

Meeting Report: Taming your Intranet March 2006

The course gathered a large cross-section of the information profession, from those who oversee their Library's site pages to those who manage intranets for complex multi-sited organisations. Irrespective of this, it was soon established that everyone was tackling similar problems; including issues around staff 'buy-in', user expectations, competition from e-mail and shared network drives, ownership of content, and archiving/deletion policies.

The day focused on how some of these issues could be resolved, however it highlighted the inherent conflicts within intranets, for example:

- Organisational needs versus user needs;
- People and their interaction with technology;
- Variant user needs;
- Information store versus a communication tool;
- Up-to-date information versus an archive;
- Flat structure versus a hierarchical structure;
- Centralised content management versus decentralised.

In the process of discussing these, Luke Tredinnick, author of *Why Intranets Fail (and How to Fix Them)*¹¹ attempted to cover much of the content of his book, a tall order in a six-hour seminar.

Although the course was titled *Taming your Intranet*, it did begin to feel there was a *bit* too much doom and gloom; with a feeling that the problems have been around for some time and no one has really found the solutions. A session on sharing success stories, however, lifted spirits, and the day was a valuable opportunity to discuss both problems and successes with fellow professionals.

To find solutions to the challenges our intranets pose, we need opportunities to learn from each other. Also, to share experiences of using newer web technologies within our intranets; wikis, blogs, RSS feeds, folksonomies and social tagging were touched upon in the final part of the day.

A few key issues I took away from the course:

Keep the intranet's aims realistic and the intranet small;

- Exploit what is working well;
- Manage users' expectations by informing them of the intranet's core function.
- Ensure users do not have to work harder, than before the intranet existed, to find information.

And finally, one of the day's key themes was that our intranets are a reflection of our organisation's culture, processes, and practices within them. And so, in our roles as intranet managers, for success, we need to become enablers of cultural change.

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¹¹ Tredinnick, L. (2004) *Why intranets fail (and how to fix them): a practical guide for information professionals*. Oxford: Chandos Publishing Limited.