

The credibility of any intranet is dependent on content. Content that is created, published and maintained by many different people across the organisation. This frees up the intranet team to focus on the big picture, but they still have a key role in teaching staff on how to deliver effective content.

Depending on the skills of the authors within the organisation, intranet teams may conduct training in:

- writing for the web
- the publishing process
- how to layout pages
- governance of the intranet

The intranet team may also run a community of practice, have specific sites for author support and provide ongoing ad-hoc support. Many of these options are discussed in an earlier article *How to empower authors*. But another way to support authors is with a drop-in centre.

A drop-in centre is regular forum for authors to seek advice without interrupting the intranet team or making an appointment.

The informal atmosphere makes learning easy, especially for those whose authoring responsibilities only form a small part of their role.

### Drop-in centre logistics

There are many options to consider when setting up a drop-in centre:

- **Timing** — depends on the size and breath of the organisation, but once a month is common. Lunchtime may a good time for people who are keen to improve their skills but only work on the intranet part-time.
- **Location** — drop-in centres are only effective if they are near authors, so major sites in capital cities where lots of authors work are ideal.
- **Room layout** — a meeting room where authors can ask their questions in private will work best. Consider placing the chairs side by side to create an informal, chatty atmosphere.
- **Skills needed** — the intranet team representative must be an expert in the organisation's CMS, and able to answer questions on writing styles and content.
- **Technology** — access to the intranet and publishing tool is essential, with full-sized keyboard and mouse.
- **Takeaways** — each person should leave the drop-in centre on a positive note. Provide each visitor with a printed copy of a relevant Step Two Designs article, and possibly a chocolate bar!
- **Staffing** — The best person to run a drop-in centre will listen to the questions posed without making assumptions or judgements. These techniques are discussed in an earlier article *Listening for intranet success*. They will also have deep knowledge of the intranet and publishing systems.

### Supply and demand

Sometimes a popular drop-in centre can be overwhelmed with people. Have some relevant and interesting books for people to browse while waiting such as *Don't Make Me Think* by Steve Krug and *Write me a web page*, *Elsie* by Rachel McAlpine.

If waiting time gets too long, provide a form for people to add their name and number and be called when there is a spot available.

If the drop-in centre is slow, the team member can continue with their other work.

At the same time as building authors' skills, a drop-in centre offers intranet teams an insight into the issues authors face. Discerning common problems may prompt the team to develop new learning materials for authors of fix some areas of the intranet.

Teams thinking of implementing a drop-in centre need to evaluate whether they have a team member with the right skills and personality, large concentrations of authors in specific locations, and an organisational culture that will embrace an informal training option. If so, the drop-in centre could be an ideal solution to those tricky post-training questions, and may inspire authors and intranet teams alike.