

Public Sector News

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Better Connected?

It's ten years since SOCITM began to survey local authority websites and much has changed in that time. Their review this year shows continued improvement and recognition that local council websites are a core delivery channel. The report, *Better connected 2008*, is available on the SOCITM website but is only free to access for members. Others will need to pay £395 to order a copy. Scottish local authority websites have lagged behind those further south, but the survey shows that here too there are improvements. It is clear that as Web usage increases in other areas of life, there will be increasing demand for sophisticated, interactive websites on offer to anyone wanting to make contact with their local authority.

National Indicator 14

Local authorities were measured on their performance using an extensive set of Best Value Performance Indicators among other measures. These are being replaced with a smaller number of targets known as National Indicators. One of these concerns 'avoidable contact'. An article in *The Times* in February interpreted this as councils not wanting to make contact with their customers, but it is really about making sure that contacts are sorted out at the first point of contact, and so repeat contact is not required. However, it also recognises that there are savings to be made by helping customers to access information themselves through the websites. Self-service through the website will be the preference for a growing number of people as Web access grows, but can also save councils money, since providing information and applications for services through this channel is considerably cheaper than by phone or face to face.

An end to spin

The Society of Public Information Networks (SPIN) will cease to exist. The organisation has been providing support to professionals using technology to provide public service information but has been unable to recruit volunteers for its board.

The Web and politics

The Centre for Policy Studies has produced a report that looks at the role of the Internet in politics. The report states that its use by politicians in the UK is lagging behind other countries. It predicts a similar level of impact as that of TV and radio in the twentieth century. The use of the Web to link to constituents would, the report suggests, re-empower politicians and bring greater scrutiny. The report *Politics, Policy and the Internet* can be found on the CPS website at www.cps.org.uk.

Blatant self-promotion!

Please look out for *Finding British Official Information. Official publishing in the digital age* by Jane Inman and Howard Picton, to be published by Chandos in May, if we can get it finished in time!

Public Sector News is supplied by ALGIS (The Affiliation of Local Government Information Specialists) which represents information professionals providing information services to local authority staff and elected members. Jane Inman is currently Chair of ALGIS. ALGIS welcomes anyone with an interest in public sector information who feels they would benefit from being part of a community working in the same area. For more information go to <http://www.algis.org.uk>.

Meeting Report: UKeiG Intranets Forum

5 February 2008, Universities UK, London

Deanne Mitchell, Information Officer, Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman

The first Intranets Forum for 2008 was held at Universities UK (UUK) in London. Susan Bradley, Information Officer UK Universities hosted the event and also demonstrated the UUK intranet. The other speaker during the forum was Martin White from Intranet Focus, who talked about global intranet practice and trends. Martin did a superb job stepping in at short notice to replace Roshan Khan, Head of Know-how at Maitland Advisory LLP who was going to present "the story of Maitrix" the development of a global intranet over the last three years.

UK Universities intranet

One of the most useful and rewarding aspects of the intranets forums is getting the opportunity to see another organisation's intranet. You always come away with at least one new idea of something that you could try out on your own intranet. It's a great opportunity to find out what works and doesn't work on a particular intranet, so that you can use this knowledge to move your own intranet forward. There was definitely lots of food for thought during Susan's demonstration.

Background and context

Susan started by setting the context and giving a bit of background about UK Universities. UK Universities is a membership organisation for all universities in the UK. Their intranet is available to around 60 staff in the London office, 14 staff in Edinburgh and five staff in Wales, as well as to staff in the Medical Schools Council, who share the building in London. The intranet is in its second incarnation, which was launched in December 2004. The intranet is built using .DotNetNuke (an open-source Web Application Framework, built on a Microsoft ASP. NET (VB. NET) platform).

The next incarnation of the intranet will be to move to Microsoft Office SharePoint Server 2007, as a corporate decision has been made to use SharePoint throughout the organisation. According to Susan, implementing SharePoint will allow more collaboration and better integration with other Microsoft applications such as Outlook and Word.

