

What message does your intranet send to your staff?

You're a powerful and highly respected professional services firm, with offices high up in a tower building overlooking a spectacular view.

You're a major consumer goods company that delivers products designed for the fashion elite, constantly at the leading edge.

You're a global technology company, that attracts the brightest minds to deliver the most innovative solutions.

You're a worldwide non-profit that attracts those who are looking to make the world a better place, drawing on great people to solve world hunger.

Yet in all four cases, your intranet is out-of-date, poorly designed, hard to use, under-resourced and non-functional.

What message does this send to your staff?

It says: "we're a powerful organisation that cares about customers, products and the world, but not about our staff." In this modern age, is this something that you can afford?

The war for talent

The 'global war for talent' has become a cliché, highlighting the increasing difficulty that organisations experience attracting and retaining the best staff. Despite an economic crisis, the situation is no easier for those businesses seeking to attract the best and brightest.

Considerable effort is put into marketing the organisation, building a brand and image, recruiting staff (and often rewarding them well).

And yet the first day in the new organisation can be a shock for new starters. In contrast to the impressive external image and reputation of the firm, the staff intranet (and supporting tools) are dated and primitive.

Coming from an environment of rapidly innovating consumer technology, the gap between expectation and reality is getting ever larger.

This sends a negative message to staff, suggesting that they are second-class citizens behind customers and products.

Worse yet, it sets the expectation that the organisation doesn't need to be efficient or effective, and that innovation is something that is delivered to consumers, but not deployed internally.

Delivering an intranet that befits the organisation

The more impressive the brand and reputation of an organisation, the more critical it becomes to deliver a working environment of equal standard, including a great intranet.

This involves many different aspects:

- Ensuring a visual design and appearance of the intranet of a standard befitting the organisation.
- Creating a strong intranet brand and identity that aligns with the overall corporate brand.
- Ensuring the intranet is highly usable, including simple navigation and great search.
- Ensuring content is up-to-date and well-written.
- Providing staff with a rich toolbox of productivity aids, to ensure they're able to be effective.
- Using the intranet as a tool for building and reinforcing the culture of the organisation.
- Clearly aligning the intranet with the overall mission, vision and purpose of the organisation.
- Resourcing the intranet, and supporting tools, to a sufficient degree.

While intranet teams would recognise this as a list of generic 'best practices' for every intranet, high-reputation organisations must deliver each aspect to a higher standard.

Getting the fundamentals right

Even less lofty organisations are under increasing pressure to deliver an intranet that respects the needs and practices of staff.

As consumer tools get steadily easier to use and more powerful (particularly on mobile devices), dated and clunky intranets look increasingly out of place.

Staff are also more mobile, which exposes them to a larger number of intranets than in years past. In each new job, the standard of the intranet is measured against their past experiences. Organisations can't afford to be found wanting!