

Many intranets are trapped in a 'downwards spiral': process and resources issues lead to poor-quality content, which reduces trust, which leads to more problems, and so on.

If intranets (and intranet teams) are to succeed, this must be turned around to become an 'upwards spiral', where each success (no matter how small) leads onto further improvements.

This briefing explores the nature of the problem, and outlines some approaches to reshaping the intranet into something that grows and prospers.

The problem

Organisational issues, a lack of resources, and a host of other problems takes its toll on the quality and currency of intranet content. The low standard of the intranet then impacts on the degree to which staff trust the intranet as a reliable source of information. This, in turn, heavily impacts upon overall intranet usage.

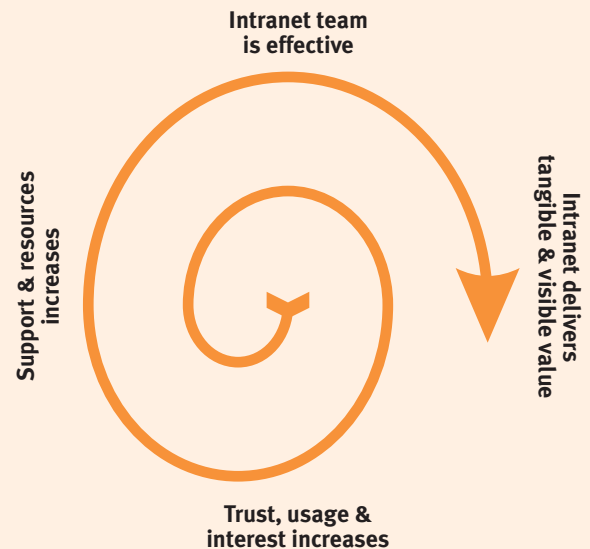
With the site languishing in a poor state of repair, little enthusiasm is generated for putting more resources or time into the intranet. Authors have few good examples to aspire to, and the morale of the intranet team is low.

This low morale, and lack of corporate support, then makes it difficult for the intranet team and authors to turn the situation around.

The upwards spiral

Successful and sustainable intranets follow an upwards, instead of downward spiral, as follows:

- The intranet team is effective, and well-placed to support the ongoing improvement of the intranet.
- As a result, the intranet is able to deliver new content and capabilities that generate tangible and visible benefits.
- This enhances the levels of trust, usage and interest, amongst both end-users (staff) and content owners (authors).
- Having demonstrated value, the intranet gains additional support and resources, allowing the intranet team to be more effective. And so on...



While this may seem optimistic to many over-worked intranet teams, it is possible to achieve this upwards spiral, if a focused and incremental approach is taken.

Letting go of compliance

The first thing that intranet teams must do is to let go of the 'carrot and stick' approach. Over-emphasis on standards and compliance has proven to be ineffective in achieving a useful intranet, more significantly, it acts against the need to generate trust and interest.

Intranet teams must therefore concentrate on the 'people' aspects of the intranet, if the upwards spiral is to be created.

Starting small

So the key question is then: where to start? The simple answer is: start wherever you can make some progress, no matter how small, that will lead on to more progress, and so on.

The key is to carefully choose where to focus resources, to generate the desired trust and interest. This may be very different from the day-to-day 'intranet maintenance' that may currently be conducted.

For example, consider focusing on the needs of just one business unit, and then using that to generate the interest to start into the rest.