases such as "enterprise social networks," "digital workplaces"

and "collaborative workspaces" fast appearing in business communications, it's no wonder some feel these new age approaches signal the demise of the intranet.

However, these arguments may actually demonstrate the power and influence intranets **continue** to have. What many see as its competitors are, in fact, its evolved form - simply repackaged and given a fresh title.

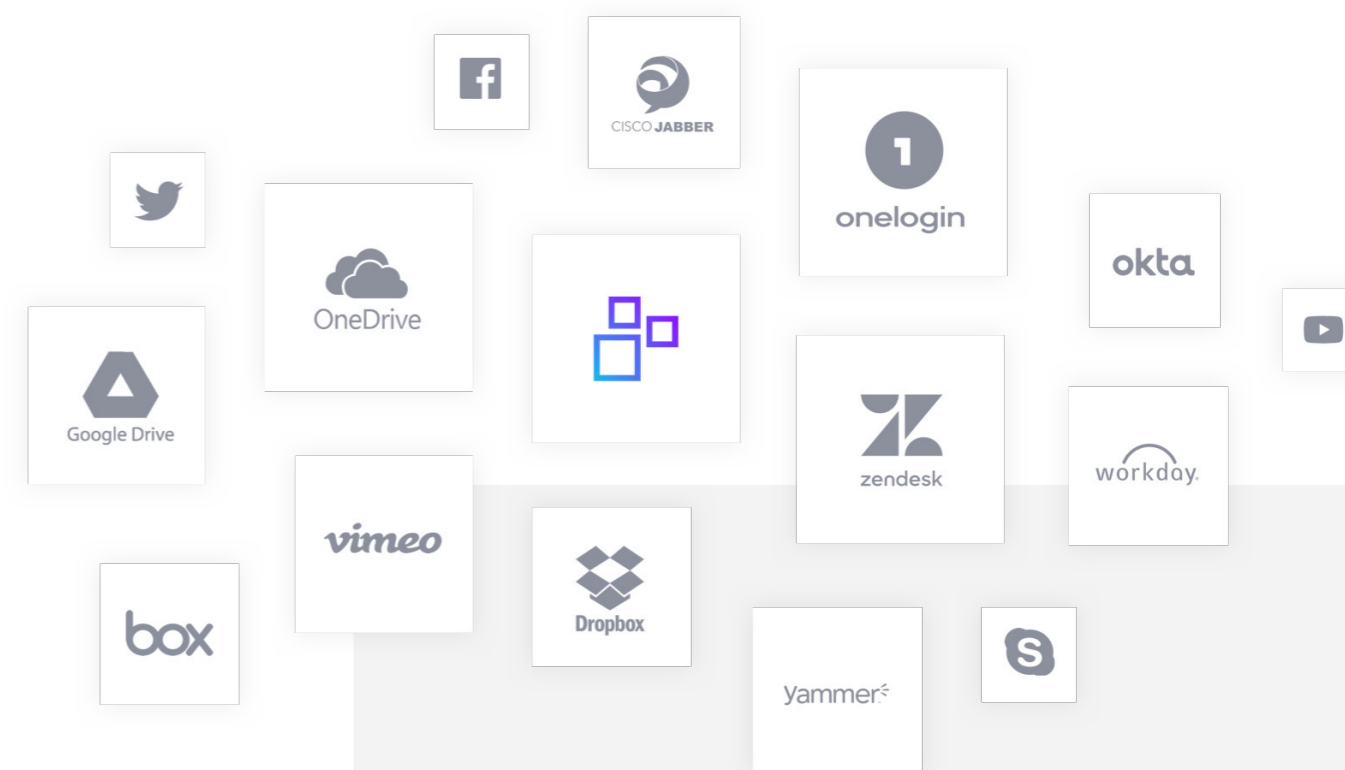
In this eBook we explore the changing role of the intranet since its inception, the reasons intranets fail to thrive and the role they continue to play in the current and future business environment, regardless of the title we assign to them.

What is an 'intranet'?

Intranets have evolved and adapted to the market and its demands since their first appearance in the 1990s, with the earliest editions now nearly unrecognizable to the modern-day user.

