47 SECRETS TO DEVELOPING A SUCCESSFUL INTRANET

THE SECRETS REVEALED!

another guide from Conscious Solutions
Introduction

Welcome to our tips booklet on developing a successful intranet. This allows better decision-making within your business, enables you to capitalise on the skills and experience of your employees, and perhaps mostly importantly, to give employees information about the direction of the business.

Additional benefits can be the reduction in the number of emails sent to all@yourfirm.co.uk, don’t you find those annoying when someone’s just offering a new litter of kittens for adoption?

The key to the effective introduction of an intranet is to ensure that the project does not get out of hand and allow it to blow out in the requirements phase. An intranet project should not turn into a IT project to fix or modernise the entire organisation. It should mostly be about employee communications. Take a phased approach with achievable milestones to keep the momentum up in the project. Make sure you train your staff in the use of the new intranet and train them well. Investing in training will pay off in the short, medium and long term.

Launch the new intranet internally, make a fuss over the launch, print up some posters, mouse mats, whatever, to get a good level of excitement. Celebrate the launch and success of the project.

This booklet has been written to give any business a way of reviewing your intranet plans. You will find useful tips whether you have some kind of static intranet that you are wishing to upgrade, or whether you are starting with no intranet, just a collection of files on disk.

Conscious Solutions has installed over 40 intranets in the last 18 months, all based on our preferred intranet technology, Intranet DASHBOARD (http://www.intranetdashboard.com) which is a powerful suite of 40 intranet applications.

Follow these tips to get the most out of your intranet plans.

About Us

Conscious Solutions designs, builds and manages websites and intranets for over 250 clients in the UK. We are a Platinum Reseller of Intranet DASHBOARD in the UK, Ireland and selected European countries. This tips booklet has been created to share some of our intranet experience with you. We would welcome the opportunity to show you how Intranet DASHBOARD might improve your employee communications and organisational efficiency.

David Gilroy
Sales & Marketing Director
Conscious Solutions
Business Case

What are you trying to achieve?
When considering the possibility of implementing a company intranet, it is crucial to formulate an end goal. Building an intranet simply for the sake of having one is often a waste of time, money and resources. So you should always evaluate the benefits which you expect the development of an intranet to provide for your organisation, discover whether they are feasible and if an intranet is the best way to achieve them. If you need more help building your business case then you can get a series of templates to help from http://www.intranetdashboard.com/businesscase/default.aspx.

![Intranet Dashboard Business Case Template](http://www.intranetdashboard.com/businesscase/default.aspx)

What is your starting point?
Does this look familiar \Server\Documents\HumanResources\Holiday\filename.doc

At the planning stages, you should aim to examine your current position with regards to intranet provision, or lack of any, for your staff. If you do not have an actual intranet, how do you make employees aware of important dates and events, new company policies, corporate template documents and other company material? Would an intranet make it easier to arrange, update and distribute this information amongst your staff, or would it complicate matters?

If you already have an intranet, is it static – or how do you keep it updated? Are members of staff able to log in and make changes using some form of Content Management System, or does everything have to go through a central administrator? These are all important questions when considering whether the advantages that a user-friendly intranet could bring to your organisation are worth the associated expenses.
What budget/resources do you have?
To what extent would you be able to allocate technical resources – in terms of software, hardware and actual IT technical support – to the development, implementation and maintenance of an intranet? Some intranet products require a great deal of input and technical work on a continuous basis, whilst others (such as Intranet DASHBOARD) involve minimal involvement by technical resources once up and running. This makes products like this particularly attractive for companies who have limited technical resources or wish to focus their IT resources in other areas.

User Interface Design

Reflect your brand
Considerations regarding design and usability are of paramount importance when planning an intranet. Your brand should be reflected throughout the intranet to strengthen the corporate image and remind staff that the intranet is a dedicated company resource which belongs to them. This will encourage its use and maximise the benefits which it provides.

Must be engaging and draw users in
Just like an effective website, an intranet needs to engage users and draw them in. There are various ways through which you can captivate end-users - including an attractive design, pleasing and simple layout, intuitive navigation and useful, well-written content. It is essential that your staff are happy to use the intranet and are not put off by a cluttered or confusing interface, or have difficulty finding the information they are looking for.

It should be functional and easy to use
The difference between an intranet and a website is that, with an intranet, you are not trying to actively market your products or services. Therefore, you should concentrate on making the intranet as functional as possible – this is the primary aim. However, that is not to say that design and presentation are not important, as ease of use is often determined by visual aspects.

Set the intranet homepage as the default home page
In order to promote the use of a company intranet amongst its end-users – your staff – many companies opt to set the intranet homepage as the
default homepage on internet browsers for all company computers. This serves as a reminder for all staff on a regular basis, that the resource exists and is available for their use. You could choose to use Group Policies on your network to take people in different departments to their departmental home page as the landing page for the intranet.

