KM COLUMN

Align intranet strategy with business objectives

Against the backdrop of changing business practices, it's valuable to broaden the focus of what intranets can (and should) do. This involves seeking out opportunities for the intranet to better meet business needs.

For some time, there has been an *assumed scope for intranets*. This consists of corporate content (HR, finance, IT, etc), plus local business documents. 'About us' sits alongside mission and vision details. Forms are collected together as PDFs with links to web-based business systems. Corporate news dominates the intranet homepage.

Sound familiar? There's nothing inherently wrong with any of these items, and they form the foundation of intranets for a reason. But while they're needed, it's hard to directly align them to business objectives, beyond 'provide a one-stop shop for information and tools' (the weakest of all intranet goals).

While this thinking may be driven by new technologies, such as collaboration and social tools, these capabilities are typically a means to an end. What are the fundamental benefits that these new tools will deliver? And how will they help the organisation?

As intranets grow in strength and scope, overarching intranet strategy should increasingly be aligned with business objectives. This helps to cut through competing priorities for the intranet team, and makes it straightforward to demonstrate business benefits.

This excerpt from our recently-released book *Essential intranets: inspiring sites that deliver business value* will explore the many ways in which intranets can align with business objectives.

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Intranet must go beyond 'provide a one-stop shop'

Provide the fundamentals and deliver business value

Few organisations would even consider operating without an intranet. There's a reason for this: intranets provide the basic foundation for managing and sharing information, as well as offering a central home for tools, forms and other organisation-wide capabilities.

As a core platform for organisations, intranets must provide the *fundamentals* that are needed by all staff.

Intranets must:

1. provide an enterprise front door
2. provide trusted information
3. deliver internal communication
4. foster staff engagement
5. foster collaboration
6. promote the organisation's culture

Intranets can do more than this, going beyond sites that are merely useful, to become *essential* to the operation of the organisation.

These intranets deliver clear *business value*, and they can:

7. enhance knowledge management
8. streamline business processes
9. improve customer service
10. mitigate business risks
11. provide 'anywhere' productivity

Together, these eleven items represent the many ways that intranets can support staff, and deliver benefits for organisations. They are not the only possible areas to focus on, but they do cover the vast majority of intranet activities.

Each of these business objectives will be (briefly) explored in the coming sections.

An exploration of intranet possibilities

The possibilities for intranets are both diverse and exciting, and they touch upon every aspect of how organisations operate.

In the book *Essential intranets*, a chapter is devoted to each of the business objectives listed previously. Full colour screenshots are featured on every second page.

This article will touch upon each objective in just a few paragraphs, with the goal of providing a clear sense of where intranets can focus.

Great intranets cut through the complexity of organisations

1. Intranets must provide an enterprise front door

The complexity of organisations has steadily grown over the last decade, and there are no shortages of systems and tools within modern organisations. As older systems have 'web enabled', they are joined by many new applications. Staff now have to routinely deal with dozens of different systems each day.

There are a growing number of information sources used by staff, including collaboration and social tools, databases and document stores.

In most cases, the problem is getting worse, not better. Each system has its own business owner, and even when supported by a competent and centralised IT department, silos are hard to avoid.

Great intranets cut through this complexity, by providing an *enterprise front door*. This provide an entry point into everything that organisations have to offer staff, including sources of information, collaboration spaces and enterprise systems.

2. Intranets must provide trusted information

The volume of information stored by organisations has grown sharply, and is increasing in pace as the number of information systems grow. Organisations are also under greater pressure to operate efficiently and nimbly, by making the best use of information that has already been created.

The problem is not one of storage; disk space has never been cheaper. Instead the challenge is to provide managers and staff with the information they need, when they need it, and how they need it.

The intranet must therefore be the source of *trusted information* for all staff. This covers many aspects, including:

• making content simple for staff

• adding value to existing information, but surfacing it in useful ways

• managing documents as well as pages

• surfacing insights from data

• engaging staff in managing intranet content

As Figure 1 shows, even the focus on the basics of delivering information in a simple way provides concrete benefits for staff.

