

Intranets and portals

A good-practice guide

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A unique collection of case studies that explore the practical considerations behind intranet and portal implementation and development.

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When less is more: Intranet consolidation

In 2000, AstraZeneca had 200 intranets, each with its own content and navigational style. To offer users a single, functional system, **Nigel Legg** based the new intranet, InSite, on a CMS that would act as a portal to existing information across the enterprise.

THE HISTORY of intranet development in AstraZeneca (AZ) – the company formed from a merger of the Swedish Astra and the UK-based Zeneca, formerly ICI Pharmaceuticals, in 1999 – has mirrored that of many other companies. The argument for having one corporate intranet is persuasive enough, but the added benefits of having your own intranet for your group that can store information for your use, and also be viewed by colleagues and collaborators across the globe has proven irresistible to many companies.

Many an information-systems (IS) research budget has been plundered for the relatively cheap (in monetary terms) options that IS groups were keen to exploit. This helps explain how in 2000 we ended up with around 200 intranets at Alderley Park, one of AZ's locations in the UK

Each intranet at AstraZeneca had its own content, of course, a lot of specialist stuff that research scientists seem to attract with varying degrees of magnetism.

However, a lot of them also carried what we might call common content – from restaurant opening hours to travel policies – the sort of material a keen webmaster would provide for users and then forget about.

So we have the scenario: 200 intranets, few of them linked, all producing independent content and some more up to date than others. Where do visitors go for information? How do they find it? Naturally, there are no common navigational standards.

And when you do stumble across the information you're looking for, do you trust it? To add a little more spice to the mixture, communication across the group, and certainly across the site, was done by e-mail – sometimes up to five a day from different sources – and complaints about information overload were coming in thick and fast.

I know that by now many of you will have formed a solution to this fairly classic case of intranet entanglement, but remember this all occurred three years ago in a relatively new world order for AstraZeneca. The solution was to have a site-wide intranet and to have it run by the newly formed Internal Communications Group.

Let's move on to the solution and how it was implemented. Rather than promote one of the more powerful functional intranets on site and risk not only confusing the prime purpose of that intranet but also the political fall out from other 'less important' areas, the decision was taken to create something new.

The next choice we had to make was what form the new intranet should take. This quickly boiled down to whether we wanted an inexpensive, standard HTML-based website or to invest in a database-driven, content-managed site.

Given that one of the main selling points of the site was up-to-date information, which meant a number of departments contributing content, the favoured option was the content-managed solution. Not having to learn HTML and battle with