**Structure**

**Do not slavishly follow your organisation structure**
The most effective way to structure your company intranet will not necessarily reflect the structure of your organisation. Although you may decide to create departmental sections, there will also be many areas which are shared throughout the company and apply equally to each department – such as a contact directory and general company policies, as well a diary for company-wide events. Obviously, it is easier to keep one section updated rather than to re-create this section in each of the departmental areas.

**Use a “card sorting” exercise to help determine your navigation**
Card sorting is a planning method which aims to draw out structure from an unsorted list of statements or ideas. Each statement is written on an index card, and participants sort these cards into groups or clusters. The result of the sorting is then analysed to help with making certain decisions. The practice of card sorting is particularly useful when planning the structure of an intranet i.e. the navigation - the statements being sections or pages of the intranet, with the final result potentially being used as a basis for the site structure.

**Departmental home pages are a must**
Although you should not allow your organisational structure to dictate the structure of your company intranet, departmental home pages are very important. They encourage use of the intranet, providing each member of staff with a more personalised section, as well as devolving responsibility of upkeep to various interested parties. Departmental home pages can also instill a greater degree of pride and even healthy competition amongst departments to provide the best possible page!

**Don’t launch too much at once - take a phased approach**
When you first set up your intranet, try and keep it simple and concise - focus on providing a secure grounding for future expansion but do not
attempt to add everything at once. Intranet development is best done in stages, as this will ensure accuracy as well as gradual analysis of the most popular areas which can then be worked on further.

If you already have an intranet you will almost certainly have to reflect most of what is there already, but perhaps launch this as Phase 1 with Phase 2 bringing new services/applications online.

Redirect old pages from a previous company intranet
If you are planning to replace an existing intranet, bear in mind that members of staff may have bookmarked specific pages from the old site. You should therefore ensure that any URLs from the old site have automatic or manual redirects to the equivalent pages on the new intranet.

People

Staff lists
An up-to-date and searchable employee database is often the most regularly used section of any intranet. It should allow users to view contact information, departmental listings, employee profiles, job titles and descriptions, as well as staff pictures and certain, optional, personal information.

In/out boards
An “in/out board” gives users information as to the whereabouts of a particular member of staff - whether they are on holiday, on a business trip, in a meeting or at their desk. This intranet feature is extremely useful for a receptionist in helping them keep track of employees, whom a client may be trying to contact.

Link to web-based CRM
Linking an intranet to a web-based customer relationship management (CRM) tool, can improve the fluidity of business processes and efficiency of employees. It centralises work-flow and avoids the necessity of having to work with too many different applications and remember multiple user names and passwords. In general, it can make life easier for anyone who needs to deal with customers on a daily basis.
Feedback

Make it easy for people to offer feedback
A successful intranet is constantly evolving to the needs of its end-users, your employees. It is therefore extremely beneficial to provide an easy way for members of staff to give feedback on its effectiveness, along with any suggestions for improvement. This will ensure that the intranet is an organic resource, not simply a static information point.

Send out a regular email newsletter with intranet news
Keeping your intranet up to date is crucial to its success or failure. To this end, you should not only make sure that it is constantly and consistently maintained, but also advertise any “news” to staff via a regular email newsletter. To make it even more effective, you can include links to specific news items or updates on the intranet, thereby drawing users in and encouraging them to check it themselves for future updates.

“Ask the CEO” section - Questions and Answers
To further increase interaction on your intranet and promote communication between different departments or sections of your company, consider implementing a section on the intranet which invites employees to pose questions to certain members of staff who may not be available to them on a daily basis. For example, an “Ask the CEO” section can help to break down any barriers and encourage all employees to make their views and suggestions known. A questionnaire can also give people a chance to have their say - and publishing results back to the intranet can enhance a feeling of company democracy.

Interactivity

Make some areas of the site fun to use
In order to get the most out of a company intranet, it is of course crucial that staff actually make use of it on a regular basis. When you first implement an intranet, it may be a good idea to include some fun elements to promote its use. Features such as fantasy football or a company quiz, will help to draw employees in and introduce the intranet.

Forums
Monitored forums can help to improve communication and promote idea exchange in larger organisations, where employees are spread across
separate geographical locations. Even in smaller companies, forums can provide an effective medium for certain debates and give rise to active discussion. Bear in mind, if you do choose to have Discussion Forums on your intranet, you may need to deal with “the rough” as well as “the smooth” i.e. comments from disgruntled employees. These will need to be dealt with, not just ignored.

