

CASE STUDY

Creating a new staff intranet at University of Sydney

The project to deliver Sydney University's first staff intranet was a daunting one, potentially requiring huge amounts of content to be reworked, restructured and migrated. The key to success was a targeted project plan, a disciplined approach, and excellent stakeholder engagement.

Most organisations have long since settled on an externally facing website, and an internally facing intranet. Universities around the world, however, tend to have a single sprawling website containing a complex mix of content for both internal and external audiences.

In order to deliver a great university website, staff facing content must be moved to a new home. Over the past decade, a number of universities have attempted to create an intranet, but many have failed.

It's a daunting challenge, with a huge amount of content to wrestle into an effective and useful state. All of which must be done in a highly complex organisation, with a large number of stakeholders.

As a result of a university-wide web strategy, a project was initiated at Sydney University to create the first true staff intranet.

While there was a clear overall objective, there were significant constraints, including limited time (less than six months) and a requirement to use the incumbent (legacy) content management system.

What they did have in their favour was a strong and experienced project team, which brought together in-depth web experience with an extensive knowledge of how universities work in practice. The team also had good connections with key stakeholders, and an extensive track record within the university.

What was delivered

Once the project was approved, the team at University of Sydney moved quickly to get started. The starting point was to determine the scope of what would be delivered, recognising that 'everything' simply wasn't an option within time and resource constraints.

The team focused on delivering an initial site that would demonstrate the value of a staff intranet, by bringing together key information in a much more usable and useful way.

Within a week of the originally planned go-live date, the team delivered:

- A new staff intranet for all 10,000 staff across the university.
- A new site structure (information architecture) that was tested extensively with staff.
- Substantially improved and simplified content, through the use of professional writers.
- Support for mobile devices, using a responsive web design (RWD) template.
- Decommissioning of old websites, thereby simplifying the main website for all other users.
- A launch and engagement plan, including an online interactive tour for new users.



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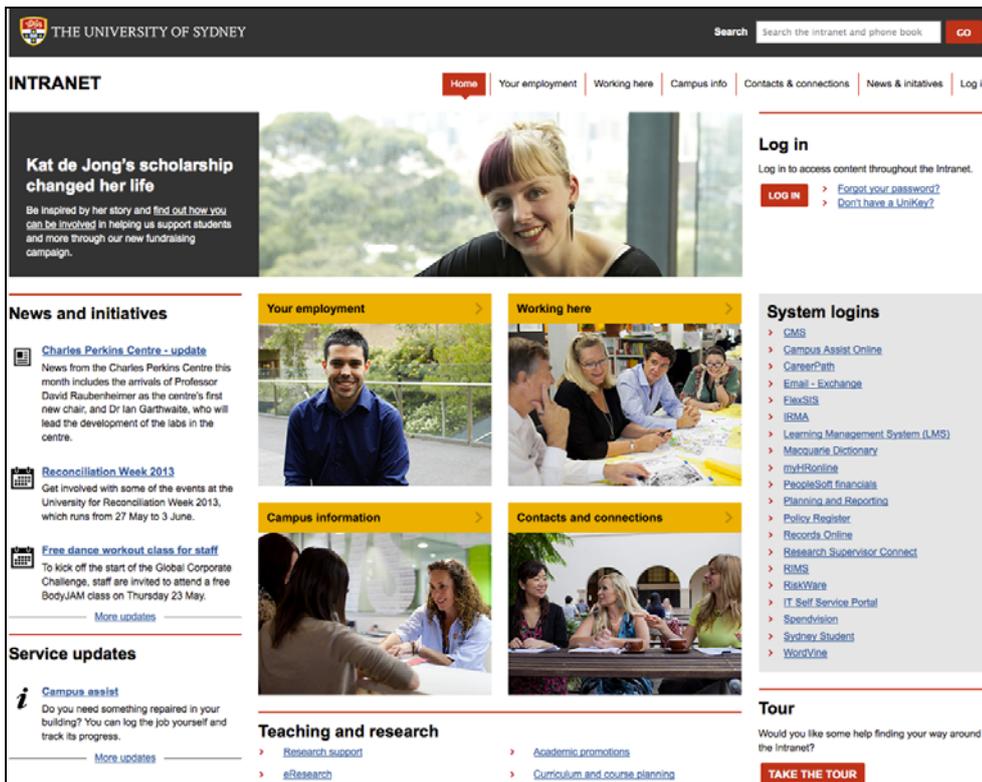
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The simplicity of the new University of Sydney staff intranet homepage is a testament to the amount of work involved behind the scenes in delivering a usable and useful site.

Why the project succeeded

The project team attributes their success to a number of key factors, including:

- Conducting robust planning at the outset of the project, to develop a clear scope and approach.
- Ensuring alignment within the team and key stakeholders to a clear overall vision.
- Reducing the potential size of the project, to target key deliverables that would position the intranet for further enhancements after the initial go-live.
- Segmenting the project into multiple streams that could operate in parallel.
- Breaking down the activities into independent 'segments' that could be adjusted or rescheduled, giving the project much-needed flexibility.
- Proactively and extensively engaging stakeholders across the university, building support for the approach and outcomes.
- Following a best-practice UX methodology that used task-based testing with staff to ensure that the new site would be usable and valuable.

How Step Two helped

Step Two played a mentoring and advisory role throughout the project, focusing on:

- Helping the team develop a clear vision and plan at the very outset of the project.
- Assisting the team to overcome roadblocks and hurdles as they arose.
- Providing training and support on key UX techniques, including card sorting and tree testing.
- Helping to address broad engagement and governance issues.
- Planning for 'phase 2' of the project, after the launch of the initial site.

"Having James as a mentor has been integral to the success of our intranet development. His expertise in the field was backed up by his ability to quickly assess the organisational environment in which we were working and to advise us appropriately. He challenged and expanded our thinking in a way that has led to a fantastic result."

Rachel Kousal, Intranet Project Manager