

A lot of work is done to incrementally improve intranets, often focusing on resolving common areas of staff frustration with the sites.

These projects may be large or small, but most concentrate on making the intranet work better, without adding new capabilities or content.

This is not enough. If intranets are to achieve their full potential, intranet teams must go beyond just reducing frustration.

### Fixing what is broken

Some of the most common intranet projects and activities are designed to improve the current site, including:

- improving site navigation
- making search work better
- refining the design of the home page
- updating content and removing old pages
- restructuring key areas of the site
- improving metadata quality
- establishing governance around authoring

These individual improvements may be wrapped up into a complete site redesign, a project at least 12 months long that aims to deliver a site that works much better for staff.

The common thread that runs through all these activities is that they are addressing the frustrations that staff express about the current site.

### Limits of fixing problems

While these are all worthy activities, they suffer from a number of key problems.

Firstly, they are often behind-the-scenes changes to the site, not fully recognised or appreciated by the wider audience. As discussed in the earlier article *The importance of 'tangible' and 'visible'*, this limits the level of support they generate for the intranet team.

Staff, and senior executives, may also perceive that these problems were the 'fault' of the intranet team in the first place. Why are we fixing the intranet, when we could have avoided it getting into a mess in the first place?

While the reality of intranets is that these problems can be difficult to avoid, the perception remains.

Perhaps most importantly, these improvements are not seen as business critical by senior management. Intranet teams will struggle to gain funding, or increasing team size, if this is the sole focus of ongoing work.

As 'custodians' of the current site, the assumption will naturally be made that intranet teams can be effective with their existing resources. Focusing on maintaining and fixing the site will not dispel this misconception.

### Taking a wider view

Intranet teams are setting their sights too low when they focus on just fixing problems. The intranet should not just be less frustrating to use, it should be extraordinarily valuable, and a tool that few could survive without.

As discussed in the article *How intranet teams should spend their time*, 40% of intranet team time should be devoted to delivering new capabilities.

This involves:

- researching staff activities to identify issues, points of pain and opportunities
- exploring ways of using the intranet to directly improve staff practices, or to resolve business problems
- steadily delivering incremental improvements to the site that go beyond fixes for current problems

There are literally thousands of opportunities within any organisation for the intranet to help staff. This goes beyond helping staff to merely find reference information, and instead focuses on streamlining end-to-end tasks.

For example, the central collection of forms on the intranet, provided as PDFs, could be progressively replaced with real online forms that save time for all involved.

Intranet teams should take every opportunity to build a stronger understanding of business priorities and staff needs. This knowledge will enable ongoing improvements to have real impact, for the organisation, site and team.