

Public Sector Intranets

Executive summary

Given the growing economic challenges and pressures on public spending, the government has put the spotlight on significantly increasing efficiency measures to maximise the effect of closely-scrutinised public spending. A well-designed and well-utilised intranet can help the public sector to cut costs and streamline everyday processes. It can also strengthen internal communications, provide an environment for collaboration and facilitate knowledge sharing. But to achieve this, your intranet needs to be an evolving resource that is easy to use, current and matches the needs of the whole organisation. It is, therefore, essential that you establish best practice when developing your intranet to ensure it remains sustainable, user-friendly and relevant in the long-term.

Public Sector Intranets is a unique guide to the particular challenges faced by those who develop, implement and manage intranet sites for public sector organisations. Based on the real-life experiences of the contributors, the report offers practical advice on topics such as securing buy-in and raising awareness at all levels of the organisation, improving accessibility and usability, use of web 2.0 tools and ensuring relevance with a thorough and effective user-consultation process.

Chapter 1 examines an issue which is the bedrock of ongoing intranet success: ensuring that staff at all levels of the organisation are engaged, interested and, most importantly, make good use of the intranet. The importance of ongoing, two-way communication is emphasised, so that support at the most senior level is maintained beyond just gaining initial acceptance of the business case for an intranet update project. The chapter is based on the experiences of launching a new intranet at North Yorkshire County Council, a geographically-dispersed organisation employing around 24,000 people.

Chapter 2 goes on to focus more closely on the important subject of how to gather user requirements and understand how staff use the intranet. The chapter is based on the experiences of designing and launching the InSite intranet at the New South Wales Department of Primary Industries; this site was named one of the ten best intranets in the world for 2008 by intranet expert Jakob Nielsen.

Chapter 3 offers 30 tips and suggestions to help organisations optimise intranet accessibility and usability. The chapter offers practical advice on methods for testing the ease of access and use of your intranet and uncovers some accessibility *faux pas*. The old and new Web Content Accessibility Guidelines are also discussed. Further tips are included for how organisations can improve usability on a tight budget. This chapter is based on the experiences of the Central Office of Information and its work with other government agencies to improve accessibility and usability.

Chapter 4 goes into more depth on the subject of usability, set against the experience of intranet redevelopment Lotterywest in Western Australia. Different methods for achieving user-centred design are examined, including focus groups, traditional research, workplace observations and usability labs. Creating a usability report is

recommended, as this allows comparison of the intranet before and after, helping to support the business case.

In Chapter 5 information architecture is considered – what is the best way to structure the intranet so that site architecture will not become invalid should there be an organisational restructuring? Different kinds of navigation are considered, with the emphasis on ensuring that navigation is intuitive and user-friendly at all times. The pros and cons of personalisation and customisation are also discussed. This chapter is based on the experiences of a major integration project of three intranets at Transport for London, which employs around 20,000 people.

Chapter 6 turns to the subject of deploying web 2.0 technologies on your organisation's intranet. The chapter examines how web 2.0 tools can be implemented and used to best effect to meet organisational needs and how intranet managers can overcome reluctance to embrace new technologies. This chapter is based on experiences at West Berkshire Council.

Chapter 7 looks at how to overcome the challenges of migrating content from a legacy intranet to a new site, based on the Irish Health Service Executive's experiences of consolidating a number of sites into one, unified site. Suggestions are made for how to embed an effective and thorough process of review, update and validation to ensure that valuable content and tools are not lost in the transfer, but also that out-of-date and redundant information and applications are not transferred. Attention is also given to the cultural significance of a 'fresh start' for the intranet.

Chapter 8 pays further attention to how the intranet can support and drive internal change. This chapter is based on the experiences of the Child Support Agency in Australia, which used its intranet to support the introduction of the largest set of changes to Australia's child support scheme in 20 years. The chapter looks at how intranets can influence staff behaviour and how agency outcomes can be delivered through intranet improvements.