Staff must be kept informed in a timely way

3. Intranets must deliver internal communication

It's no small challenge to keep staff informed. Paper newsletters and internal newspapers have had their day. Email is universally used, but the flood of messages now means many staff treat corporate updates as 'internal spam'.

Against this backdrop, the need to communicate within organisations has never been greater. As organisations grow in size and complexity, it becomes increasingly hard to connect staff to the corporate strategy, and to keep different areas of the organisation working in a coordinated way.

There are many different internal communications needs, including:

• communicating top-level strategy

• sharing success stories and 'wins'

• announcing new products and services

• communicating regulatory and compliance updates

• providing visibility of wider industry news and changes

• delivering frontline and operational messages

For many years, communication has stood alongside content as one of the primary pur-

Figure 1: Simple content written for the online medium makes it easy for staff to find and use the information they need. (Screenshot courtesy of DCMS.)

poses of intranets, with news featuring heavily on the homepage of most intranets.

Beyond this, communication is now about peer-to-peer and bottom-up, alongside traditional top-down messages. The growth of collaboration and social tools is also blurring the line between official messages and social media updates.

Engaged staff are more motivated and productive

4. Intranets must foster staff engagement

Engaged staff are more motivated and productive. They have a clearer understanding of the organisation's strategy and focus, and understand their role in the bigger picture. When staff are engaged, they are also active contributors to organisational planning and discussions.

It is therefore no surprise that staff engagement is a primary focus of corporate affairs, internal communications, HR and intranet teams, across all sectors.

Many intranet projects are launched with the sole aim of addressing staff engagement issues, or strengthening existing levels of engagement.

Beyond addressing short-term pain, organisations are increasingly seeing the long-term benefits of fostering staff engagement, from both productivity and cultural perspectives. The shifts in working behaviours to more collaborative practices is also driving a focus on staff engagement.

While addressing staff engagement is primarily the responsibility of senior managers, intranets can help in many ways, including:

- giving staff a voice, and an opportunity to provide input
- providing recognition for staff activities and successes
- helping senior management connect with staff
- strengthening social bonds in the workplace
- engaging staff in strategic initiatives

5. Intranets must foster collaboration

The way we work is changing. External factors, such as tough economic times, means that organisations must be more effective, efficient and nimble.

Major shifts in technology are also having an effect. Collaboration and social tools, having proved themselves on the wider web, are now becoming ubiquitous within organisations.

This collaboration can be informal and small-scale, within limited groups of staff, or supporting a single business unit. At the other end of the scale, some organisations are moving towards becoming 'social businesses', where collaboration becomes a key part of the organisational 'DNA'.

Regardless of the intensity of use, collaboration and social tools deliver a range of important business benefits:

- reducing organisational silos
- improving staff effectiveness when working in groups
- assisting the delivery of projects
- supporting information sharing within teams or business units
- increasing innovation
- reducing duplication of work
- improving knowledge management

Figure 2 provides a typical, but nonetheless powerful example of the benefits that collaboration and social tools can offer.

Central tools or templates can be offered as a service

6. Intranets must promote the organisation's culture

It's the mark of a strong culture that staff are able to be effective and resilient, even in the face of major organisational changes, such as explosive growth, marketplace changes, or even downsizing.

Organisations with mature and effective cultures operate as 'well-oiled machines', where staff know what they should be doing, and how they should be working with each other.

Most visibly, organisational culture is manifested as a set of clear objectives, shared val-

Adam
Hello Yammerites...Would like to get your insight on a particular challenge I am working on with the Business Engagement Community. The current situation is that on average, over 2000 calls a month to IBM are related to central ID password resets. Each password re-set costs $. This works out to be roughly 10% volume of IBM service calls per month at a cost of roughly a year in wastage. There is currently a facility to re-set a users password on the intranet. However, the calls still remain to be a problem. Either the message has not been communicated effectively, or there is another unknown reason why employees continue to need to re-set their Central Id passwords. I would like to ask the Yammer community for their insights into a) where the break down seems to be and b) ideas how this wastage could be reduced? Am very interested to hear your thoughts.