Following the explosion of the internet, the intranet made a reserved

appearance originally as singular welcome pages with essential company information. Flat, text heavy with the traditional blue hyperlinks, they served to deliver basic company communications before developing into a clunky document management system (DMS) by the mid-late 1990s.



With the growth of technology, intranets began to evolve. Helpdesk features were introduced, enabling users to perform transactional processes such as finding colleagues on the employee directory, performing basic HR functions such as booking absences, and searching for information.

From 2000 onwards, intranets were beginning to be recognized as valuable enterprise portals. Platforms began to incorporate the company brand and identity, with content and applications designed to support employees in their day-to-day roles. While still heavily-weighted as a company information tool, intranets were able to deploy better search features, allowing employees to access the information they needed quickly and effectively.

Through the 2000s, social media began to take hold in the public

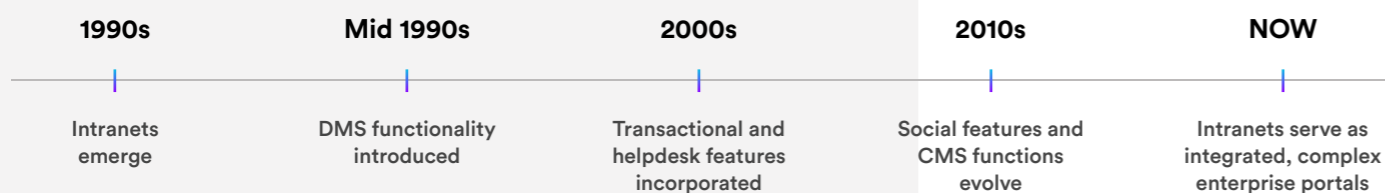
domain. As the value of these tools was recognized, intranets began to mimic their success by integrating basic social functions into their platforms, including limited blogging tools, wikis and discussion forums.

Content management systems developed, and intranets picked up the technology. It became easier for individuals and teams to access documents in a centralized location, and communities became commonplace as the earliest collaboration features of intranets emerged. Greater capability of forms also meant intranets became cross-functional within a business, used by multiple departments including HR and finance to have employees 'self-serve' and streamline business processes.

Social tools moved at a fast pace, and intranets followed. User profiles took precedence, with communication and collaboration tools moving to the forefront of development. Rather than being a place to simply push information down from management and to house documents, intranets could be used for employees to work together. Activity streams, microblogging and other familiar social tools crept into the domain, and two-way conversations were the result. Employees could comment, like, share and ultimately engage more with their organization and each other.

If the history of intranets through time can demonstrate anything, it's their capacity to adapt and evolve according to demand and trends. When defining an intranet, it's important to consider not necessarily what it is now, but what potential it holds.

The intranet of 10, 15 or 20 years from now promises to be near-unrecognizable to today's platforms, as developers continue to innovate and push the boundaries of possibility.





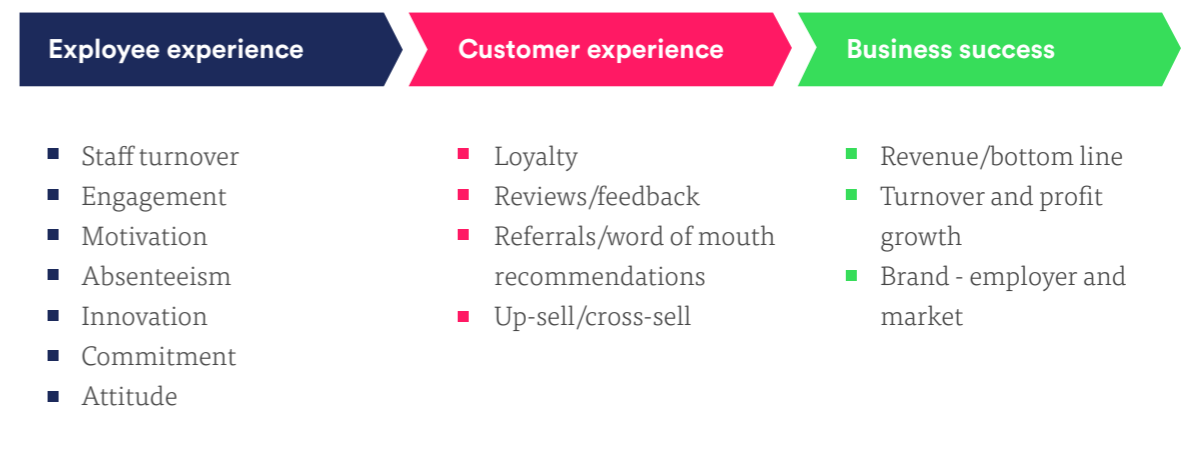
The domino effect: employees and the bottom line

