Intranets

Intranet Miscellany

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A round-up of recent intranet books and reports

This month the column might well be called a Miscellany as I'm going to pick up on various books and reports and some other things that interest me, and I hope you.

6x2 methodology for intranets

I mentioned this report a couple of issues back when talking about my 2.1/2.2/2.3 etc route to intranet development. Now it is finally published. It addressed the fundamental but sad position that intranet teams are confronted with many business needs with insufficient resources and little support to solve them. With little recognition of the value of the intranet, it is often very difficult to gain the required resources, and maintain the energy levels and enthusiasm of the intranet team.

James Robertson has developed a very pragmatic approach to the resolution of these problems. The 6x2 methodology works round a six month planning cycle, with a focus on what can be achieved in the next six months, and what might lie ahead for the following six months. The methodology is based on a ten-step process, of which only the final two steps are about implementation. There is a strong message here that good planning and preparation are essential if tangible and visible results are to be achieved. The key messages are about setting realistic objectives and then delivering on them.

As with all StepTwo Designs reports there is the strong feeling of a synthesis of experience from a wide range of client projects. The clarity of writing and the design of the 104pp report ensure that it could be used within hours of downloading it. If you have to make a business case to spend the money, divide the price by the number of employees, each of which will see a significant improvement to the intranet within six months. A small price to pay for transforming your organisation. Before very long the 6x2 methodology will be the intranet equivalent of the Balanced Scorecard. Simple but very powerful. Don't just read this – go and buy a copy!

James Robertson, StepTwo Designs http://www.steptwo.com.au Price $189.

Books for intranet consultants

I was asked by Monique Cuvelier, the editor of *FreePint*, to write a column for the newsletter on the books that I would recommend for intranet consultants. Most of you have probably read the column but if not, the link is http://www.freepint.com/issues/190407.htm and scroll down

Making Search Work

I make no apologies for promoting my new book. It took up a lot of time last year, and I need the royalties, so have a look at http://www.intranetfocus.com/technology/searchbook.php. Helen Carley and Lin Franklin at Facet Publishing were brilliant, even allowing a very last minute change to the text to

take into account the IBM/Yahoo! announcement. The cover design is stunning. In the USA Information Today are acting as sales agents, and in May I will be doing a book signing at the Enterprise Search Summit in New York. J.K. Rowling look out! One outcome of the launch of the book was that I was called up by Sean Donahue, who is a journalist for Marketingsherpa. http://www.marketingsherpa.com. He interviewed me on various things I said in the book, and came up with a stunningly good article. You can read it at https://www.marketingsherpa.com/barrier.html?ident=29929

Search blogs

At last there are some blogs on intranet/enterprise search. The Enterprise Search Practice blog http://feeds.feedburner.com/EnterpriseSearchPracticeBlog comes from Gilbane, a US consulting and conference company run by Frank Gilbane. The content is quite good but there is no attribution to the author, and the layout is terrible. Just one long paragraph with what I take are bullets being denoted as > marks in line with the text.

The Fastforward blog http://www.fastforwardblog.com/ comes from FAST search, and is somewhat broader than just enterprise search. The articles come from a range of contributors and the standard is high. However I have a dislike of orange on white – not the most readable of colours. My standard mantra with the colour of text on websites is that if the colour combination is used for road signs (black on white, white on blue, white on green) then the contrast is going to be pretty good. But have you ever seen a road sign that is orange on white? One further observation. Whenever the company refers to itself in print it is always styled FASTSearch. So why is the logo just *fast* with a lower-case f?

Although a newsletter rather than a blog, the NIE Enterprise Search Newsletter is essential reading each month. http://www.ideaeng.com/

David Goebel writes SearchMax http://searchmax.blogspot.com/, which is always a good read, though sometimes I wish he'd give more of an opinion. I suppose it's a question of not ruffling the feathers of paying clients of his company's services, but you always get the sense he knows more than he is telling.

Groxis

I continue to be impressed by Groxis http://www.groxis.com. The problems of federated searching and of managing large datasets are being increasingly challenging, as is explaining them to senior executives in an organisation. I have been using the Groxis site for some time now to illustrate federated search (even if just searches across Yahoo!, Wikipedia and Amazon Books) and also to show the way in which search results can be presented graphically, so that users can navigate through a large and diverse collection of results with no more than a click of a mouse. This is accomplished using the Grokker Web application, which can be used for both website and enterprise applications. Not only is this a good site for demonstration purposes but the company have taken a lot of time and effort to present the case for their software in terms that business managers, rather than information specialists, can understand. Other vendors in this space should look and learn. I know that there are other similar applications available (http://www.kartoo.com/ comes to mind), but in my view none make their case as well as Groxis.

Faceted navigation

Faceted navigation has been around for some time, but is only now starting to get the attention it deserves. Have a look at the demos from the Endeca site at http://endeca.com/demo.html, and the Siderean site at http://www.siderean.com/customers.aspx.

There is a brilliant set of coursework slides on the principles of faceted metadata from Marti Hearst, a Professor at the University of California, Berkeley based on the outcomes of the Flamenco project http://flamenco.berkeley.edu/. The slides are at www.flamenco.berkeley.edu/talks/chi_course06.pdf but it is an 8MB download

The Flamenco search interface framework has the primary design goal of allowing users to move through large information spaces in a flexible manner without feeling lost. A key property of the interface is the explicit exposure of category metadata, to guide the user toward possible choices, and to organize the results of keyword searches. The interface uses hierarchical faceted metadata in a manner that allows users to both refine and expand the current query, while maintaining a consistent representation of the collection's structure. This use of metadata is integrated with free-text search, allowing the user to follow links, then add search terms, then follow more links, without interrupting the interaction flow.