

How to improve intranet content? (Version 1.4; www.steptwo.com.au)

Content management system (CMS)

- Simplify or eliminate the need for authors to know HTML
- Enforce formatting through templates and stylesheets
- Lock down the formatting controls in the CMS editing tool
- Provide spell-checking to authors within the editing environment
- Removes most of the need for an authoring "styleguide"
- Allows business areas to more easily own and update their own content
- Use workflow rules to manage review and approval
- Use reports and management tools within CMS
- Establish review and expiry dates to help manage aging content
- Display last modified date and owner on published pages
- When migrating into a new CMS, conduct a cleanup first (only good content is migrated)

Implement intranet feedback

- Provide a feedback mechanism on all pages for staff
- Ensure feedback items are managed
- Address feedback in a timely way
- "Close the loop" by contacting staff person when feedback has been acted on
- Build usage by ensuring that staff know that feedback is acted on
- Allow user comments on intranet pages
- "Was this page useful?"
- Better to have a "living" intranet that is quickly updated than to try to get everything right before it is published

Content quality

- Not all content needs to be of equal quality
- Devote limited intranet team resources to the more important content
- Define (and communicate) different levels of intranet content quality
- Help staff to self-assess the expected quality of different intranet content

Develop personas

- Create personas to capture and communicate the needs of key staff groups
- Use to help authors to better target their audiences
- Use to prioritise intranet improvements and additions
- Focus personas on staff with distinct needs and environments (not "general" staff)

Conduct centralised reviews

- Conduct content reviews and cleanups across the whole site
- Look for ROT (redundant, outdated, trivial)
- Identify owners for all content
- Remove any content or sections that don't have an owner (they are by definition out of date)
- Avoid trying to "boil the ocean"
- Run link-checking reports across the intranet to identify broken links

Role of the intranet team

- Define the role of the central team in relation to intranet content
- Document and communicate this
- Avoid playing a "gatekeeper" role (it's a shortcut to burnout)
- Lose the "language of enforcement" (force, compliance, audit, standards)
- Know when to say "yes"
- Position the intranet as the "making it happen" team
- Say "no" when appropriate
- Escape the reactive role as a publisher of whatever is provided by business units
- Demonstrate professionalism

Build relationships

- You get the right content when the right people are doing the right things (these are all people issues)
- Grow interpersonal relationships with authors
- Build engagement with business areas
- Understand motivations of site owners and authors (they are mostly positive!)
- The most successful intranet teams are "people people"

Intranet team management

- Assign specific roles and responsibilities within intranet team
- Allocate specific proportion of team time to content development and maintenance
- Setup task tracking system and processes to keep on top of jobs
- Assign service levels (SLAs) to each business unit
- Have multiple levels of SLAs, depending on importance of business area and content
- Hand off work to other teams and areas where appropriate
- Establish an escalation process for resolving content and support issues
- Build team skills in writing and editing

Intranet goals and purpose

- Define clear intranet goals and purpose
- Define what should be on the intranet (and what shouldn't!)
- Articulate the benefits that the intranet should be delivering
- Communicate this to all site owners and authors
- Derive policies and governance from intranet goals

Track intranet usage

- Collect overall usage reports for the intranet to identify most (and least) used areas
- Provide local usage reports to content owners
- Generate search engine usage reports (most popular searches, failed searches)
- Use reports to identify key topics of interest for staff
- Use reports to identify terminology used by staff
- Use statistics and search usage to guide review and development of content

Harness collaborative writing

- Provide mechanisms for teams or groups to collaboratively work on content
- Example: wikis
- Use this community model to build better engagement and involvement
- Break down the lines between "author" and "reader"
- "User-generated content"

Authoring models

- Use centralised authoring for the most important content
- Use decentralised authoring to give business areas ownership of "their" content
- Use professional writers for complex and vital content
- Look for opportunities where content is shared between the website and intranet
- Review new author's work until they are "graduated" to become a "senior author" (and can directly publish)
- Get the right number of authors (not too many, not too few)
- Establish "dual ownership" of content (one group to own the content, another to own the user experience)
- Establish "custodians" or "gatekeepers" within larger business units
- Ensure the volume of content matches the level of authoring resources
- Avoid the situation where the "cost of publishing" is zero for individual business units (and is instead fully borne by the central team)

Training and supporting

- Offer online "writing for the web" training
- Provides initial and ongoing mentoring for authors
- Give new intranet authors formal training
- Provide an intranet "help desk" for authors
- Establish "certification" for intranet authors
- Conduct yearly "recertification" for authors

Establish an authoring community

- Establish an authoring "community" or "group" consisting of authors and site owners
- Meet regularly (monthly or bi-monthly), ideally face-to-face
- Communicate news and updates to members
- Use meetings to provide training and skills transfer
- Build a sense of shared ownership and responsibility
- Use group dynamics (including peer pressure) to improve intranet practices
- Ensure there is value and benefits for members (keep them coming back)
- Harness the group to help build policies, guidelines and governance
- Include a social element to help build relationships

Formalise authoring

- Recognise the gap between amateur authors and the desire for professional content
- Ensure intranet team has influence over who is chosen as an author
- Include intranet authoring in formal position/role descriptions

Standards and guidelines

- Create intranet standards and styleguide
- Create guidelines and "how to's" for authors
- Create a section on the intranet containing support material for owners and authors
- Evangalise "Plain English" policy
- Use a structured writing methodology such as Information Mapping® where appropriate
- Define roles and responsibilities for authors
- Establish policies for appropriate format of content (documents vs pages)

Marketing and promotion

- Internally promote importance of key site sections, putting a focus on content quality
- Give internal awards for "excellence in content presentation"
- Submit great content for external awards such as IABC's Gold Quill award
- Submit innovative uses of content to Intranet Innovation Awards
- Use public recognition to build internal importance of content

Make the intranet more important

- It is hard to get sufficient support for authoring because the intranet is not seen as important
- Better content alone will not make the intranet more important
- Focus on making the intranet more useful and valuable, by delivering new capabilities and features
- When the intranet is more successful, support and resources will follow
- Obtain management support for the intranet

Meet staff and business needs

- Conduct "needs analysis" to understand staff needs and issues
- Focus on information "consumers" not "producers"
- Understand when the intranet can help (and when it can't)
- Identify opportunities for improvements and additions
- Don't ask users "what they want"
- Use structured techniques, such as interviews, workplace observation, contextual enquiry
- Limit use of surveys and focus groups
- Focus on key areas of the organisation, such as frontline and operational areas
- Conduct specific projects to address key business needs
- Drive these projects from business needs, not content policy
- Articulate (and measure) benefits
- Use business projects to demonstrate value of intranet content management

Improve key areas

- Identify important sections of the intranet
- Examples: HR, policies, forms
- Use centralised resources to help business areas improve these sections
- Apply usability and information architecture techniques
- Create "exemplar" sections for others to follow

Using this mindmap

- Use a mix of approaches
- Some ideas will be more effective than others in your situation
- Copyright Step Two Designs. Shared under Creative Commons license (Attribution; No Derivatives)
- Written by James Robertson. Thanks to Catherine Grenfell, Amanda Broomhall, David Williamson, Jane Floyd, Richard Tuffin, Tori May
- Email us with suggestions, additions or comments (contact@steptwo.com.au)

Help us improve this mindmap!