The business market is more competitive than ever before. Globalization, free trade markets and constant innovation mean very few (if any) organizations can claim a total monopoly for a given product or service; what's more, the changing attitudes of consumers and a need to protect the bottom line mean we're no longer competing on price or product alone. To remain competitive (or simply survive) in today's market, organizations have to provide an outstanding customer experience.

This now goes beyond the realms of traditional 'customer service,' which focused primarily on first-hand interactions with consumers. Expectations now span the entire user experience, from aesthetics (of websites, apps and collateral) and technological interactions (reducing crashes or server downtime) to point of sale contact, personalization and more.

So, as an internal tool typically unseen by the customer, why are intranets relevant to the customer experience?

The answer is the domino effect of employee and customer experience:



Employee experience impacts on the experience they create and sustain for your customers; and this, in turn, impacts on business success.

Case study: Starbucks

In 1993 Starbucks had just 272 stores; as of June 2015, they boasted an eye-watering 22,500 – a growth of 8,272%. The About Us page on the Starbucks website tells visitors to ‘Expect More Than Coffee’ – a reflection of the approach that has made the chain so successful.

Aesthetics of the infamous stores reflect cafes, designed to welcome people to “chat, meet up or even work”. Small touches like wireless charging points, free Wifi and the infamous ‘tell us your name’ initiative add to the experience, making it friendly and tailored. Personalized rewards were also offered via its loyalty reward program and app.

However, the use of technology and design alone isn’t enough; ensuring a 360-degree experience includes the frontline experience delivered by its people. As many a review will testify, customer experience can be diminished in a moment by a rude, disengaged or disinterested member of staff.

Starbucks has succeeded in addressing this also. Employee turnover rates are almost half the industry average, and the company has earned a spot on the Fortune’s 100 Best Places to Work for the past 13 consecutive years. Given the evidence, it’s safe to assume a link between happy employees, happy customers, and happy business results.

Intranets and employee experience

So, where do intranets have an impact?

In its [State of the Global Workplace report](#), research analysts Gallup observed:

“Employees who are engaged work with passion and feel a profound connection to their company. They drive innovation and move the organization forward.”

Among some of the factors in Gallup’s employee engagement model, employees pointed to the following elements that made them feel engaged:

- Availability of resources to perform well
- Freedom from obstacles to success at work
- The materials and equipment to do their job right
- At work, the opinions of employees seem to count
- The mission or purpose of the company makes employees feel their job is important

When established and embedded correctly, intranets play a central role in shaping employee experience by answering all of the above drivers for employee engagement with their organization.

A successful intranet will cater to the 4 'C's required for any employee to excel in their role:

- **Communication:** two-way conversations that give users insight and information on the organization and its mission or direction, as well as enabling them to push feedback to management and ensure their opinions are heard. Intranets also provide a means for colleagues to connect, regardless of location, department or level of seniority.
- **Collaboration:** the ability to work together to achieve business goals in a manner that is intuitive, simple and efficient, removing barriers that can impact productivity and ensuring the right tools are readily available.
- **Content:** a variety of content and resources, covering essential business information such as policies and documents, through to company news and blogs. This ensures employees have all the information they require to do their jobs well.
- **Context:** ensuring that the right content and information is made freely available to the right people, at the right time. Using a variety of metrics including user behaviors and interactions, keywords, tagging, age and more, effective intranet software will ensure a search for "business expenses" doesn't return a 5-year-old CSR blog on how expensive the photocopier is to run, for example.

A successful intranet, therefore, will work alongside good management and a positive working environment to ensure employees feel engaged, motivated, and positive about their roles – translating into a positive customer experience, and ultimately, greater business results.



When intranets lose their relevance

Intranets lose their relevance to business when they fail to deliver on their core purpose of driving employee engagement.

