

Jargon is generally language that applies to a particular trade, profession or group of people. Within organisations jargon can be like secret shorthand, with many variations, including abbreviations, made-up words and acronyms. Who has ever been on a Genesis project or had to go to a meeting in the CQ building?

The intranet can suffer and benefit from this collective organisational shorthand. Good intranet teams need to ensure any jargon used on top level pages such as home page and landing pages is appropriate.

For example, 'Richard's blog' might be highly appropriate when it is owned by the CEO, often referred to and covered during induction training. On the other hand, 'OSKA' might be used as the name of the online training system based on the software used, and have no real relevance at all to staff.

The key factor in assessing any jargon-like terms that appear on the intranet is to determine the level of understanding of the terms by all staff. Do not assume that everyone knows what it all means.

How to jargon test

Depending on the size and diversity of the organisation, there are many ways to jargon test the intranet. One of the most effective ways is to review possible jargon words with new starters. This can be as simple as a joint discussion while reviewing the intranet online.

A more sophisticated option is to identify and list possible jargon words and then ask staff to share their understandings of the words. It is very important to ensure that staff do not feel like they are being tested, and they understand they are helping you with testing the intranet. One of the difficulties with this approach can be that words in the list might have different meanings in different contexts.

Of course the best way to ensure your intranet is effective is with tried and tested methods of usability testing, staff feedback and research. However it is possible to improve an intranet quickly with some simple language fixes.

System names

One of the most common and frustrating areas of jargon on the intranet can be links to other systems. It is not uncommon to see things like ESS/MSS, Enter PMP and WNV allowances on the home page of an intranet.

Depending on the age of the system and frequency of use system names can be easily understood or very confusing. Which are yours? Unwieldy system names can be replaced by stating the task. For example, 'Book a training course' is preferable to 'TrainWebStar'.

Name of the intranet

Bob, Boris and Compass are all examples of intranet names. A name for the intranet is an excellent way to build identity. However it cannot be assumed that everyone instantly knows what and who Bob is. Intranet names are brands and require effort to build, otherwise they are in danger of becoming another form of company jargon. More information on naming intranets is covered in an earlier article *Naming the intranet*.

World-wide intranets

Some intranets span entire countries or the world, and diversity in language and culture can influence the language that is useful on the intranet. Jargon relevant in one area of the organisation may be completely misunderstood in others. Even seemingly valid words can have different meanings. For example the word 'lawyer' has different meanings in Australia, Canada, England, Wales, India and the United States.

Automatic translation engines can also struggle with jargon terms. When the word Coca-Cola was first translated into a Chinese language it came out as 'bite the wax tadpole'.

Summary

Jargon needs to be kept to a minimum on the main pages of your intranet, as not all staff have the same levels of knowledge. Simple tests can establish where your intranet stands.

Intranet teams need to research staff understanding and aim for clarity on the intranet at all times.