Like · Reply · Share · More · April 8, 2011 at 3:45pm

Fairvalue   Yammerwin   Yammer ROI

Jon , Reuben , Simon and 9 others like this.

Show 78 older replies »

Adam   **in reply to Simon** : Hi Simon, A number of small changes have been made in the process and in educating the end user. I will know more on actualls in terms of progress hopefully by end of month when we re-baseline.
September 19, 2011 at 4:27pm · Like · Reply · Share · More
Christian and Simon like this.

Figure 2: Social tools can be very powerful when used to solve business problems, or to answer questions. In this example, there were 78 comments made on a thread that has the potential to make significant savings in out-sourced IT costs. (Screenshot courtesy of NAB.)

ues and standard processes. These need to be understood widely, from the C-Suite down to frontline and factory floor staff.

In the modern working environment, however, intranets can be used as a strategic tool to support senior leader's goals of fostering and strengthening the organisation's culture and value.

This includes:

- providing an enjoyable, engaging and productive working environment
- communicating organisational strategy, priorities and changes
- helping to bring the organisation together
- fostering a collaborative culture

> ### The global team typically 'owns' only a fraction of the whole

7. Intranets can enhance knowledge management

Organisations are made of people. While formal policies and processes are important, much of the success of organisations rests on the knowledge in people's heads, and how they make use of it.

Knowledge management (KM) as a discipline has existed for several decades, with the goal of improving the use and impact of knowledge. A broad field, knowledge management offers many different approaches and techniques, addressing four main aspects:

- people
- process
- content
- technology

While intranets are primarily a technology platform, they can assist (both directly and indirectly) with all four aspects of KM.

This includes:

- capturing and communicating key knowledge
- connecting staff who have a common interest or need
- surfacing staff skills and expertise
- supporting ongoing collaboration and social interaction

8. Intranets can streamline business processes

The day-to-day work of organisations is built around tasks and processes. These may be small activities, such as filling in a form, or making a request. They can also be large, business-spanning systems that provide the engines for core business.

In all cases, organisations have struggled to establish efficient ways of conducting and completing these processes. At an individual level, staff often find it hard to locate the right form, or to confidently know how to fill them in.

At a larger scale, the 'web-enabling' of most legacy systems has simplified access to some degree, but has led to a sea of separate islands, often with their own usernames and passwords. Integration, where it exists, is often fragmented and piecemeal.

Intranets present many opportunities to streamline business processes, ranging from quick and simple solutions to strategic initiatives. These fall into four main categories:

- Improving the design and usability of systems, in terms of finding the right tools, and then using them in a productive way.
- Automating simple tasks, using out-of-the-box functionality to simplify the myriad of smaller processes that exist across organisations.
- Meeting local business needs, by providing individual business units and teams alternatives to Excel and Access.
- Delivering strategic solutions, that use the intranet to directly deliver core business processes.

Figure 3 provides a compelling example of how an intranet can support core business activities, in this case in a building company.

> ### Streamlined processes deliver productivity benefits

9. Intranets can improve customer service

Customer service is make-or-break for many organisations. This includes consumer and retail organisations, business-to-business providers and government agencies.

Figure 3: Bidding on (and winning) projects is a key process for a building company. Here, the whole process has been captured in an intranet-based system, allowing a real-time dashboard to be produced (amongst many other benefits). (Screenshots courtesy of Hansen Yuncken.)

