

Intranets

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Employee engagement with the Intranet

If you build it, they will come – or perhaps not, in the case of intranets.

One of the perennial problems for intranet managers, and indeed for strategic managers of organisations with intranets is how to get colleagues and employees to use the intranet. In the “old days” (the 1990s and early 2000s) when intranets were mainly the repository for the organisation’s key documents, this was a problem of “we’ve provided the water, why won’t they drink?”, and solutions centred on making the content key not just to the focus of the organisation but also to the day to day work of the staff.

The main perceived benefits then were efficiency – tasks would be performed more quickly with more accurate information, and reducing the risks of inconsistent action: everyone would sing from the same hymn sheet and hopefully speak with a single voice, or at least sing in the same choir! Now leaders also hope intranets will function as springs of creativity and act as platforms for cultural change, in a time when the environment we must respond to is changing in unpredictable and ever quickening ways.

Although comprehensive figures for the use of intranets are as hard to come by as they are for their adoption by enterprises (and for the same kind of reasons, commented on often in these columns) the results of recent surveys chime well with the more anecdotal experience of those involved with intranets in this country: intranets are under-used. In 2009 Wyatt Watson Worldwide was reported to have found that 50% of employees didn’t access their intranet on a daily basis¹. Jane McConnell of New Strategy JMC in her *Global Intranet Trends for 2011* reports that one of the two major challenges for organisations in this context

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http://intranetblog.blogware.com/blog/_archive/s/2009/4/17/4156487.html

continues to be how to engage all stakeholders and make the intranet the “natural” way to work¹.

To address this commentators over the last couple of years have been pointing to the need for intranet managers to take a more business approach, and treat employees as customers who need to be engaged and converted. Bill Ives brings the traditional and the current themes together in his review² of the Global Intranet Trends 2010 Report:

The intranet is starting to become the entry point into the “workplace Web” – the collection of resources and information needed by staff. This includes applications, intranet sites, specialized portals, team spaces, collaboration spaces and so on. This was the original vision for many intranets but rarely realized.

But what action can be taken to increase the uptake of the intranet in the daily lives of

employees, without which the vision cannot be realised?

Six suggestions for improving employees’ engagement: turning occasional users into everyday users, and non-users into users

1. Survey the non-users, not just the users

Whether you are conducting employee surveys, running focus groups, or usability testing, involve non-users as well users: these are your new customers. Include the use of the intranet in the questions on your organisation’s “employee commitment” surveys.

2. Use feedback actively

Encourage suggestions as well as problem reporting. Whether you use online feedback facilities or a phone helpdesk, make sure the person who provides the feedback and the employee community see what you have done about the feedback.

3. Make the intranet the default desktop in the organisation

Even if you can only force the intranet to appear when the employees first log on each day, leaving them with the choice of clicking away from it, you will increase visibility of the intranet and make it seem less of a luxury, more a key function which your organisation takes seriously.

¹ Global Intranet Trends for 2011 Executive Summary, p2. <http://www.digital-workplace-trends.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/Global-Intranet-Trends-2011-Executive-JMC.pdf>

² <http://www.fastforwardblog.com/2010/03/02/global-intranet-trends-2010-report/>

4. **Make sure your use of communities of practice and social media is appropriate to your organisation**

The value of communities of practice was established mostly through use by specialists and professionals in worldwide organisations. If you are a single-site organisation, with a heavy burden of routine work, they may take a lot of effort to establish and maintain. If you are a creative organisation, with multiple sites or staff working remotely, you may find a ready participative audience. Brand them in whatever way appeals to potential users – they may not have to be called communities of practice!

5. **Link information to business processes**

Don't leave support information languishing in silos, out of sight of business users: when employees are filling in online forms via the intranet, have the information they need accessible from the form they are using.

6. **Focus on "people search".**

Though there is a belief in the industry that intranet/enterprise search capability may have reached a plateau, it is still far from Google-like quality, and this is one of the most common criticisms by non-users and occasional users. Focussing on getting the people results right will increase users' tolerance, by connecting people to people, not just users to documents.

Book News

Global Intranet Trends for 2011

Jane McConnell published her 5th annual *Global Intranet Trends Report* in November 2010. <http://www.digital-workplace-trends.com/>. The report is available in two forms: in full (priced at 550 EUR, 750 USD, 470 GBP), or in full with briefing delivered in a 60-90 minute telephone conversation with Jane (1100 EUR, 1500 USD, 940 GBP).

The executive summary is available as a free download at <http://www.digital-workplace-trends.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/Global-Intranet-Trends-2011-Executive-JMC.pdf>.

There has been much blog recognition of the value of the report. See for instance:

Martin White

<http://www.intranetfocus.com/archives/295>

Michael Sampson

<http://currents.michaelsampson.net/2011/01/resource-git2011.html>

In previous years, Jane has posted interviews on YouTube about the results of the Global Trends report:

2010

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aEm8uyP29-Q&feature=related>

2009

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wUZ9INM_lw

Intranet Management Handbook

Facet Publishing published Martin White's latest book on 14 February. This is his 6th (most recently *SharePoint 2010 for Intranets*, published by Intranet Benchmarking Forum in 2010). The *Intranet Management Handbook* has gained great reviews by

Jed Cawthorne <http://ecm-stuff.blogspot.com/2011/02/book-review-intranet-management.html>

Jane McConnell <http://netjmc.com/reference/intranet-resources/the-intranet-management-handbook-by-martin-white>

James Robertson

<http://www.steptwo.com.au/columntwo/book-review-the-intranet-management-handbook/>