**Wikis**

A wiki is essentially a collection of web pages designed to enable anyone who accesses it to contribute or modify content, using a simplified markup language. The most famous wiki is, of course, Wikipaedia. Implementing a wiki within your intranet can provide a central resource of information for employees which they can keep updated themselves.

**Suggestion box**

Most successful companies encourage internal debate. Seeking opinions and suggestions for improvement of company practices, policies and products can help to engender a feeling of inclusion amongst all employees, as well as ensuring constant organic development of the company. This should of course feed in to any “offline” suggestion scheme that your company runs.

**Contribution of content by staff**

Staff-generated content not only encourages employee contribution and development. If they take the form of articles or whitepapers, then the content can also act as an effective marketing tool for your company. If they are later made live on the website or included in promotional material, as they demonstrate the skills and knowledge of your employees. Initially, staff who wish to publish their articles can do so on the intranet – this enables the content to be peer-reviewed.

**Content**

**What is your “killer application”?**

One of the primary reasons an intranet will succeed or fail depends upon the quality, accuracy and relevance of its content. This content may take a variety of forms such as staff contact lists, timesheets or IT support information. One or more of these specific forms of content may come to constitute the most popular and important parts of the company intranet - its “killer application”. Whilst the staff database may form the core of one intranet, the wiki might be the most popular application for another
organisation. For one of our clients, it was the staff restaurant menu! Find yours!

**Keep it updated**

It is of the utmost importance to ensure that your company intranet is kept up to date on a continuous basis. As the central repository of company information, all the latest company documents and templates should be available immediately, and staff lists should be current and accurate. Whilst it is a good idea to retain old versions of documents, these should always be appropriately marked with version numbers and dates if possible. If the intranet content is kept updated, the end users - your employees - will come to trust and make use of it on a regular basis.

**Ease of use - technology made simple**

A well designed intranet should not require any more than the most basic IT skills to maintain the content properly and effectively. The user interface should be constructed in a simple manner which makes it easy and straightforward for any member of staff to make changes and updates, with a minimal of training. Unfortunately, some company intranets require a dedicated IT specialist to maintain content, even on a basic level - generally a bad idea, and one which can eat up resources, hinder updates and push up your overall total cost of ownership.

**Check your statistics**

A good intranet product should give you the ability to view the usage statistics. Being able to see what areas of the intranet are being used should help you to analyse trends and discover which sections of the intranet are most important to each department - or to the whole company. The results of this analysis will aid in the development of the intranet and avoid mistakes being made when it comes to planning for new sections.

**Upload all your key documents**

If you have traditionally kept all your company files on a certain internal server or specific directory on a networked computer, you should ensure that all the relevant content is transferred from that location to the new
company intranet. If you continue to store some key documents on a server and others on an intranet, this can lead to confusion and reduce the benefit of the company intranet. The aim is to encourage staff to view it as the central repository for all important company information, and to look there before anywhere else for specific content.

**Conduct a content audit**
Rather than simply dumping all the content you have acquired onto the company intranet, planning for a new intranet is a good time to sort through all the various bits of information and separate the good from the bad. Discard any irrelevant information and review any content which you aim to make live on the new resource.

**Ensure that your content editors have time to maintain content**
It is a good idea to give the responsibility for maintaining the content on your company intranet to specific members of staff. These “content editors” will feel a degree of ownership which should ensure that updates are made on a regular basis and information is kept accurate and current. However, do make sure that you provide these editors with enough time so that they can dedicate a portion to the maintenance of intranet content.

**Technology**

**Provide a single sign-on where possible**
Try and make the intranet login procedure as simple and straightforward as possible. If you already require employees to log in to a company network when they boot up their computers (via Active Directory for example) then your intranet login should recognise this user automatically. Although you will want to keep your intranet secure, at the same time you should avoid putting up too many barriers in the form of multiple passwords and login procedures. Employees should be able to access the intranet confidently and easily, so they are not put off from using it.

**Include a search feature**
Although you should always aim to implement excellent navigation for your intranet, effective search functionality should always complement the navigation interface. As people are so familiar with “googling” to find the information they are looking for, many website and intranet users will
attempt to perform a search before clicking on any navigational links. Therefore, adding a prominent search box to the home page of your intranet is a good idea.

Include a Content Management System
Rather than simply dumping all the content you have acquired onto the company intranet, planning for a new intranet is a good time to sort through all the various bits of information and separate the wheat from the chaff. Discard any irrelevant information and review any content which you aim to make live on the new resource.

Integration with other web-based applications
When planning your company intranet, consider the other web-based applications that you already have in the business which members of staff need to use on a day-to-day basis, such as CRM software, HR software or an IT helpdesk system. The more you can integrate the intranet with these other applications, the more streamlined business processes can potentially become. It is crucial that you discuss these issues at an early stage, as integration work may need to be carried out in advance.

