

Your new site will be 20% different from current site

Implementing a new website or intranet is a unique opportunity to work with new functionality and ideas and push the bounds of what the site will do.

When a new underlying platform is being implemented, such as a content management system or portal, the scope for rethinking the site can be increased further.

Yet, despite all of this opportunity for change, the simple rule of thumb is that the new site will be at best 20% different from the current site.

There are fundamental reasons for this, which will be explored in this briefing. The implications of the rule for the design and technology aspects of the project will also be discussed.

New ideas

'Blue sky thinking' explicitly provides scope for rethinking the purpose and design of the site, allowing radically new approaches and ideas to be considered.

Even without this, any site redesign allows for some reconsideration of how the site is designed and delivered, along with a concrete opportunity to implement these changes.

When the underlying technology is also being changed (such as installing a new content management system), the opportunity for change is even greater.

High ambitions combined with an opportunity for reworking the site, can generate the desire for significant site changes, such as:

- Reworking the entire site as a 'web 2.0' platform, where content will be actively provided by users.
- Reworking the static CMS-based intranet into a dynamic, personalised portal that will target information to specific staff roles.
- Creating a dynamic, data-driven website that will use user profiles to deliver targeted information and functionality.

These three examples have been drawn from real projects. While desirable in vision, such ambitious goals will always need to be tempered into a concrete scope for the project, and into a clear design for the site.

The 20% rule

A useful rule of thumb when discussing the scope of a site redesign is that the new site will be no more than 20% different from the current site.

This recognises that the limiting factor for change is not the scope of the vision or the available technology. It is the amount of organisational, process and cultural change required to execute and support the new site.

Authors will still have to produce the right content for the new site. Site owners will need the skills and expertise to design the way the site functionality will work (such as personalisation). Underlying processes must exist to support the new approach and features.

If the website has fallen behind the maturity and expertise of the organisation, a radical change can be made to catch it up. More likely, however, there is a desire to push the site ahead of the current organisational state. This will certainly hit the 20% rule.

Set realistic scope and requirements

The first implication of this rule is that the overall scope of the project should be set in a realistic way. Attempting to exceed the 20% rule is always very high risk and often fails, at significant cost to the organisation.

The requirements for any new technology should also be determined with a recognition of the 20% rule. Buying a product to support loftier ambitions will increase cost and complexity, and the risks will be commensurate.

Recognise the 80%

If the changes will be no more than 20% of your site, this means that 80% of the site will remain unchanged. Any new technology will therefore have to support the 80% at least as well as the current solution does. This also highlights the opportunity for incremental improvement of current approaches, alongside any new functionality.

For example, a move may be made towards data-driven content, but the new CMS must still pro-

vide robust tools that are easy for content authors to use, or the project will fail.