Typical red flags include:

- Poor adoption by users and/or management
- Unclear or indemonstrable value in relation to core business objectives
- No tangible ROI
- Bad engagement with content
- Reputational damage

Given the considerable investment that usually goes into implementing an intranet solution – both financially and in terms of time and internal resource – it’s no wonder senior management will express a fear of failure.

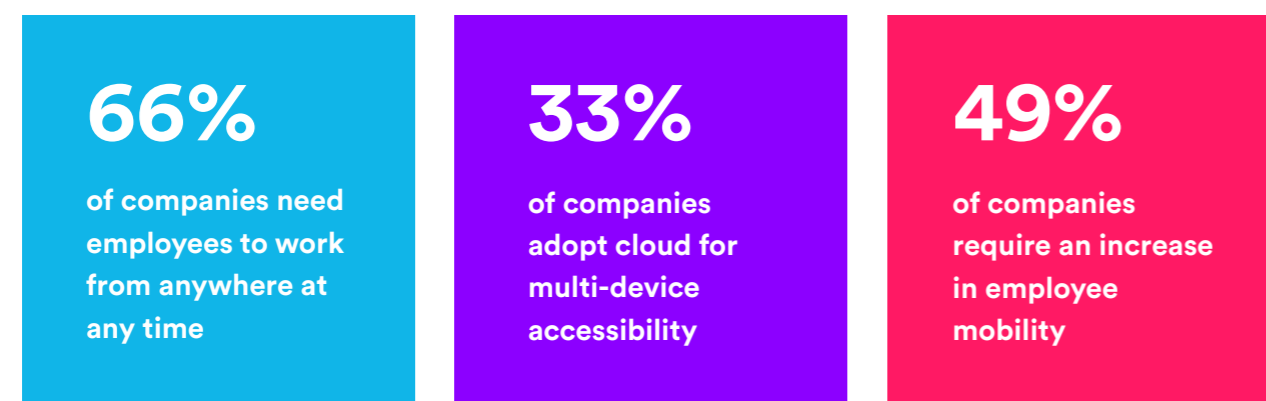
underline the future direction of intranets and present the solutions (or preventative measures) to these red flags.

In order to remain relevant and competitive, intranets must respond to these major developments:

Some big-picture changes in the internal communications sector

- **A digital workplace:** providing an ecosystem that allows interconnectivity across different tools, applications, and systems for a centralized and seamless employee experience
- **Social enterprise:** responding to the growing popularity of social tools within the workplace and implementing this for greater productivity and collaboration
- **Cloud:** providing connectivity for employees regardless of time or location that is secure, centralized for better document version control, efficient, and reliable
- **Mobile:** catering to the growing use of mobile or smart devices to access work-based platforms away from the office, and ensuring platforms can be accessed and viewed regardless of device

Why do intranets need to adapt and respond to big picture changes?



A digital workplace: are intranets relevant to the communities they serve?

Perhaps the most prominent reason intranets fail to thrive is due to a lack of understanding behind the science of communities: that is, the different groups of people using the platform and the end goals those groups have.

Typically, there are four distinct 'communities' that will be found within any business. Here, we demonstrate their varying goals and the tools they require to achieve those objectives.

Community	Definition	Examples	Tools needed
Purpose	A group who connect to work towards a shared objective	Project team, committee, tender/bid team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Document collaboration ■ Calendars ■ Tasks
Event	A group who connect due to a physical or virtual event	Facebook groups, conferences, training courses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Calendars ■ Timeline ■ Forms
Practice	A group who connect due to shared profession or expertise	LinkedIn groups, geographically dispersed experts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Forums ■ Ideation ■ Questions and Answers
Interest	A group who connect over a common interest	Corporate Social Responsibility, charity work, sports, social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Blogs ■ Conversations ■ Galleries

From the above, it's clear that different groups, individuals, and communities within any organization will have unique approaches, pain points, and requirements when it comes to achieving their goals – calling

for a vast spectrum of applications, features and tools. A lack of adoption or engagement with an intranet often arises from its inability to provide these different ways to collaborate.

Alongside diversity of employees and their needs, organizations also now use a variety of tools to get work done, to manage employees, to communicate with customers and vendors, to develop and distribute goods or services, and much more.