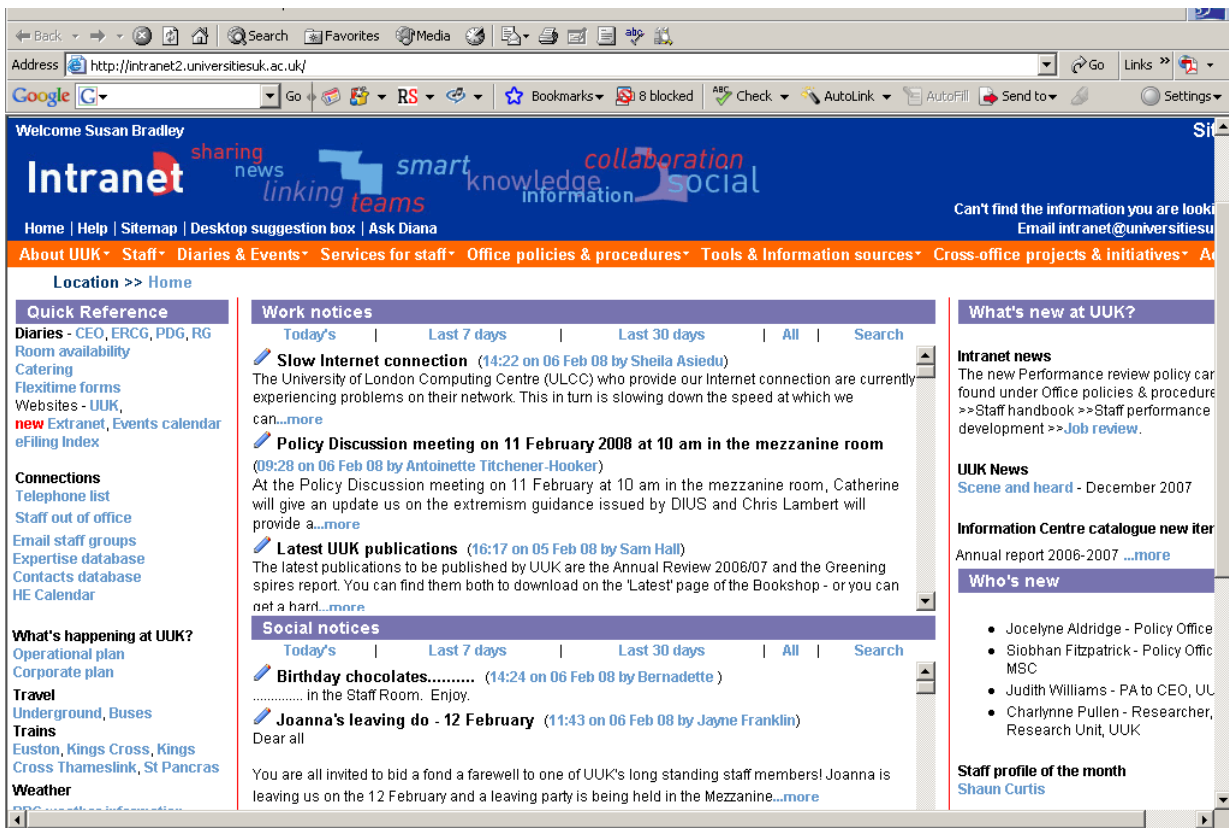
Structure of the site

The site uses drop-down menus, and the top level navigation consists of: About UUK, Staff, Diaries and events, Services for staff, Office policies and procedures, Tools & information sources, and Cross-office projects and initiatives.

Then we move on to the layout of the homepage, which is broken into four areas:

- Central pane – notice board, split into work and social notices. All staff are able to add a notice and determine who sees the notice.
- Left-hand pane – quick reference to pages that are frequently used and/or several levels down in the menu structure.
- Right-hand pane – what's new, including highlighting the newest item added to the Information Centre catalogue and who's new highlighting new staff.
- Bottom pane – news, plus links to further news feeds.

Figure 1 UUK Intranet Home Page



Notable features

I identified four features on the UUK intranet that I thought stood out, and that others could learn from:

Visibility

UUK has a number of good ideas about how to raise the visibility of the intranet and also the visibility of the CEO and visibility of feedback mechanisms, which include:

- The Intranet loads and opens automatically when you login to your PC, and it is also set as the home page in Internet Explorer. One of the main reasons for this is to get staff to read the notice board, which is a prominent feature of the intranet homepage. More about that later.
- An upfront link to the intranet team, where the e-mail address is displayed in the top right of the homepage encourages staff to e-mail the team, rather than have to click again to find out how to send feedback to the intranet team.
- Ask Diana – Forum, where staff can ask the CEO (named Diana) questions; responses are provided.
- Desktop suggestion box – an electronic means for staff to make suggestions, anonymous if they wish, and to raise issues if they are unsure who to raise them with. Non-virtual suggestion boxes are also provided in the office.

Notice board

Featured prominently on the home page. There are two sections to it, one for work or organizational notices and the other for social notices. Anyone in the organization can post a notice and determine which groups see the notice. This cuts down on the amount of all staff e-mails that go out. Measures have been put in place to ensure staff read the notices, for example the intranet homepage loads up when you turn on your pc and the intranet is set as the homepage in Internet Explorer. According to Susan, the Notice board works well and is popular with staff.

