

As a fundamental purpose of intranets, communication has a vital role to play in the ongoing development and success of a site. But understanding how an intranet can perform as a useful communication platform is often lacking.

This article will explore three types of communication that can be found or deployed on an intranet. There are many others too.

Common questions

- What's happening in the business?
- What's the leadership team focusing on?
- What are my colleagues working on?

These are just some of the key questions staff ask and expect to see answered via platform like the intranet. Yet often such information is communicated infrequently or not at all.

With less resources and time, and more remote offices and home-workers in businesses, there's an ever-increasing need for communication via the intranet. But there's also a balance to be found. Too much information can cause information overload, and too much irrelevant information can be as frustrating as no communication at all.

Time and time again in research projects, interviewees will say, 'I only want to see information that's relevant to me', but this will also be contradicted by a desire to know what's happening in the business.

In reality, it's not feasible for all intranet content to be 100% tailored to each individual's needs and requirements all the time. There's a legitimate need for 'global' business communication as much as for local and team-oriented business communication.

Therefore, the ambition should be to find the balance between communication types on the site, and emphasise aspects that are more individually tailored.

Global communication

Global communication is business-wide: the CEO's message, column or even blog, the main corporate news bulletins and more. This is traditional, top-down communication, organised (and often written) by the internal communica-

tion team. This type of communication will always have a place on the intranet, but it's usually over-emphasised, and dominates communication.

Local communication

'Local' communication is targeted to local or specific areas of a business. This might be a regional office or department, or one level of a business such as retail stores. It can be generated by the internal communication team, other departments such as Sales, IT or HR, and also often by employees themselves via a 'submit news' feature or similar.

Local communication can be anything from specific training programs coming to a region, office or job-type, other business-oriented events and happenings, to much more socially-oriented information such as a charity bike ride in the area and more. This type of information is usually much more useful to individual users than global communication.

Employee-to-employee communication

With the increasing use of social media tools in businesses, employee-to-employee communication is becoming more and more familiar in intranet design. Publicising the latest discussion threads from employee forums and enabling employees to embed their own feeds into a specific section of the intranet is increasingly popular.

This type of communication is immensely valuable to employees, and the opportunities now commonly provided by AJAX, Javascript and XML technologies mean displaying such communication and information can be done in a number of ways.

Finding the right communications mix

Primary focus should be on the needs and requirements of employees, but businesses will always require a global communication channel too. Finding the right balance of frequency and display priority for each type of communication is vital for intranet success.