

It is widely recognised that an intranet must be *trusted*, if it is to be regularly used by staff across an organisation.

While it is easy to make this statement, it is harder to qualify what is meant by trust, how users assess it, and how we can build (or rebuild) trust in the intranet.

This briefing looks at the issue of trust, and presents some simple steps that can be taken to further build staff trust in the intranet.

How trust works

When users access the intranet, they are implicitly judging the credibility and value of the content on the site. Their level of trust is determined by a number of factors:

- how easily information can be found when needed
- whether the information is up-to-date and accurate
- whether the information found is complete
- how easily the accuracy and currency can be judged when looking at the site
- how well the information meets their current need, or answers their question
- whether the intranet meets their expectations (or preconceptions) about the site

Trust in the intranet is also influenced by the reputation of the content publisher and intranet team, as well as by the broader organisational culture (such as how open management is when communicating).

In many cases, users are not able to directly compare intranet information to a known trusted source. In these situations, they are looking for clues and signs that help them determine whether they should trust the intranet.

Losing trust

The intranet competes with many other information sources within an organisation, including using the phone or talking to the person in the next office.

Staff have many demands on their time, and need information quickly and easily. When deciding how to find a piece of information, they

first make a value judgement about each information source, and then use the source they trust the most.

Trust is also assessed for the intranet *as a whole*, and not for each individual section. Even if some of the content is accurate, if users cannot easily identify what content is correct and what isn't, their trust in the whole intranet is devalued.

Unfortunately, trust is quickly lost and hard to regain. Even a few instances where the intranet fails the user are enough to significantly reduce trust in the site. Once the intranet ceases to be trusted, usage levels across the organisation fall greatly.

Building trust

There are a number of short-term steps that can be taken to rebuild trust in the intranet:

- Consolidate the intranet into a single, consistent site with a clear boundary.
- Create a modern, professional appearance for the site, and apply this to all pages.
- Display 'last updated' dates and content owners on all pages.
- Rewrite key content to be simple, concise and useful.
- Ensure collections of key documents or pages are complete (such as publishing *all* corporate policies on the intranet).
- Enhance intranet search, by improving the quality and relevance of search results, and giving additional context for each hit.
- Implement a feedback system (see the earlier article *The value of intranet feedback*).
- Clearly communicate to all staff what is (and isn't) on the intranet.
- Give staff insight into the processes 'behind the scenes' that keep the content up to date.
- Present a 'human face' when communicating, to build the credibility of the intranet team.

See the article *Creating an upwards spiral for your intranet* for another perspective on enhancing the intranet over time by building trust.