

Staff directories (internal phone directories) can be much more than just a way of looking up contact numbers. In any large or complex organisation, they can also provide a way of ‘navigating’ through the relationships between staff, business units and locations.

One of the key conclusions from examining successful staff directory implementations is the importance of providing extensive cross-linking within the directory.

These cross-links allow staff directory users to find the information they need, even when the first search doesn’t uncover the right contact.

Linking within the staff directory

The key concept is this: never leave the user with a ‘dead end’. Instead, links should always be provided to further information, related details, or other potentially useful features. This allows users to explore the staff directory, making it much easier for them to find required information.

The screenshot shows an example of this type of cross-linking. In this case, links are made from the staff profile page to details on the organisational units that the staff member belongs to.

Examples of where cross-linking is valuable include:

- people → locations
- locations → services
- locations → meeting rooms
- people → business units
- people → teams
- teams → team members
- projects → people

These types of cross-links helps the staff directory to support common business tasks, and they are the most effective way of moving the staff directory beyond just a collection of names and phone numbers.

As the breadth and richness of the information within the staff directory grows, so does the potential for cross-linking. This increased cross-linking makes the staff directory more powerful, and reduces (or eliminates) the need for complex ‘advanced’ searches.

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Screenshot provided courtesy of Sydney Water

Linking outside the staff directory

The staff directory should be considered more than just a self-contained collection of contact information. Instead, use it as a database of information that can be used (and reused) in many other locations and systems.

Lists of staff can be automatically generated and included on intranet pages. For example, the health and safety (OH&S) page on the intranet could include a list of all the OH&S staff, generated directly out of the staff directory (and therefore always up to date).

If the intranet is published using a content management system (CMS), an author will be listed for each page on the intranet. This should be automatically cross-linked to the profile page for that staff person, to make it easy for intranet users to contact the person responsible for a specific piece of information.

The staff directory information can be used in other systems, such as document or records management systems. In this way, updates to the staff directory (such as a person’s role) are automatically reflected in other systems.

In practice, there will be many other opportunities to implement this type of ‘information reuse’. This will allow the maximum value to be gained from the investment made in establishing the staff directory.

More information

See the *Staff Directories* report for more on developing an internal phone directory, including screenshots and examples.