

Finding compelling examples to build the intranet business case

For many intranet teams, funding and resourcing is incredibly tight. The intranet is often a poor cousin to an organisation's public website, and its worth to the organisation is rarely demonstrated well.

Intranet teams also rarely have direct lines of communication to senior management who, as infrequent users of the site, have little understanding of its complexity or potential.

As a result, when it comes to getting funding for a new content management system (CMS), or developing and adding new applications and services, making the case is an uphill struggle.

Yet there is great potential in intranets; we only need to look at the winners of the Intranet Innovation Awards to see how useful, powerful and valuable intranets and related services can be.

Compelling examples

To capture the attention of executives and get the visibility or funding that's required to progress the site, it's necessary to demonstrate how the intranet can help.

Identify compelling examples where processes failed or the bottom line was clearly affected by poor systems and information, and the task of obtaining more funding becomes much easier. Consider the following two examples, which both make a strong case for easy-to-use information systems.

Improving information currency

One organisation had three existing knowledge bases, all with similar, product-oriented content. Pages in all three knowledge bases were developed over the years in static html. They were not part of the main CMS, and there was no effective search tool.

The fundamental issues were the maintenance, consistency, currency and findability of information. Even if they could find what they were looking for, staff couldn't trust the information and had resorted to building their own, paper-based 'bibles' of product information, or asking colleagues who weren't guaranteed to have the right answers either.

This situation needed fixing, but doing so wouldn't be easy and would inevitably cost a significant amount of money in development and resourcing.

In this example, the case was made by identifying how the poor information was directly affecting the business: staff conservatively estimated that customers were being given the wrong information 10-15 times per day. Extrapolated across the organisation's contact centres and stores over months and years, the dollars lost far outweighed the investment needed.

Building competitive advantage

In 2008, online investment firm Scottrade won a Gold Intranet Innovation Award with its 'competitor wiki'. This wiki allows Scottrade consultants to easily contribute and update competitor information and share it with their colleagues.

Prior to the wiki, competitor information was mostly shared informally through email, conversations and meetings, while formally gathered and published on the intranet by two associates when they had the time. With constant changes in the industry and limited resources, these associates often did not have enough time to keep up with all the information and still carry out their own duties. Typically it took around three days to get new information on the intranet.

It was a similar story with the monthly newsletter that highlighted one competitor at a time. It provided useful information but the whole process – researching a firm, and publishing the newsletter – took around one month, and so much could happen in that time.

Using a wiki, all consultants were able to instantly publish competitor information. Eliminating the need for a central publishing process empowered users and gave life to a whole new stream of up-to-date business intelligence, which in turn became a competitive advantage for Scottrade.

Find examples in your business

To make the case for intranet funding, research the business, its strategy and the challenges it's facing, and focus on intranet-based solutions that can help resolve those challenges.