

Intranets serve a diverse range of users in organisations, from staff in head office to those in regional offices, or on the front line.

These users are not all the same, and do not have the same needs, issues or environment. A key principle for intranet teams is therefore: *you can't usefully deliver information to users that you haven't personally met.*

This article discusses the challenges in delivering information to all staff within an organisation, and outlining practical approaches that ensure efforts spent publishing intranet content are not wasted.

### Users are not the same

There is no such thing as 'intranet users', as this presupposes that all staff within an organisation have the same information needs.

Instead, each distinct job role within an organisation has a unique set of information requirements. For example, the needs of an accountant is not the same as those of a policy writer, call centre operator or sales person.

These staff all conduct quite different tasks, and will require a range of tools and information to support their daily activities. Their issues and problems will be equally distinct.

Just as importantly, the environment in which staff work has a significant impact on how they use information and business systems.

For example, staff in regional offices may have slow internet connections, limiting their ability to download documents off the intranet. An even more extreme example could be sales staff who spend most of their day on the road, with less than an hour each day in the office (where they can access to the intranet).

### An example: nurses in wards

The very real danger is that information published on the intranet is not delivered in a way that can be easily (and efficiently) used by the intended audience.

Without an in-depth understanding of staff needs and working environment, much of the intranet publishing effort may be wasted.

This is perhaps best illustrated by an example, drawn from real-life observations:

Nurses are a key audience within a health care organisation. They are responsible for delivering many of the services, and they have the greatest interaction with patients.

Nurses need considerable information about their ever-changing clinical policies, procedures and guidelines. In theory, the intranet could meet this need.

This might prompt the creation of a new area on the intranet, devoted solely to delivering information to nurses, in a format best suited to them. But can they make use of this?

Visiting a ward quickly identifies that there is only a single computer, and that is primarily used by the nursing manager.

Nurses are also extremely busy, and have little time during the day beyond providing patient care. They complete their paperwork at the end of the day, before going home.

Nurses also intensely dislike anything that takes them away from direct patient care, such as using the intranet. There is also a culture that using computers is 'time wasting'.

For all these reasons, the intranet is actually a very poor way of delivering information to nurses. Instead, perhaps the audience is actually the nursing managers, who then verbally convey information to their staff.

### Personally meeting users

The simple solution is therefore to personally meet the users the intranet is serving. This will provide real insight into the day-to-day issues of staff, and the environment they are working in.

This can be done in a formal, structured way, as outlined in the article: *Conducting intranet needs analysis.*

Equally, it can be done informally when the opportunity arises. Simply dropping by someone's desk for a chat over a coffee is time well spent for intranet teams.

This is not to say that every staff person must be visited, but rather a representative cross-section of staff in different roles should be met.