An effective intranet will not attempt to replace or replicate these tools. Instead, intranets should complement your existing technology stack,

becoming the central hub for an interconnected ecosystem. Using integration functionality, intranets can signpost or streamline user journeys across multiple systems within your business. By driving a true “digital workplace” where users can log in to one, centralized location and have access to all the tools, platforms, information, people, and applications they need, intranets arguably become more relevant and essential than ever.



Enterprise Social Networks: can intranets get employees talking?

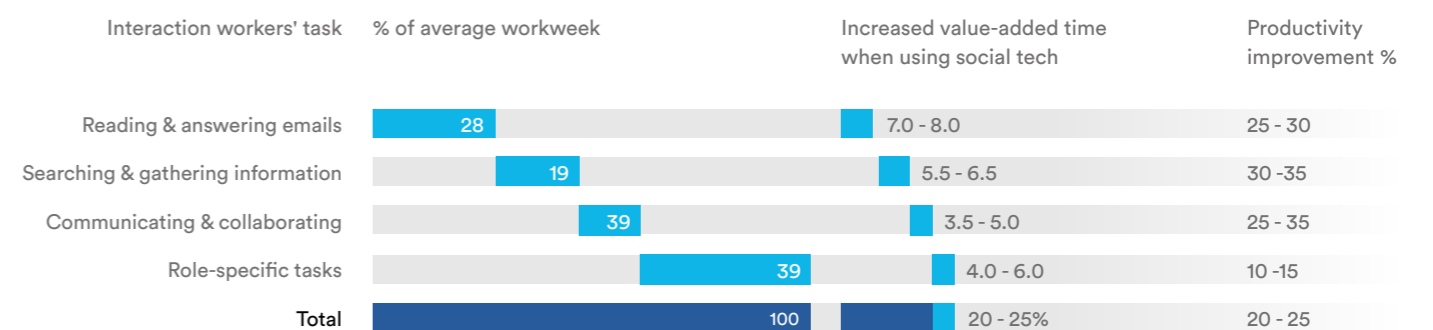
As social platforms continue to evolve and introduce new ways for users to connect and communicate, internal communications platforms have recognized the growing need to align with these recognizable and easy-to-use tools that individuals adopt in their personal lives.

As innovations continue in the social media market, intranets have shown their capacity to keep pace and respond to new trends and developments. This user-centric approach to design increases usage and engagement, making intranets a powerful business communication tool.

The most recent examples of social tools in intranet platforms include @mentioning, #tagging and

instant messaging (IM). Deployed successfully, social features not only connect individuals but increase collaboration; for example, by @mentioning specific documents, pages or groups.

What’s more, intranets that incorporate these tools are shown to provide that all-important ROI and value sought by top level management. In its report, [‘The social economy: Unlocking value and productivity through social technologies,’](#) research analysts McKinsey Global demonstrate that improved communication and collaboration through social technologies could raise the productivity of knowledge workers by 20 to 25 percent.





Cloud: can intranets be relevant to all employees globally?

According to Microsoft, 66% of organizations need employees to be able to work from anywhere at anytime, and 73% of knowledge workers report the need to collaborate with different people in different time zones and regions at least monthly.

As the trend towards flexible and remote working continues, it is more vital than ever before that employees can connect with resources and colleagues, regardless of time zone or location.

The answer for many is a move towards cloud-based technologies, which offer the agility and flexibility required for a globalized digital workplace.

As the go-to collaboration space for an organization, intranets should be no different. Cloud-based intranets not only relieve the burden on IT services by allowing for faster executions, instant updates, and reduced downtime; they also cost up to 60% less than an on-premise solution, and deliver increased usage amongst employees. Interact analytics show 23% of activity now occurs outside of work hours, which would not be achievable with on-premise servers.

Cloud technologies represent a way to futureproof organizations. Accessibility and the ability to connect dispersed workforces now make intranets a vital digital workplace tool.

Why are cloud technologies on the rise?

82%

of enterprises have a multi-cloud strategy

66%

of organizations need employees to be able to work from anywhere

88%

of cloud users experience cost savings

73%

of workers need to collaborate with people in different timezones

23%

of intranet activity now occurs outside of work hours

Embodying this technology within intranets not only answers the call for an “enterprise social network,” a growing demand in the internal communications field, but will also

streamline processes and increase productivity, making intranets arguably more relevant than ever in a competitive market.

