

What is the intranet for? An easy question to ask, but surprisingly hard for many intranet teams to answer.

To be successful, intranets must have a clear definition of their purpose and character. This underpins decisions about future directions, as well as current priorities and activities.

Answering this question goes a long way to defining the intranet 'brand'. More than just colours and logos, the brand captures and communicates the nature of the intranet.

This briefing will outline a simple technique to start the process of determining the intranet brand.

### Product Reaction Cards

The user experience team at Microsoft have published a very interesting tool called the 'Product Reaction Cards', which can be freely downloaded from the team's website:

[www.microsoft.com/usability/UEPostings/ProductReactionCards.doc](http://www.microsoft.com/usability/UEPostings/ProductReactionCards.doc)

This contains a wide range of words that can be used to describe almost any product, whether physical or electronic.

It includes words such as 'innovative', 'engaging', 'collaborative', 'reliable', 'effective' and 'useful'.

These can be used to help define the future direction and role of the site, narrowing down the many possibilities to one clear direction.

The cards also contain a range of negative words, such as 'dated', 'overwhelming', 'irrelevant', 'busy', and 'complex'.

These have obvious application to the current intranet in many organisations.

### Using the cards

Write each of the words onto a filing card to create a pack (or print the words onto labels, and stick these onto the cards).

The cards can then be used in a variety of ways, to facilitate discussion and build consensus about the intranet and its role.

Start with the intranet team. As a group select *eight cards* that best describe the intranet as it should be.

This will require compromise: the intranet can't be all things to all people. Will it be fun and engaging? Or perhaps useful and structured? Equally validly it might be time-saving and efficient.

This helps (and forces) the intranet team to focus the intranet, defining what the intranet will be used for, and what it won't.

The Product Reaction Cards can also be used with stakeholder groups, using a workshop to build consensus about the future direction of the intranet.

They can be used to gauge staff perceptions of the existing site, as well as to obtain staff input on what the intranet should do for them.

In this way, the cards can be used to help define the intranet brand, not just within the intranet team but more broadly across the organisation.

### Just a start

There is much work to be done beyond this, and eight words will not in themselves define a clear brand.

Work on 'fleshing out' these initial activities to describe a more complete picture of the intranet. This could be done in a number of ways.

At a minimum, an explanation should be written for each of the words, outlining why it was chosen and what it means in practice. (Words on their own will mean many different things to different people.)

The words can also be combined into a broader statement about the intranet. Consider using the process outlined in the earlier article *Creating an "intranet concept"* to produce a one-page description of the intranet.

All of these activities should be designed to achieve two things. The first is to more clearly define what role the intranet should play.

The second is to build a stronger consensus among stakeholders and staff about where the intranet should be going.