

We often hear of intranet teams being asked to 'deliver' the intranet as if it was a product that can be purchased and deployed in a straightforward manner. While there are aspects of the intranet that can be thought of in these terms, another approach is to view the intranet as a service.

If they are able to differentiate between these two perspectives, intranet teams are better positioned to frame the intranet conversation, making it easier to communicate what they are trying to achieve and to manage expectations of internal clients as well as stakeholders.

### The intranet as a product

Sometimes it is useful to think of a product as an outcome. Effort is expended and something namable, even concrete, is produced.

Many aspects of intranet delivery can be seen like this. Principal among these is the technology platform that supports the intranet. It can be acquired, it has 'out of the box' functionality, it can perhaps be modified for local needs, and it can then be deployed.

Other aspects of the intranet may have a launch-date associated with them and the quality of a 'thing' to be delivered such as a

- people finder
- document repository
- team space
- search function
- newsletter

Framing the intranet in these terms carries a risk that their delivery becomes the end-goal. This devalues and narrows the contribution the intranet can make to the organisation.

### The intranet as a service

'Service' is associated with ongoing delivery, client satisfaction, helping others' to achieve their goals; it's about being useful, relevant and above all else, it's about business value.

Services have no end point. This perspective helps place the intranet in a process of continuous improvement, supporting an agile approach which responds to changing business needs.

Some key intranet services include:

- improving the way information is captured and delivered
- refining communications channels to all staff
- increasing the use of collaboration tools
- maintaining guidelines for governance and support
- seamlessly integrating with evolving enterprise systems
- supporting content providers and authoring communities
- consulting staff on changing needs
- collaborating with other internal service providers such as HR, IT and finance

Without this service mentality 'intranet products', at best, become stale and fail to maintain their relevance for staff. At worst, they stumble from the outset and fail to fulfil their full potential.

### Serving the business

In intranet reality there is a great deal of grey between where a product ends and a service begins but an example shows the contrast between the two viewpoints.

The intranet team is tasked with providing an online newsletter:

- A product approach might take an existing paper version and make it downloadable.
- A service approach will take a broader look at this and consider the different channels that are available and help the business leverage and enhance communication to specific audiences.

The latter is more challenging, but ultimately delivers more value to the business.

The line between product and service may be blurred, but the tenets of great customer service will serve the intranet team well: know who your clients are, actively listen to what they say, manage their expectations and deliver what they need as best you can.