Make sure your intranet gets backed-up
It is important to devise a regular backup process for any critical information which you store on your company intranet - this can include any content and databases that are part of the intranet application. Whether you transfer this data to securely stored backup tapes, another server, or simply an external hard drive, ensure that the process is included in the rest of your backup processes.

Training
Who does the training?
When you are setting up your intranet, you will need to consider the provision of training for any dedicated content editors, as well as anyone else who has responsibility for general maintenance and updating. You should establish who will be responsible for any training, whether it is included in the cost of the intranet, and how it will be provided.
Recorded demonstrations
Some degree of training can be provided via recorded demonstrations, using products such as Camtasia (http://www.techsmith.com/camtasia.asp). These types of video demonstration allow the viewer to learn at their own pace, in their own time and can be repeated as many times as necessary. You can even post these demonstrations on the intranet!

Walk in sessions
In addition to any recorded demonstrations, you should arrange for the provision of face to face intranet training for relevant members of staff. You may be able to include this service as part of the contract with your intranet developers or providers. Also, ensure that phone support is always easily available.

Governance
Who is responsible for what?
Most successful intranets are governed by a central team. Although authorship and content-ownership can - and very often should - be devolved throughout the business, the management of the intranet itself should be the direct responsibility of a dedicated team, in the same way that a company’s external website is.

Various potential roles for intranet management can include:
- Intranet Administrator - responsible for facilitating the general coordination and functioning of the intranet. Their primary focus is on strategy, organisation and quality of the intranet as an effective communication environment.
- Publisher - responsible for determining the information which is regularly provided on the intranet.
- Editor - the manager for purposes of creation and management of formal information related to specific areas within the company.
- Webmaster - responsible for maintaining the technical side of the intranet as well as bridging any gap between technical and non-technical experts.
- Author - responsible for creation of basic content on the intranet - both text and graphics.
Ensure that content is reviewed regularly
It is extremely important to make sure that your company intranet is kept up to date. All the content should be regularly reviewed to check that it is still relevant and accurate, so that its users can be confident in relying upon it. Out-of-date information can damage the reputation of a company intranet and therefore discourage members of staff from using it.

Establish an intranet oversight team to guide the development of the intranet
It is a good idea to give the responsibility for future growth and development of the company intranet to a specific individual or team. They should probably not be the people administering the intranet on a day to day basis, so they are able to take a bird’s eye view. However, anyone who deals with the intranet should, of course, be able to give feedback and suggestions to this “oversight team”.

Make sure there is an owner for the home page
Ensure that a member of staff has ownership of the intranet home page, this will typically be whomever is head of internal communications. In a small business this might be the MD, in a larger company it will be a specific job. It is the first impression of the site and needs to be regularly maintained, to keep it looking fresh and also to help draw users in. It may be a good idea to post the latest updates made to a specific page of the intranet, on the main homepage itself. This could include a link which takes you further into the site.

Launch

Have a launch plan
There are various ways in which you may decide to promote the launch of your intranet to members of staff, and encourage them to use it. This may be through email communication, formal training or induction sessions, leaflets or brochures or even simply by relying on word-of-mouth dissemination.

Run an intranet naming competition to engage employees
Giving your intranet a memorable name is one way of promoting the intranet amongst staff. A name can give your company intranet a personal identity by which it can be referred. You may even decide to run
an intranet naming competition to engage employees and build a sense of ownership.

Documentation

Document publishing processes
You should always ensure that the process of publishing to the intranet is properly documented. This is important in case the person who is normally responsible for this area, is away or off sick. A step-by-step guide should cover both the technical procedure and the company policy on publication to the intranet.

Make sure you have online help for administrators
The designated individuals responsible for maintaining the intranet should have access to online help - or even hard copy manuals, in case they require information on something specific or if they want to check up on something which they learned about in training. They should also be encouraged to compile their own “help” files or documentation for future reference.

Make sure there is an installation log
It is a good idea to give the responsibility for future growth and development of the company intranet to a specific individual or team. They should probably not be the people administering the intranet on a day to day basis, so they are able to take a bird’s eye view. However, anyone who deals with the intranet should, of course, be able to give feedback and suggestions to this “oversight team”.

What other people are saying about this tips booklet:

“Immensely practical guidance based on a wealth of implementation experience”

**Martin White, Managing Director**
Intranet Focus Ltd
http://www.intranetfocus.com

“Easy to read, packed full of good, simple advice on developing an intranet”

**Ann Elia, Head of IT**
Travers Smith LLP
http://www.traverssmith.com

“Sensible, down-to-earth ideas from a team that were instrumental in helping us relaunch our intranet”

**James Delaney, Web Developer**
Barnsley Primary Care Trust
http://www.barnsleypct.nhs.uk
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