CM BRIEFING

Intranet teams need technology savvy

Intranets are increasingly being owned and managed by communications teams or business areas. In general, this is a positive shift, leading to greater alignment with staff and organisational priorities.

However, the move away from IT ownership, can leave intranet teams with a significant knowledge and skills gap relating to technology. In this technology-dominated world, is this viable or sustainable? Can intranet teams do without technical knowledge?

Intranets as a technology platform

There has always been a technology component to the delivery and management of intranets. When intranets were just a publishing platform for content and news, modern web content management systems (CMS) thankfully took away much of the technical complexity, replacing it with simple point-and-click interfaces.

Many technical aspects remained, however, often relating to integration with other business systems. Notable examples include HR self-service, the staff directory, online forms, and business process integration.

With changes in the broader web landscape, expectations of intranets are growing rapidly. No longer just publishing tools, modern intranets are expected to support collaboration and social tools. There is also a desire to deliver simple, streamlined tasks online, hiding behind-the-scenes complexities.

These greater capabilities all require technology involvement. Even when capabilities are mostly deployed 'out-of-the-box', work needs to be done to seamlessly integrate features together to create a coherent intranet.

In many cases, non-trivial development work is required to develop desired functionality, often far in excess of the original purchase cost of base products or platforms.

This presents a challenging dichotomy: even as intranets are focusing more on business and staff needs, they are becoming more complex from a technical perspective.

Increasingly, this means great intranets are the product of a clear business vision and superb technical execution.

The need for technology savvy

Where does this leave intranet teams? As discussed in the earlier article *Roles needed in an intranet team*, there are many areas of knowledge that need to be covered. How much technical expertise is required in successful intranet teams?

First off, intranet teams cannot afford to be technology *ignorant*. All teams should have at least a reasonable awareness of the technical platforms underpinning the intranet, and the technical aspects of making improvements.

But neither do intranet teams need to be technology *geeks*. Technology is only one aspect of running intranets, and team members don't need to be professional developers or IT architects.

What's needed is technology *savvy*, perhaps best defined as "the ability to have meaningful discussions with IT, and to make informed technology-related decisions".

This middle ground involves having a working familiarity with relevant technology platforms, and a sense of what's involved in doing further IT work. This enables intranet teams to be effective drivers for delivering a great site.

Gaining technical knowledge

There are many ways of steadily building technology savvy over time, including:

- Reading blogs and websites that cover general technology trends from a business perspective.
- Gaining hands-on training with key tools, to an administrator (not developer) level.
- Attending conferences and events that explore intranet and technology topics.
- Tracking what other organisations have done from a technical perspective.
- Building a productive relationship with IT, to allow constructive two-way dialogue and knowledge sharing.
- Hiring team members with a greater level of technical knowledge or comfort.
- Sticking at it! Not being afraid to ask questions, or to keep asking for more information until things make sense.