# Intranets

**Dion Lindsay**

## The fourth generation of intranets

Doing the rounds of my usual clients in the not-for-profit sector, it is clear that this autumn managers who are not information professionals are beginning to see intranets less as products in themselves, and more as features of the collaborative way of working in which many are putting their faith as the future of effective, productive organisational work. It is easy to speculate, as I have heard some do, that intranets are on their way out, to be replaced by collaboration platforms and enterprise social networks.

For those information professionals whose work comprises in part managing the content of intranets, however, there is no serious cause for worry – on the contrary, their efforts can be given more prominence than ever. What I believe we are experiencing is a new generation of intranets, which has at least three predecessors.

In the mid-1990s, intranets fulfilled the role of repositories of authoritative, stable information sources, providing an increase in efficiency for departments that had been delivering policies and procedures to the workforce's desks in the form of written documents. This generation eased the problems of consistency and timeliness by providing a single electronic source, from which all staff could draw.

By the turn of the millennium, many intranets had an added function of communicating news, and acting as a managed (though often competitive) environment for teams to publicise their value to the goals and aspirations of

the organisation. This era saw the standardisation of the three column intranet – with home pages offering a rapidly changing column of news items, sandwiched between a navigation column outlining the contents of the site, and links to other resources in the organisation's digital landscape.

By the mid-2000s, just before the recession slowed up the radical development of in-house communication and knowledge sharing products, Web 2.0 features had become a mainstay, providing access to the technology for and displaying some of the results of user collaboration. These were often based on in house communities of practice, consisting of discussions among and between teams. These produced an often erratic delivery of ideas, tools and guidance to support the rapidly changing work patterns.

This new generation in turn features access to in-house social media discussions and their highlights, with advanced information-sourcing tools and business processing support.

It is in this area where the modern intranet combines with collaboration environments (of which Huddle, tibbr and Yammer are the most common examples), and where the expertise of the information professional has fresh value, primarily in the indexing, meta-analysis and governance of the emerging information.

These new features have been much in evidence in the programmes and releases from this season's three major intranet conferences I previewed in the Intranet column of the autumn issue of *Elucidate*. In the rest of this column I provide links and summaries of their most outstanding outcomes – they are all very much worth a look, and demonstrate just how social media are making modern conferences environments in which even those unable to attend in person can feel a part: a boon to those readers whose organisations are not (yet?) able to finance attendance.

## Outcomes from autumn intranet conferences

### Interact Intranet Conference, London, 24-25 September

A long and highly informative summary was posted as a blog by Interact Intranet on 2 October at http://tinyurl.com/nfdph9e. It provides a very generous summary of all the streams from the conference, and many embedded videos and slide decks from the conference.

The Twitter thread at #iic13 was exciting to follow – and is still available to all those with Twitter access. Choose your favourites from the 26 tweets from participants during the conference. Here are my top three:

> @DigitalJonathan 25 Sep Opinion: The problem is when organisational culture and structure doesn't allow full exploitation of collaborative tech. #iic13

> @kellya_freeman 25 Sep Collaboration isn't something you buy and turn on. You have to work at it to get adoption. A process not an event! #iic13

> @DigitalJonathan 25 Sep Opinion: Deleting content is a real shame. It's your searchable organisational history that we can always learn from. Archive please #iic13

### Nordic Intranet Summit, Stockholm, 21-22 October 2013

A summary of the conference exists at http://tinyurl.com/pz5ajng. Don't be put off by the predominantly Swedish language of the report: Google Translate is well suited to providing translations.

61 interesting tweets were posted during the conference. My favourites (with Google Translate-assisted translations in square brackets):

> Sina Keshavarzi @sinakes 21 Oct Intressant liknelse mellan intranät och gammaldags anslagstavla #norintra #intranät pic.Twitter.com/D2IfsYJVTm [Interesting analogy between intranet and old fashioned bulletin]

brorsan @brorsan 22 Oct Yammer network visualized measuring collaboration: find the critical glue #norintra pic.Twitter.com/zWfVUA0r7x

Åsa Andersson @asacharlotta 21 Oct Mobilt intra. Inte intra på mobilen. Bra Jaan @orvet #norintra [Mobile intranet. Not intranet on mobile]

## J Boye's Web and Intranet Conference: Turn experience into advantage, Arhus 5-7 November 2013

Janus Boye has provided a great set of videos from the conference at http://aarhus13.jboye.com/video/. My favourite tweets from #jboye13?

Mobile content CREATION http://aarhus13.jboye.com/news/get-ready-for-mobile-content-creation/

Janus Boye @janusboye 17m Slides: The art and science of selecting the right CMS http://www.slideshare.net/JanusBoye/the-art-and-science-of-selecting-the-right-cms … #jboye13

All told, a fascinating and useful set of information from the three conferences – all illustrating that we are in the 4th generation of intranets, with promise for a strong future for the tool, and a continuing role for intranet professionals.

Best wishes for the festive season!

*Dion Lindsay is Managing Director of Dion Lindsay Consulting Ltd*