

## Don't try to boil the content ocean

The phrase 'trying to boil the ocean' refers to tasks that are clearly and heroically impossible. This is exactly what most teams take on when they try to get every intranet page up to the same high standard.

In the earlier article titled *Intranet authoring: a hobby?*, the role of intranet authors was explored, highlighting that many are required to maintain their content 'on the side', with little training or support.

Most intranets struggle to deliver consistent, accurate, readable and valuable content. Despite this, the goal of many intranet teams remains to deliver universally 'good' content.

This briefing will discuss common approaches to improving content, focusing on those that have failed. Suggestions will then be made on ways to target efforts for best effect.

### Failed: content cleanups

Many teams attempt a content cleanup on a regular basis, perhaps every year or two. These involve reviewing most sections of the site, and the content contained within.

These reviews are looking for ROT (redundant, outdated or trivial), generating 'hit lists' of content that can be removed.

While these very easily remove hundreds or thousands of pages, the long term impact is negligible. As fast as content is reviewed by the central team, more is published by decentralised authors.

The process drains the energy of the intranet team, and often frustrates content owners. Even after a major cleanup, the intranet rapidly accumulates more content problems, and reverts to its previous state.

### Failed: universal workflow

Some intranet teams react by putting in place workflow that requires all content to be assessed by the central team before it is published.

This quickly becomes a bottleneck, consuming huge amounts of the intranet team's time. In one organisation, the intranet team spent 50% of every day simply clicking 'approve', with no time to even look at the content.

The intranet team is also very constrained in how much they can assess, and are only able to conduct a final 'quality check' on pages.

In the most extreme case, the intranet team fully centralises publishing. While potentially beneficial to content quality, this can never scale to meet the needs of a whole organisation.

### Failed: rigid policies

In a decentralised environment, the temptation is to establish rigid rules and policies relating to content publishing.

Typically built around a thick 'style guide', these rules outline writing standards, linking policies, naming standards, and approval requirements.

While these policies will always be needed, they are impractical when authoring is conducted as a 'hobby'.

Without sufficient time, skills or knowledge, it is unreasonable to expect decentralised authors to meet these tight standards. The central team also has limited time to enforce the guidelines, and they are routinely ignored.

### Targeting efforts

As discussed in the article *Not all content needs to be of equal quality*, the fundamental mistake is to apply a single rule across all content.

Some content must be of very high quality (such as HR policies), while other material is almost irrelevant (meeting notes).

Intranet teams should therefore allocate their limited resources to the content (and authors) that will have the greatest impact. This includes:

- establishing multiple content standards, explicitly targeted at different types of information
- focusing reviews and improvements on the highest-value content
- making it as easy as possible for authors to meet minimum standards
- working closely with key authors to help them deliver the best possible content
- letting go of any desire to 'control' content publishing across the whole intranet