

The Unconference of the Year – Intranet Now wowed the intranet world at its first attempt

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The Intranet Now conference on 2nd September was a joyous success. There was more energy and a better sense of fun on the day than I have experienced in the last few years at any conference of that scale.

Wedge Black and Brian Lamb, who organised the conference, are two independent intranet consultants who were persuaded, or persuaded themselves, that it was high time the UK had its own independent intranet conference. It was only in April 2014 that they started putting together the elements that a conference requires, but by the time the 2nd September came they had procured a good central London conference site, well-known speakers and around 130 participants.

The morning was full of inspiring and useful presentations from Intranet names at the top of their form. Twenty speakers included Gerry McGovern, Elizabeth Marsh from Digital Workplace Group, Kim England from Pearson and Nigel Williams from Interact, to name just a few.



The day was marketed as a hybrid conference/unconference, so the afternoon was full of delegate-nominated discussions. Wedge and Brian did a great double act worthy of Morecambe and Wise in their cheerful efforts to get people to pitch their ideas for the sessions. They were so effective that at times people from one group were leaning into another group to contribute something in real time and then leaning back into their own again.

Collateral

There are no proceedings from the conference, but Wedge and Brian have maintained the dedicated website for Intranet Now and all the full slide decks from the presentations are on the site. Participants were avidly tweeting both comments and photos throughout the day, and a professional photographer was on hand all day to create a huge album of snaps. <http://intranetnow.kilobox.net/> will give you the full agenda, the list of speakers and the presentations.

#IntranetNow will provide you with hundreds of comments and pictures of key slides

Interview with the Intranet Entrepreneurs themselves: Wedge and Brian!



Co-founder of Intranet Now Wedge Black



Co-founder of Intranet Now Brian Lamb

UKeiG are proud to have been media partners for the organisers and a week after the event I interviewed Wedge and Brian. The story of the conference is best told in their words, so here is what they had to say:

DL: It's great news you intend to run this again this time next year. Have you thought yet about any changes you might make for the next one?

“It actually sounds like intranet managers would like a longer event next time”

Wedge: We've taken feedback from a proportion of the attendees and the weird thing is that it tells us that everyone liked the packed agenda and the fact we had so many speakers. But on top of that people would like a bit more time to ask questions. So it sounds like they want a longer event, which will be difficult, as we have to stop sometime after 5 pm!

DL: What about having a day and a half?

Wedge: Well that would be incredible, but people have said, you know “why not make it three days with workshops?” But it's all about costs, and the value to the attendees. As Brian and I evaluate the feedback accidentally we keep trying to design next year's event! But of course we've got plenty of time.

DL: It was wildly successful but you only started planning it in what, May?

Wedge: Yes, May-June, and then come July we were desperate to find the right venue. So we have done well in a short period of time.

DL: Did you find any scepticism about the tight deadline, or did people jump straight in?

Wedge: Well, occasionally people asked us “How are you marketing this?” and our answer was “We're not marketing it, but you know, we've got quite a few people saying hello to us on Twitter”, which of course was a ridiculous thing to say, but it was true. We were asked to do a webinar, and we thought it would be good marketing. We worried we wouldn't have our key speakers lined up by then. But by the time it came to do the webinar, we were sold out!

“It really was social media marketing at its best”

Brian: Wedge is very well connected! He used those connections to the max. It might be a trite phrase, but it really was social media marketing at its best.

Wedge: It's not to say we didn't really appreciate the email newsletter that UKeiG sent out to its members (thanks for the plug Wedge! DL). It really made a difference, and although a lot of our marketing was social media, we did have some targeted email distributions as well, and that must have helped us reach the right people.

“Part-time intranetters are awake! What’s different about Intranet Now was that there was a physical space where exactly those people could gather”

DL: At UKeIG we were particularly pleased at the number of people who came with practical experience of intranets. We’ve been aware for a long time now that for most people involved in intranets in the UK, it’s only part of their job. And that makes it harder for them to get away to intranet conferences.



Enthusiastic pitchers for the afternoon sessions

Wedge: Absolutely. If your role is in digital comms, or “comms” as we used to say, that’s where I was ten years ago. You see, if they’re wearing three hats but expected to do it all in a forty hour week, that’s our target market. I can demonstrate that because of the price Brian and I agreed (a ground breaking £60 for early-birders and a £120 full ticket price). We knew some people would have to pay for themselves, that it isn’t always just about an expense docket. And that’s what I mean about community - people in those jobs have been blogging about their intranets for the last ten years.

DL: So there is a community, and it didn’t take much prodding to wake them up.

Brian: They *are* awake! What’s different about the Intranet Now conference was that there was a dedicated physical space where exactly those people could gather.

DL: Yes, there was a strong sense of a latent community, and right from the start of the conference we were all on the same page, and making instant friendships.

Wedge: Well I hope that’s true. Obviously people were very nice and came up to talk to us during the day, but I hope they met each other as well.

DL: Just as a last thing. Looking back now, what has excited you most about the whole experience?

Wedge: It's very exciting to create something from nothing. It feels like an act of creation, and it's such a privilege to have so many co-creators. And to look back and say: we have created something from nothing, feels special.

“It feels like it's got another decade in it!”

DL: And for the future?

Wedge: It feels like the event's got another decade in it. With the annual Intranet Now award, the topics that were showcased and the sponsors that wanted to be involved. I'm looking at this for the next ten years!

Brian: The strength of the response was very encouraging. Knowing that there is an online community where people are working and talking in the world of intranets and the fact that they came together at Intranet Now to demonstrate the strength of the community. It all shows us Intranet Now is here to stay.

DL: Brilliant! Is there anything you want to say directly to our eLucidate readers?

Wedge and Brian: Just that when it comes to planning next year, we want to hear even more real cases from real intranet managers. We may have some semi-famous speakers again, but it's not always about the speakers, It's about intranet managers sharing their intranet journey!

Intranet Now Diamond award

A very touching and thoroughly deserved presentation was made to Martin White of Intranet Focus at the end of the Conference, as the first recipient of the Intranet Now award for his remarkable contribution to the intranet community. Martin's surprise was palpable, and the applause from the participants made it clear how wholeheartedly they approved of Wedge and Brian's choice!



From Left: Brian Lamb, Martin White (recipient of the inaugural Intranet Now Diamond award), Wedge Black.