

The intranet needs to have a strong brand, a sense of identity that, at a basic level, distinguishes it from the public website and other information sources within the organisation.

Beyond this, the intranet brand should be designed to build staff trust, and to convey a clear sense of what the intranet can offer and when it should be used.

This briefing explores the role of the intranet's brand identity, as well as outlining how to put it into practice.

Lack of identity

Too many intranets consist of nothing more than a collection of many different intranet sub-sites, published by individual business units. With each of these sub-sites having a very different look-and-feel, it is hard to tell where the intranet starts and ends.

This situation is very damaging for the intranet, as there is no clear sense of identity for the site as a whole. Staff often have difficulty distinguishing between the intranet, the public website, and other sites on the broader internet.

It is also very hard for staff to find information, and the general level of trust in the intranet is often low.

Purpose of the intranet brand

The brand identity for the intranet serves many purposes, including:

- distinguishing the intranet from other information sources
- communicating the purpose and use of the intranet
- defining the scope and boundaries of the site
- building trust in the intranet
- supporting communications regarding the intranet

Elements of the brand identity

First off, let's state the obvious: there should be a single look-and-feel that encompasses the entire intranet. This includes a standard page layout, colours, and navigation.

Beyond this, the intranet brand identity consists of a number of supporting elements:

- An *intranet name*, which should be memorable and not too 'geeky'.
- A consistent set of *colours* that is reflected (in a low-key way) throughout the site.
- A standard *page design and stylesheet* for all pages.
- Consistent use of *language*, at least in general terms.
- Consistent *structure and navigation* of key areas of the site.

Align with the corporate brand

The intranet brand should align with the overall corporate brand, but not copy it directly. This ensures that the intranet has its own identity that matches the purpose and use of the site, while reflecting key elements of the overall organisational branding.

This ensures that there is continuity of the intranet brand, even when the public-facing brand of the organisation is changed to reflect new marketing and communication imperatives.

This also reflects that the brands of the organisation and the intranet have two very different audiences (one is targeted to the customers and the public, the other to internal staff).

Don't over-manage the brand

The temptation when establishing a strong brand for the intranet is to try to enforce this very strictly throughout the intranet.

This often results in the creation of 50-page 'writing guides' for the intranet and an equally extensive 'brand manual'.

As discussed in the early article *Not all content needs to be of equal quality*, there is not one standard that applies to the whole site, and this needs to be reflected in the application of the brand.

Apply the branding strongly to centralised pages, and then apply an increasingly light touch to lower-level areas of the site. The needs and identity of regional areas and individual business units must also be reflected in designs.