

## Intranets

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*Intranets and Collaboration; Intracom 2008 in Quebec; Enterprise Search Summit, New York*

In late April I had my first opportunity to visit Quebec, where I had been invited to keynote Intracom 2008. This French-language intranet/Web conference has been going for some years, and I took part in 2002 and again in 2004 when it was in Montreal. The switch to Quebec was because the city is celebrating the 400th anniversary of its foundation. It was quite a long journey to Quebec, as there are no direct flights from London, but it was well worth the effort. I had been asked to talk about Enterprise 2.0 in relation to intranets, and I realised that I'd not really spent as much time as I should thinking about these issues raised by the fairly rapid adoption of these technologies. Being invited to conferences is a good way of stimulating some professional development energy.

There is no doubt about it that supporting collaborative working is now recognised as a core business requirement. There is a great quote in Deloitte Research Series on Talent Management (No. 2 Connecting People to What Matters, 2007) (<http://www.deloitte.com>)

In a wired world, connecting people to what matters most is the name of the game. That's because innovation and value emerge primarily out of people's connections. No ideas evolve in isolation; they emerge out of people's interactions. When people are connected, things fall into place. Teams give their best efforts and new products launch on time. The energy is palpable as ideas spring forth and become reality.

And when people aren't connected? Strategies fall apart and investors can pull their funds. Executives may get ousted and key people leave—or worse, they stay and complain.

Intranets as such are not good at supporting team working. Just as a guess I would reckon that around 35% of the content on the average intranet is about "Me", mainly coming from the HR Department. 50% is about "Us" and is generated largely by Internal Communications, and only 15% is about "We". Wikis and blogs are still regarded with suspicion by many organisations, as are social network applications. Rightly, there is a concern about misuse of these applications by people with a poor sense of corporate responsibility, but the long-term damage to the development of the business may be significant.

One of the fundamental issues is that organisations do not support collaboration. Some years ago I came across the following list of the characteristics of a collaborative organisation. I have no recollection of where it is from, so if you recognise the author or organisation, please let me know.

1. Employees are willing to seek help from outside of their organisational unit, even if this might suggest that they are not performing well.
2. Employees are able to locate colleagues with information and expertise with the minimum of effort.
3. Employees feel that they have a duty and a freedom to help others, even if there is no immediate benefit, and indeed even a short-term impact on their own work performance.

4. Employees promptly acknowledge telephone calls and e-mails requesting information.
5. Employees willingly work together with colleagues from other units to solve specific problems.
6. The organisation has clearly stated principles related to the value of teamwork and cooperation.
7. An important element of induction programmes is to give new staff experience of working together in teams from different units, and with staff who have a range of expertise.
8. Recruitment, development and evaluation procedures provide an opportunity to review and reward collaborative working and knowledge exchange.
9. Examples of good practice and success in knowledge exchange are given wide publicity and recognition.
10. Managers who do not support and participate in collaborative working do not gain promotion to senior management positions.

I asked the 250 delegates at Intracom 2008 how many of these criteria they felt that their organisation could tick off, and most gave up at 5. Unless your organisation can score at least 5 (and recognising that No.10 is not going to happen in my career), then any Enterprise 2.0 applications are going to remain as pilot trials, lest they reveal the extent of the disconnected nature of the organisation.

In May I was in New York attending the Enterprise Search Summit.

(<http://www.enterprisearchsummit.com/default.shtml>) This year's event was the best so far, and that is not just because I had been invited to give the opening keynote! At a guess around 300 delegates attended the event. Overall the quality of the papers was very high, and even the presentations by the search engine vendors were not out-and-out sales pitches. The programme, developed this year by Michelle Manafy (Editor of *EContent* magazine) had tracks designed to appeal to experienced practitioners, delegates with a degree of enterprise search experience, and finally delegates who were coming to enterprise search for the first time. This approach worked well, and all the sessions were well attended. The workshops before the conference attracted around 30 delegates for each, which is a good illustration of how keen people are to gain a better understanding of search implementation.

As Steven Arnold remarked in his summary of the conference, this year it became acceptable to recognise that enterprise search was difficult and that few organisations could claim to have achieved total success. The trend in the past has tended to be to brush all the difficulties away out of sight. This year the difficulties were on full view and that resulted in some very constructive discussions, both in and out of the session. There has been a tendency to blame the search engine vendors for search failure, but there is now a realisation that the problem is more likely to be that the search application is under-resourced. A show of hands at the opening session indicated that in most of the organisations present there was just a single person responsible for managing enterprise search. In a panel session towards the end of the conference, Computer Associates remarked that they had eight people working on search and Accenture quoted a figure of fifteen.

One of the main developments over the last year or so has been a focus on social search, in which users can comment on search results. However this concept is also being extended to using a range of social inputs to enhance search effectiveness, such as potentially tracking e-mails and other documents that are being written by a user to provide additional search parameters. This approach is still in its infancy, but there seems to be keen interest in developing this type of application. There was also a lot of interest in the sessions on e-discovery, which is a hot topic in the USA because of recent changes to Federal law.

Overall delegates went away with a sense that they were not alone in finding search difficult, but with a lot of very useful practical guidance to apply back in the office. The Enterprise Search Summit has now established itself as the leading event in enterprise search management though that is in no way to downplay the value of the Search Engine Meeting <http://www.infonortics.com/searchengines/index.html> as a forum for innovation in search. If you cannot wait until next May for the 2009 event ESS West takes place in San Jose on 23-24 September (<http://www.enterprisearchsummit.com/west/>). I would also recommend completing the registration form for the Enterprise Search Sourcebook <http://www.enterprisearchcenter.com/Readers/SubscriberSourceBook.aspx>, which contains some excellent articles on all aspects of enterprise search technology and implementation. I'm surprised that there is no equivalent event in Europe given the number of European search vendors. However most of these are French, so maybe the venue should be Paris.