

For many intranet teams it is all too easy to view the intranet through the eyes of their corporate colleagues. With dedicated computers inside the firewall and polished computer skills, access issues are limited. However, taking a broader audience view is critical to ensuring that the intranet gets the attention and usage it needs.

## Access issues

Clearly, some intranet audiences have limited computer access. Computers may have to be shared or may only be available when workers are not completing core duties. Other audiences have no apparent need to use a computer, and there is a danger that these workers will be completely ignored for that reason when the intranet is designed. Some staff types at risk of being ignored include:

- sales employees in a retail environment
- educational teaching staff
- production line employees
- delivery and transportation workers
- heavy industry plant operators
- maintenance and repair crews
- hospitality industry workers
- workers in health care professions

In addition to the obvious access difficulties that the environment presents, there can be other more subtle issues like security or connection speeds. More examples can be found in the earlier article *Paradox of delivering to isolated staff*.

## Impact

Ironically, those with the greatest access difficulty may be the ones who need the intranet most.

For example, a water infrastructure maintenance worker might not need a computer to perform maintenance activities, but will probably need access to procedures, safety documentation, technical manuals, maps and schematics. Since these audiences can represent the majority of people in many organisations, the difficulties are not trivial.

Being disconnected from the ‘mother-ship’, they may also lack good communications channels,

and paper-based solutions can be especially cumbersome.

Less obvious are the impacts on the organisational culture, which can be far-reaching. For example, when effective communication channels are absent, staff will develop informal ones, which may be a lot less accurate or constructive. Alternatively, open two-way communications foster a culture of trust and transparency. Which culture is your intranet fostering?

## Considering solutions

Delivery of the traditional ‘computer screen’ view can be facilitated easily enough by measures like:

- making more computers available in ‘down-time’ or common areas
- enabling home access

More solutions are covered in previous articles *Intranet kiosks or remote access?* and *Rolling out intranet access from home*.

To make the intranet more generally available, the intranet team may need to move away from the ‘computer screen’ view of what they are delivering. Some possible alternatives include:

- mobile and smart phones
- common-room information displays
- moving message boards

Avoid the trap of trying to deliver the entire intranet through an unsuited medium. Those with access difficulty may only need some portion of the intranet, so tailor to the medium and the audience.

For example, making the people directory available on all mobile devices would be a boon for most organisations and as yet has rarely been seen.

Reconnecting workers to the ‘mother-ship’ can be rewarding but avoid the trap of telling them what corporate communications thinks they need to know. Success will only follow delivery of tools and information that actually help workers complete their tasks more easily.