In most cases, the staff providing customer service are located at the periphery of organisations. These staff include:

- customer service operators in call centres
- retail staff in stores and branches
- sales staff travelling from customer to customer
- service staff working at front counters and other service points
- cabin crew in planes
- technical support and other support staff

Organisations are judged according to the quality of customer service provided. Were customer service staff knowledgeable? Was the right information provided? Was the problem solved? Was the service prompt and helpful?

Intranets can help by providing the knowledge that underpins great customer service. This includes delivering timely and useful information to customer-facing staff, giving greater visibility throughout the organisation of customer needs, and providing effective tools for customer-facing staff.

As shown in Figure 4, intranets can also help to connect the organisation as a whole with the needs and issues of customers This is a key input into customer-centric practices.

Business risks range from small and frequent, to catastrophic

10. Intranets can mitigate business risks

Organisations wrestle with a wide range of business risks. Some of these represent frequent but minor irritations, while others prevent the delivery of core services, or threaten to undermine the organisation as a whole.

Day-to-day business risks often centre on the creation and use of information, such as:

- whether decision-making is informed by the best possible information
- the degree to which staff know corporate policies, and follow them
- the strength of information management practices, ensuring that information is accurate, trustworthy, available and findable

- the level of compliance with mandated standards, such as recordkeeping legislation or ISO–9000 compliance

Business risks also more tangibly relate to the delivery of core services and products, such as:

- quality of advice given to customers and clients
- mistakes or errors in manufacturing or operations
- reputational risks arising from incorrect information
- breaches of environmental or safety standards

Business risks also result from the extraordinary impact of disasters, both natural and man-made. These includes power outages, floods, fires, hurricanes and volcanic eruptions.

Intranets are the visible face of information management practices that address and mitigate business risks. They provide a central point of access to trusted information and tools, and connect staff in ways that reduce mistakes and improve coordination.

Intranets also provide a virtual workspace that allows organisations to rapidly respond to disasters, and to keep staff working even when offices are cut off from the rest of the world.

Staff must be productive wherever they are

11. Intranets can provide 'anywhere' productivity

It has long been the case in many organisations that the most important staff don't work in an office. These 'mobile' or 'field' staff encompass many different roles, including:

- engineers and technicians working in the field
- sales staff visiting customers
- consultants working with clients
- workers in factories and plants
- local government staff delivering a wide range of services
- staff working in stores and retail environments

Figure 4: Customer insights and stories are brought directly into the intranet. This includes a feature box on the homepage (top) and a section dedicated to customer stories that communicate the needs of key customer groups (bottom). (Screenshots courtesy of The Scotts Miracle-Gro Company.)

These staff all do very different jobs, and have their unique needs in terms of information and tools. What they have in common, however, is that they don't have the things that all office workers take for granted: a desk, a PC, and an opportunity to converse face-to-face with other office staff.

More than just using mobile devices in a work context, this is about providing 'anywhere' productivity for all staff. It encompasses a range of approaches, some simple and some more demanding.

This is the aspect of intranets that is experiencing the greatest shifts at the moment, and is still at the leading edge of innovation (at the time of writing this book at least).

It's an exciting time for intranets

Intranets are a process, not a one-off project. No one activity, regardless of how large and well-resourced it is, will deliver the 'perfect' intranet.

Delivering a better intranet fuels a greater maturity of intranet knowledge across the organisation as a whole. If the right improvements are chosen, they also foster ambitions to deliver even greater improvements.

By targeting intranet activities to address clear business objectives, intranets can quickly become essential tools for all staff.

This is an exciting vision for organisations of the future. It sees business-centric intranets sitting as one element of a seamless *digital workplace* that allows staff to be productive wherever and whenever they are.

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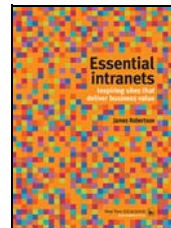
This article shares excerpts from the book *Essential intranets: inspiring sites that deliver business value.* In 290 pages it explores the full scope of modern intranets, providing over a hundred intranet screenshots in the process.

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