Intranets

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Welcome to Dion Lindsay, new columnist for eLucidate.

Are Intranets out of date? Could you manage an Intranet from your mobile? Plus reviews of a SharePoint 2010 title

As I begin to take up editorship of the column, this issue is a mixture of thoughts based on the UKeiG's Intranet Forum, mention of a report that suggests that Intranets are out-of-date thinking, and reviews from Martin White, until very recently editor of this column, and future contributor to the pages of *eLucidate*.

Where are the Intranet managers?

It has always impressed me, given how the issues (real or exaggerated) of confidentiality hover in theory behind discussions of cases and good practice in the world of intranets, just how keen people involved are to share their experiences and learn from others. UkeiG has an Intranets Forum and over the last two years between a quarter and a fifth of the 120 or so members have attended each meeting – with engaged debate as well as well-received presentations from intranet managers.

It has been clear from the start that the centre of gravity for these meetings, as is so often the way, is London and the surrounding counties. And yet the Office for National Statistics 2009 survey on e-commerce and ICT activity[1] (published 26 November 2010!) shows that 24.5% of all business surveyed "had an intranet system for sharing information with employees". This rises to 89% of businesses with more than 1,000 employees. Though ONS has not produced regional figures, it is hard to think of reasons why they should be dramatically less in the rest of the country than for the south-east!

The Intranets Forum uses a JISCMail[2] list for its members to keep in touch between meetings. As

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[1] http://www.statistics.gov.uk/pdfdir/ecom1110.pdf

[2] http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/

the new organiser of the Forum, I was examining what that gives us, and the existence of a discussion room facility set me thinking: why wouldn't members, who find it hard to get to face-to-face meetings, want to have a half hour at, say, the end of every week when they can log-in to the discussion room and talk about problems, or share their successes with others? In an electronic way, this echoes an idea of Martin White's back in 2004 or 2005 that intranet managers might tackle feelings of professional isolation by organising local drop-in meetings in cafes or public buildings. So the JISCMail discussion rooms are a facility I'll be trying out in the next few weeks!

With the figures ONS produced, it may be surprising that the great loyalty of members of the forum is not matched by the size of the group! One likely explanation for this emerged at the meeting we held at Lawrence Graham LLP's office on the south bank of the Thames in More London. When we shared our job titles, not one of us was called an Intranets Manager, and very few of us had a full-time job for managing the organisation's intranet. It may be, for example, that the responsibility for intranets is so diffuse that comparatively few of those involved see it as a professional career, to be supported by membership of groups and discussion forums.

Intranet Innovations Award 2010 Winner Arup and Adam Pope

By a happy coincidence, news of Arup's Gold Medal Award in Step Two Designs' 2010 Intranets Innovation Awards reached our Intranets Forum at the end of October. Just in time to organise the presentation of the award to Adam Pope, one of our members, and the client lead for their winning

project at Arup University, which revolutionised their discussion groups. The citation for the award[1] reads "**Arup**, the global engineering firm responsible for icons such as the Sydney Opera House, has been awarded for the comprehensive overhaul of its internal discussion forums. Employees can

Adam Pope receiving the Intranet Innovations Award from Martin White

now easily navigate, contribute to, and participate in global discussion, even from their mobile device". Wouldn't it be great to see more of these prestigious international awards coming to the UK – indeed to members of the UkeiG?

From Intranet to Digital Workspace

Only space here for a very brief mention of a recent report from the Intranet Benchmarking Forum. *Digital Workplace Maturity Model: from*

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[1] http://www.steptwo.com.au/products/iia2010

Intranet to digital workplace[1] The IBF is a confidential membership benchmarking group, and this future-looking report presents a scenario in which organisations are increasingly subsuming their intranets into the entire "digital workplace", a place where distinctions between intranets, collaboration and communication applications and electronic ways of working are becoming increasingly porous. The maturity model that IBF proposes for this process uses a metaphor of the evolution of market places: the report is very much worth a read (the full report is available free on its website), and will be reviewed more fully in these pages.

