

Intranet strategies vary from 100-page formal documents to informal plans that can be conveyed verbally in a lift. Some strategies cover the coming six months, while others stretch out to encompass five-year timescales.

Regardless of the scope and duration of the plans, successful strategies all build on a common narrative structure that describes:

- where we've been
- what we're doing right now
- what comes next

This basic structure helps intranet teams to give shape to their strategy development efforts, and ensures that nothing is missed.

Where we've been

Intranets are generally the product of a long history of changes and organic evolution, which provides vital context for the planned improvements.

Strategies need to outline:

- history of the intranet
- current intranet problems and issues
- results of research conducted
- staff needs and points of pain
- what has already been delivered or improved
- why the intranet can't remain in its current state (the case for change)

Beware of getting caught up in describing the history and current state of the intranet, however, as the past can easily overwhelm discussions of the future.

What we're doing right now

Intranet teams must clearly outline the planned work that will be done to improve or enhance their sites, including specific deliverables or features. This typically covers a six- or 12-month timeframe.

This is the weakest part of intranet strategies, and some teams never produce a concrete project plan. Without this, teams struggle to gain the necessary support at the outset of the project, and to deliver the hoped-for improvements.

Good strategies outline:

- what will be delivered or improved
- timeframes and milestones
- who will do the work
- resources and support required
- dependencies on technology and other projects
- business benefits of the improvements

While this should be succinct, it also needs to be robust enough to form a foundation for the actual work to be done.

What comes next

Strategies are incomplete without providing a long-term view of where the intranet will be heading. This ensures that activities conducted across the business align to produce a coherent outcome.

This strategic view should cover at least a year beyond immediate improvements, and may stretch out to three or even five years.

Strategies should outline:

- long-term vision for the intranet
- further improvements required beyond current activities
- strategic and business-wide benefits
- how the intranet fits in the context of broader enterprise systems and plans

Note that the 'big picture' view of intranets is often the element that most engages senior managers and key stakeholders.

Living strategy

Treat these three elements as a snapshot of the intranet journey. As improvements are delivered, they move from 'what we're doing right now' into 'where we've been'. Items in 'what comes next' then move into current concrete plans.

At any given point, intranet teams must be able to describe, and provide in written form, all three of these elements when required.

(Thanks to Harry Max for the insights that led to this article.)