

Many web and intranet teams will be expected to create business cases at some point in their work. These may be for major website redevelopments, selection of new technology platforms, or to gain further resources.

Considerable amounts of work go into creating a business case, but success is far from certain. Too often, business cases fail to hit the mark, even when they follow the guidelines provided by the senior executive themselves.

In part, this is because these business cases fail to target the emotional elements, concentrating instead on details and evidence.

Boring business cases

Web and intranet teams are often provided with a corporate template to fill in when creating a business case. This covers elements such as:

- current situation
- research conducted
- detailed findings
- options for improvements
- recommendations
- indicative figures

These documents can easily grow to 30, 50 or 100 pages in length. Considerable detail is captured and communicated, but the danger is that we lose sight of the forest for the trees.

The first major problem with these business cases is that they are boring. Few in the organisation have sufficient enthusiasm to read 100 pages of detailed business case, and even the executive summary can fail to inspire.

These documents can also fall into the trap of describing the 'how' but not the 'what'. For example, the business case might articulate the need for a new CMS and search, a site redesign, and revised governance.

But what is being delivered? What will the organisation get as a result of all this work, and what benefits will that provide?

For all the length of these documents, senior executive may not be left with a clear case for why they should commit resources to the project, ahead of many other competing projects across the whole organisation.

Targeting emotions

While the evaluation of business cases as part of a formal approvals process appears to be very analytical, emotions play a major part.

We need to go beyond a dry description of behind-the-scenes activities, and paint a compelling picture of what should be done and why.

Effective business cases must include four key elements:

1. the case for change (why we can't keep doing what we're currently doing)
2. what will be delivered
3. the benefits that will be provided
4. compelling evidence and examples

These should be describe in ways that are meaningful and important to the executive or steering committee. The practical details of running websites and intranets are our problems, and few outside the core team will be interested in meta-data management, technical upgrades or content standards.

Instead, the most successful business cases find important business needs and issues, describing the current state and giving rich examples (potentially involving quotes, pictures and videos).

Benefits will always be hard to describe in purely dollar terms, but that is less important. Instead, teams should focus on providing clear evidence, targeting emotional responses.

For example, the needs and working conditions of nurses will be of interest to everyone working in a healthcare organisation. Describing the difficulty they have in obtaining patient records and clinical procedures can make for a compelling business case.

Equally powerful cases can be built on the needs of field staff, who can struggle to find client addresses and account details. Call centre staff also work in challenging conditions, while acting as the primary 'face' of the organisation.

For more information on this topic, obtain copies of *Leading Change* and *Heart of Change*, by John Kotter. These provide a robust methodology and concrete examples on how to gain support for these types of enterprise projects.