

## Intranets: losing the language of enforcement

All too often, centralised intranet teams find themselves battling with decentralised authors to enforce consistency and quality standards.

Not only is this fighting ultimately fruitless, it can be very damaging for the morale of all participants, and potentially crippling for the future of the intranet itself.

In these situations, intranet teams need to find a new approach, and new ways of working with their decentralised authors. The first step is to lose the language of enforcement.

### The battle rages

In many organisations, battle lines have been drawn between the centralised intranet team, and the decentralised authors or site owners.

On the one hand, the centralised team is saying:

*“Our last audit identified that your content is out-of-date, poorly structured, and doesn’t meet the corporate standards. You must conform to the intranet policies, guidelines and stylesheets.”*

On the other hand, the decentralised authors respond:

*“We are frustrated with the complexity of publishing, and the roadblocks that prevent us from easily delivering new information. You can’t force us to meet these standards, and we know best what our audience needs.”*

The result is that there can be considerable tension between these two groups, generating stress and frustration, and impacting on the success of the intranet.

Intranet teams often become “burnt out”, tired of fighting this battle. There is, however, a much better way.

### A new perspective

The first thing to recognise is that no-one reports to the intranet team. While there may be a desire to enforce standards and changes, the intranet team has little (if any) actual power to achieve this.

Once this is fully realised, the intranet team can start to look for alternative approaches.

The previous article *Intranet teams: a leadership and coaching role*, presented the case for intranet teams taking on a more proactive role within the organisation.

This briefing looks at a much earlier and simpler step that can be taken by intranet teams, one that focuses on how they communicate and interact with the decentralised authors and site owners.

The first step to building a more constructive relationship with intranet authors is to use appropriate *language*. Care must be taken to avoid using language and phrases that will generate increased tension and resistance.

### Banned words

Too often, intranet teams fall into a habit of using language that makes them appear unapproachable, or “more important” than the intranet authors. The authors then react accordingly, and the problem worsens.

Intranet teams should therefore ban themselves from using the following terms (amongst others):

- enforcement
- compliance
- audits
- standards
- policies
- regulations
- obligations
- force
- require

### Putting this into practice

Instead of using these terms, intranet teams need to communicate more openly with their authors, and on more even terms. There should still be standards, and it’s not being suggested that all the problems are caused by the centralised intranet team.

Someone, however, needs to break the cycle of conflict around intranets. As the group with the greatest responsibility for the site, the intranet team should set a new tone for intranet conversations, starting with losing the language of enforcement.