Mobile: can intranets provide a seamless digital experience across devices?

Mobile digital media time now accounts for 69 percent of digital media time spent (ComScore: [US Cross-Platform Future in Focus, 2017](#)) with the desktop falling to less than one-third of total digital media time.

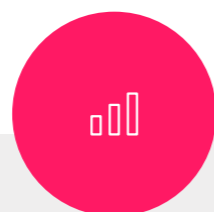
What's more, as the use of mobile devices continues to rise, the app economy is projected to double in size to \$101 billion by 2020 (Source: [App Annie](#)).



69% of digital media time now occurs on mobile, compared to **31%** on desktop



90% of media time is undertaken on mobile apps, than mobile site versions



The app economy is projected to double in size to **\$101 billion** by **2020**



App versions of intranets for **iOS** and **Android** are growing in popularity and usage

Intranets that are designed exclusively as a desktop application will quickly become redundant as users demand accessibility outside of work. Research by [Yahoo's Flurry](#) also suggests that 'mobile sites' won't satisfy consumer demand; apps continue to dominate the market, with 90% of media time currently undertaken on mobile apps over mobile site versions.

These trends suggest that the ability of intranets to cater for the growing mobile market are foundational for their continued relevance.

The good news is that this is increasingly common practice. Mobile compatible intranet sites that cater to both the smartphone and tablet markets are now well-established; app versions for iOS and Android are also growing within the market.



The selection process

Intranets have changed and progressed significantly and as such, can only continue to be relevant if they tick certain boxes for both users and business.

First and foremost, intranets have to be adaptable and continue to evolve. History demonstrates the flexibility of the intranet to do this; selecting an intranet partner who prioritizes innovation, continues to invest in development, and releases regular updates, is imperative.

Intranets also need to unify the vast spectrum of business platforms that saturate the market, while offering a spectrum of tools to support different modes of communication, collaboration and processes. By tracking market trends for communication both in and outside the work environment and embracing integration functionality, intranets can safeguard against uptake and adoption risk, and deliver tangible ROI.

As mobile usage, telecommuting and globalization increase, intranets must evolve accordingly and ensure accessibility, driving adoption by hosting in the cloud and ensuring platforms are compatible across multiple devices.

What is clear, however, is that when people talk about “digital workplaces” or “enterprise social networks” as competitor approaches for internal communication – they are failing to consider the sheer range of functionality of an intranet and its ability to encompass and facilitate these demands. When done right, an intranet goes above and beyond these definitions.

A social intranet takes tools from enterprise social networks and builds upon them, giving levels of collaboration that can't be realized within an ESN alone. It centralizes

and drives the digital workplace by bringing together the tools and platforms employees use daily for a seamless, integrated experience.

An intranet is an enabler, a portal: it not only boasts value in its own right through a spectrum of functions and tools but unifies all the technology and noise that crowds the modern-day workplace into a single, centralized location.

In a world defined by the technology we use, successful intranets, therefore, remain more relevant than ever. Constant innovation will continue to deliver yet more applications, platforms and tools to facilitate the way we work; to combat the growing climate of ‘technology fatigue,’ organizations need a simple solution to streamline the clutter.

Intranets provide the answer: both for the individuals they serve, and the companies who adopt them.

Are intranets still relevant? We put this question to our users during a webinar and the vote was unanimous: **100% yes**

About Interact

Interact is a global enterprise software company that serves intranet software to over one million users across more than 850 organizations. We specialize in solving internal communication and collaboration challenges by combining our sophisticated intranet software with outstanding professional services, focusing on developing long-term strategic partnerships with our customers.

Interact has offices in **Manchester** and **New York**, and operates across the whole of the **US and Canada, EMEA and Australia**.

Enjoyed this eBook? Why not explore the rest of this series on social collaboration technology? Earlier in the series, we explore:

- 01** [WHY do I need social in the workplace?](#)
Making the case for social and collaborative technology
- 02** [HOW to get the boss to say 'yes'](#)
Securing stakeholder buy-in for your project
- 03** [WHICH social collaboration tool is right for my business?](#)
Understanding social technology, and choosing a platform to meet your needs

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