Target information to groups

Links are provided on the home page for travel and weather information. These are targeted for each of the sites in London, Wales and Scotland. The notice board also allows targeting so that notices can be displayed to certain groups and sites.

Pulling information from other systems

UUK have a clever in-house developer who has built some useful tools to pull data from other systems so that it can be displayed and easily accessed by staff on the intranet. These applications provide excellent examples of how intranet content can be aligned to business processes. Three examples include:

- Room booking system – pulls data from the room booking system so that staff can see on intranet pages which rooms are free.
- Diary pages – pulls information from Outlook calendar (unless marked private), so that staff can see group diaries.
- HE Calendar – based on SharePoint, staff can add their own events.

Are there any downsides to the UUK intranet?

Susan pointed out one downside to the intranet in that it doesn't have a full search capability, although content in the Noticeboard is searchable.

Global intranet practice and trends

Martin's presentation was based on the 2007 global intranet and portals strategies survey conducted with 178 organisations around the world by Jane McConnell, intranet strategy consultant. Survey participants were predominately private sector organisations, ranging in size from under 5000 staff to over 100 000. 2007 was the second year that the survey has been conducted, which has allowed Jane to compare results and changes over time.

Jane has come up with three classes of intranet, which can be summarised as:

1. Class 1 - intranet is the way of working in an organization
2. Class 2 - in the process of becoming so, but another 1-2 years before it becomes class 1.
3. Class 3 - we have made progress but it is still another 3-4 years away before becoming class 1.

Class 1 makes up about 10% of intranets in the survey, class 2, 44% and class 3 around 46%.

In the rest of the report I'm going to outline some of the more interesting findings from the research, and at the end I'll tell you about another intranet trends report for the UK that you might find interesting.

What are intranets used for?

By far the top use is distributing information, followed by helping to create business opportunities, facilitate productivity and facilitate collaboration. It is interesting to note that the research also found that 'facilitating collaboration' is one of the areas of intranet usage that has stagnated between the two surveys. It seems that organizations are using separate systems to carry out collaboration rather than use the intranet.

What are the main strategic drivers for the intranet?

Communications and culture, usability & findability, knowledge sharing, collaboration & facilitation, producing efficiency, and economic cost savings.

Changes impacting the intranet

Top ones include organizational change, restructuring of intranet, sponsor or senior management change, new content management system and new search tool.

Do we need to give our intranet a name?

If you are contemplating the issue about branding your intranet, it is useful to know that most 'class 1' intranets, the successful ones, call their intranet something, while most 'class 3' intranets don't have a name.

Portals

Despite lots of talk about portals being the holy grail of intranet success, the research has found that relatively few organizations have a portal solution in place.

Personalisation

It seems some of the world's biggest intranets don't use personalization, and a large proportion of intranets have no personalization features at all. Personalization may be another intranet myth success factor.

Integrating 2.0

- What tools are being used? Internal blogs, wikis, podcasts and subscription services.
- Main uses of blogs: sharing information, expert views on a subject, distribution of news, and experience and knowledge sharing.
- Main uses of wikis: experience and knowledge sharing, building encyclopedias, project management and expert views on a subject.

Search

Most organizations are not satisfied with intranet search.

Governance

Intranet steering committees are heavily weighted with IT staff, followed closely by communications, then intranet managers, HR, business units and knowledge management.

Primary obstacles for an intranet

Intranet is not seen as a priority, lack of awareness of the potential role of the intranet, lack of ownership at a senior level, lack of an insufficient search solution, not aligned to processes and not essential for daily work.

Would you like to know more?

See the link below for the NetStrategy/JMC website where you can find out more about Jane's research and purchase a copy of the full research report. If you would like something for free, another company called SORCE have also recently produced a research report on intranet usage and requirement from intranet users throughout the United Kingdom. See the website link below, where you can download a copy of the SORCE Global Intranet Research report.

Coming up...

The next Intranets Forum will be held on 1 April at the Trades Union Congress, where Dion Lindsay will be presenting on the impact of Web 2.0 on intranets and Aslee Christoffersen will present the TUC's application of Google Mini.

Contact

Janet Corcoran is the new UKeiG Intranets Forum co-ordinator. If you would like to find out more about the forum please contact Janet at: j.m.corcoran@imperial.ac.uk

Links

DotNetNuke <http://www.dotnetnuke.com/>

Intranet Focus <http://www.intranetfocus.com/>

NetStrategy/JMC <http://netjmc.com/>

SORCE Download a copy of the Global Intranet trends research report
<http://www.intranet-extranet.co.uk/>

UK Universities <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/>