

Intranets

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Over the years I've been in many unusual conference venues, but never one held in a gymnastics and sports centre that had been converted from a railway repair workshop. This was the location chosen by JBoye for its fifth Aarhus conference <http://www.jboye.com/conferences/aarhus09/> in the first week of November. When I arrived on Monday there were games of basketball and badminton taking place, but on Tuesday morning it had been transformed into a main auditorium for the 250 delegates (from 19 countries) and multiple breakout rooms for workshops and parallel sessions.

The conference, as always, was an adroit blend of quality speakers, excellent networking opportunities, and faultless timekeeping and food. On Tuesday there were a dozen pre-conference workshops, two of which were on the subject of SharePoint. The numbers were, shall we say, small. So why so few workshop delegates? I have a concern that it is because the governance battle is over: IT have won. The business doesn't have a say in how SharePoint will be implemented, or (looking ahead) whether the organisation will upgrade to SharePoint 2010. It is all just going to happen, and all the good practice in the world is not (I fear) going to be taken into account. I'd like to be proved wrong, but the evidence from conversations with delegates at the conference suggest that I'm probably uncomfortably close to the truth.

Please do not think for one moment I am suggesting that SharePoint is poor choice for an organisation. Indeed the upgrades and new features for SharePoint 2010 show that Microsoft is listening to the feedback from users. But the need to have an ongoing, informed, dialogue between all the stakeholders is even more important in planning for SharePoint 2010 than it is in implementing SharePoint 2007.

The conference itself opened on Wednesday with one of the best keynote papers I have ever heard. It was given by B.J. Fogg. Check him out at <http://www.bjfogg.com/>. Fogg differentiated between Hot Triggers and Cold Triggers. In brief a Hot Trigger is something that you can respond to (the example being a cheap cup of coffee in the Starbucks you are passing) and a Cold Trigger is something that you have no chance or interest in responding to, such as being asked to contribute to a charity when you are driving down a road. Fogg, in essence, was arguing that websites needed a few Hot Triggers, and no Cold Triggers, to motivate people to use them. To me this was the justification I needed to suggest that news really does not need to be all over the home page – it is just a huge mass of Cold Triggers. This summary really

does not do justice to a masterly presentation given with humour and insight. (The keynote on the second day was Mark Canter http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marc_Canter His paper on Digital Cities was probably the most ego-centric keynote paper I have had the misfortune to have to sit through. Never again.)

The conference then split into a number of tracks, which were slightly different on the two days. If I tell you that the tracks included higher education, intranets, Microsoft, Web content management, Web strategy, standards, eHealth and Web project management it will give you some indication of the breadth of the conference, which to me is the main attraction. This is an event where ideas travel between tracks.

Two of the presentations in the intranet track were given by the Raiffeisen Bank and the News Room concept of NYK Shipping. Both of these were award winners in the Intranet Innovations 2009 awards, which were announced in early November by James Robertson <http://www.steptwo.com.au/iia>. (The report is priced at \$189 and is a very good 200pp read.) The intranet team at Raiffeisen have come up with a cleverly constructed My Homepage, for which they have now released the software under an open-source licence. That really is innovation. Rupert Parker from NYK Shipping in London described a very neat way of creating a news feed both from internally generated news and also from external feeds. One of the issues that the project team had to address was whether 'negative news' should be included. In the end it was allowed, as it might have been based on erroneous information and employees needed to see the news to be able to redress the potential misinformation with their customers.

Jane McConnell presented the results of the Global Intranet Trends Report 2010, which has also just been published; details can be found at www.netjmc.net. Jane has identified five important trends for intranets as they start to mature: these are the front-door intranet, the team-oriented intranet, the people-focused intranet, the real-time intranet and the place-independent intranet. These trends emerge from the survey data, and provide much to ponder over.

As is not the case with so many conferences, the delegate fee includes social events on each evening, one of which was in the turbine hall of an old power station, expertly converted into an event venue. Attending a JBoye event is really total immersion. I've now been to four of the five events and have always come away with some interesting ideas and lots of business cards. The dates for 2010 are 2-4 November, or if you have a travel budget then there is JBoye Philadelphia on 4-6 May. The JBoye team will be in the exhibition area at Online Information in December.

“Are there no downsides?” I hear you ask. The weather for one. The week was just solid rain and gales, and quite cold. Access to airports is another. Aarhus Airport is about an hour's coach ride away from the city and Billund is a 90-minute journey. Now I should say that I have been a speaker at the four conferences I have been to, but this event has reached the maturity of the Online Information Conference, in that I would attend it even if I was not speaking. Try it yourself next year.