Mobile Access to Information

Martin White

For several years there has been an increasing focus on enterprise collaboration. There are a number of reasons for this, of which the adoption of Microsoft SharePoint has been just one. Collaboration is not easy, and it is good to see the emergence of consultants, such as Michael Sampson (www.michaelsampson.net), Evan Rosen (http://www.thecultureofcollaboration.com/) and Morten Hansen (http://www.thecollaborationbook.com/), who specialise in identifying good collaboration

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[1]

http://www.intranetlife.com/intranet_benchmarking_for/2010/11/the-digital-workplace-maturity-model-part-1.html

practice. Done well, collaborative working can have a major impact on organisational performance and culture, but in my experience few organisations really invest in training and mentoring to support effective collaboration. If you look at the programmes of intranet conferences there is often a lot of emphasis on social media, but collaboration is much more than just providing social media applications. See, for example:

http://www.cmswire.com/cms/enterprise-20/collaboration-an-intranet-perspective-008273.php

and

http://www.cmswire.com/cms/enterprise-20/collaboration-if-it-were-that-easy-we-would-all-do-it-well-008243.php

If there is one trend that I would highlight in 2011, it would be the rapid deployment of mobile apps that provide employees with access to enterprise information. The 2011 Nielsen Norman Intranet Design Annual report http://www.nngroup.com/reports/intranet/design/ highlighted that six of the ten winning intranets had a clearly defined mobile access strategy, with a strong emphasis on providing employee directories. The programme for the Mobile Enterprise track of the Global Mobile Forum this year stated:

> Not too long ago the term "enterprise mobility" referred to a couple of professionals who used their cell phones and/or any sort of unconnected handheld device to get things done remotely. They were usually responsible for some kind of field work, such as consulting, sales, O&M or customer relationship, commonly known as road warriors.

But those years are gone, and enterprise mobility now presents itself as a pervasive and ubiquitous mesh of software, middle-ware and hardware requiring seamless integration, state-of-the-art user interface and pristine security. Companies around the globe are compelled to find ways to cope with an increasingly remote workforce, while at the same time protecting the digital infor-mation flow that can be stored anywhere in the cloud.

On the other hand, employees hooked on enterprise-provided smartphones are reach-ing higher levels of productivity with 24X7 availability, but also seek to balance work with their personal lifestyle – ideally using the same handset – which puts even more pressure on their company's IT department.

If you want some quantification of this situation business intelligence vendor MicroStrategy recently surveyed more than 2,400 business and IT professionals, of whom over a third worked at companies with annual revenue of $1 billion or more. Eighty-three per cent of all respondents will deploy or are investigating deployment of mobile apps within next two years. Whether this happens in 2011 or 2012, we are clearly moving towards the provision of mobile personal information services for employees that will empower them to make business decisions on the site of a client or supplier.

To me there seems to be a paradox here. Organisations are keen to provide enterprise applications to support collaboration, and at the same time are also keen to ensure that away from their desks employees have all the information

they need to drive business forward. This is especially true for access to business intelligence applications, which are not normally seen as being within the scope of an intranet strategy.

If ever there was a time to sit down and work out how to integrate mobile apps into a collaboration strategy it is the next few months. Even with the very high quality displays on current generation smart phones, no one is going sit in the reception area of a prospective client to scroll through document libraries on (for example) a SharePoint platform to find business-critical information. Mobile search and mobile collaboration are going to need some serious attention. Time for some creative thinking!

If you would like to know more about using mobile smart phones to access both enterprise informa-tion and also external business information resources I will be running a workshop for UKeiG on 13 April:

http://www.ukeig.org.uk/trainingevent/mobile-access-information-resources-martin-white

Reviews

Intranet Design Awards 2011

Nielsen Norman Group http://www.nngroup.com

Reading through the Intranet Design Awards report is always such an encouraging start to the year. This year the report profiles AMP Limited, Bennett Jones LLP, Bouygues Telecom, Credit Suisse AG, Duke Energy, Habitat for Humanity International, Heineken International, Korea Telecom, Mota-Engil Engenharia e Construção and Verizon Communications. This is such a diverse group of

organisations in terms of size, sector and geographic location that there is something in this report for every intranet manager. Each of the profiles extends to 30 or 40 pages with quite a number of screen shots. In addition there is a short but useful section on why some of the submitted entries failed to gain an award. According to report authors Amy Schade, Patty Caya, and Jakob Nielsen the critical success factors are to watch people work, conduct usability evaluations, understand the technology, personalise after you create the structure, help content contributors to succeed, consider accessibility and measure ROI. In the case of ROI there is a comment that decreased use can also be a good ROI indicator! For example, Habitat for Humanity saw a 60% decrease in "where do I find…?" questions after launching its improved design. A sure indication that users are getting the content they need more often.

Some of the main themes of this years' winners are a focus on mobile access and on supporting knowledge-management applications. Six out of the ten winners had made a substantial investment in providing access to the intranet by staff working away from the office, double the number in the 2010 awards. It also seems that social media applications are maturing, and are now supporting knowledge management, innovation management, participation rewards and customised solutions.

This report represents excellent value for $248, as it combines the detailed descriptions of individual intranets that can provide a range of practical solutions for any intranet together with a strategic analysis by authors who have the experience to see beyond the screen shots. It is not a quick read, and there almost needs to be a version with wide margins for marking up comments. Sadly still no index! Maybe next year?

Martin White

Essential SharePoint 2010: Overview, Governance and Planning

Scott Jamison, Susan Hanley and Mauro Cardarelli

Addison Wesley Microsoft Technology Series

http://www.informit.com/mstechseries

The flood of books on Microsoft SharePoint 2010 has begun, with over 300 listed on Amazon as I begin to write this review. I have read only a few of them, so I can't say for certain that this is the best of them, but I think intranet managers will find this book to be of considerable value. As the sub-title indicates, this is not a book about the technology of SharePoint, though there is enough to highlight the differences between the 2007 and 2010 versions, and to explain why planning and governance are so important.

After an overview of SharePoint 2010 there are substantial chapters (typically 30 pages) on enterprise content management, social media, search, business process applications and business intelligence. Other chapters cover security, disaster recovery (more important than most people realise!), planning for training and communications, and using SharePoint for a public-facing Web site. The 590-page book is well illustrated with screen shots, though these are mocked-up for the book and are not production applications.

What I like about this book is the care that the authors and the publisher have taken to make the book readable and useful. The writing style is a model of clarity, given the complexity of the topics covered, and each chapter ends with a summary of key points. Although the authors do have strong connections with Microsoft they are not above highlighting some deficiencies with SharePoint 2010. I liked the comment "It's unclear why Controls is not on the Insert tab but that's a question for the [Microsoft] InfoPath team". That is a good example of the style of writing.

This is not a book for Microsoft developers, though even they may benefit from the overview of the capabilities of SharePoint 2010. The target audience is clearly people who have a managerial responsibility for SharePoint 2010 implementation, who need to get the best return on their investment. The value of the book is further enhanced by a very good index. As you can imagine I have quite a collection of Microsoft 2010 books, but I turn to this one more than any other, and it is now colourfully adorned with marker pen highlighting. I expect your copy will be as well.

Martin White

Membership of UKeiG Intranets Forum

If you have a professional or work interest in intranets, you will be very welcome in our Intranets Forum! We hold regular meetings for presentations of intranet initiatives and discussions, we support members with a growing JISCMail facility, and all meeting reports are published on the Intranets Forum pages of the UkeiG website. Membership is free to UkeiG members, and £30 per annum to non-UkeiG members. See the UkeiG website for more details – we hope to see you soon!