

How to manage an intranet

While every intranet is different depending on the size, type, and culture of the organisation it supports, there are some key principles that are common to intranets that are successful. First, you need to have a clear [intranet strategy](#) followed by a plan, standards and a governance framework. Let me show how you can achieve these and have a great intranet.

Plan

An action plan will cover in more detail the short term strategy for your intranet. This could be for the next 12 months of a three year intranet strategy. It needs to include timelines, owners, and updates and it should be available for others to check on progress. Every successful intranet should have this.

Strategy

You need to find out what your organisation's strategy is first and make sure your intranet strategy aligns to it. If it isn't it will be difficult to achieve it and you will waste time and effort. You need to show how your intranet saves costs, adds value, and helps generate revenue. Your plan will break down into more detail how you will be achieving that strategy.

User feedback

Make sure the views and needs of the people who use your intranet are driving your intranet plan along with any business needs. It could mean for little time, cost and effort, simple changes to your intranet could improve productivity greatly making big savings for your organisation.

Benchmark

What are other intranets doing? Whose intranet is better than yours? You need to find out so you can feed those ideas into your intranet plan. Benchmarking may mean you pay for an external organisation to do this or it may mean using informal networks like LinkedIn and Twitter to share your ideas with other intranet managers to help your planning.

Prioritise actions

Make sure you group any related activities together, then prioritise them so the most important is given top priority by you and seen to be given it in your plan. This can be by it being in bold type, or earliest date, or most senior ownership, etc. It needs clear actions and progress updates on what is happening to achieve the right outcome.

Socialise

Everyone who needs to be aware and involved must see the action plan to comment on before you can start working on it. However it is not just the immediate team and people you need to contact. It is also important that key stakeholders (someone can influence or be affected by your plans) of resources or people are aware, understand and accept why they need to do things to help your action plan.

Budget justification

Make sure you have the budget or can justify in a business case what you need to achieve the priorities in your action plan. You need to be able to show what funding you need and the value to

be gained (financial and other benefits) over a period of time. The wider the criteria for value gained by your intranet, the better the likely outcome of a business case will be.

Standards

You need to have firm foundation for managing your intranet based on business needs to give a great experience for employees. Business needs along with any legal, employee, or regulatory needs are best represented in standards that publishers need to comply with. They need to cover all types of content. This could range from formal, authoritative, facts published using a content management system through to personal thoughts and opinions expressed in blogs or groups building up knowledge in a wiki.

Ownership

It is vital that all the information on your intranet is managed appropriately. Intranet managers need to be able to contact the information owner if there is a problem with it quickly and easily. Employees need to know who to contact if they need more information or wish to check about the information published. Wikis make it easier as you can change things yourself rather than ask anyone but wiki articles should not be anonymous as it helps to know who last edited the content.

Up to date

Employees must be confident they can rely on your information being up to date. The best way is to show a review date, normally in line with your organisation's information retention policy, so employees can see it. A date when it was last updated can also be a useful indicator the information is active and being managed. You also need to make sure content is reviewed regularly by the owner and can be removed if it goes out of date.

Security

Employees need to see all the information they have permission to use like accredited type information - a company policy - or contributing to collaborative type information - a wiki article. Employees need to be confident the information is accurate and sensitive. Personal information is only available to people with the right permission. This can be done through single sign on access when employees' first login or the first time they get to information that is sensitive and need to apply for access. An audit trail can track who has gained access to what content in case you need to check later.

Usability

Your information needs to be usable and valuable to employees. It needs to be relevant and of interest to those using it. This means employees know who the owner is; it is readable and written for the web; headings and links have meaningful titles so employees are not confused. Employees need to be satisfied with their use of the intranet otherwise your organisation is not getting the benefit from all the investment made.

Accessibility

You need to go that extra step beyond usable content and make sure your content is also accessible to all employees whether they are disabled or not. Your information and tools need to meet the latest web accessibility guidelines. Legal requirements vary from country to country but most are based partly or fully on the World Wide Web (W3C) Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) guidelines. Accessible content is also easier for use with mobile devices.

Governance framework

You need to show how everything is managed and everyone fits together. A governance framework can help do this. It can show who is responsible for the intranet, what their responsibilities are and fit with the strategy and plan. Making it available to everyone on the intranet helps their understanding of how it is managed and supports the business.

Roles and responsibilities

A framework helps to show the roles and responsibilities needed to manage the intranet. This will typically cover the senior stakeholders, intranet team, and publishers.

Stakeholders

The senior representatives and sponsor for the intranet will be responsible for the strategy and major decisions on how it is prioritised and actioned. They will typically be senior managers whose roles in the business have a major influence on the intranet or will be heavily affected by the intranet. A sponsor will be at the highest level of an organisation – CEO, COO, director – and be able to champion the role of the intranet.

Intranet team

The intranet manager will either have a dedicated team or a virtual team who will be responsible for coordinating activities that are connected with the strategy and plan. Whether the team are in same part of the organisation or spread across the business units, there has to be a common purpose, clear priorities, and roles agreed with everyone for it to succeed. The size and purpose of the team will vary depending on whether the publishing is centralised or decentralised.

Centralised

This is likely to be a large team who take a strategic and operational role with managing the intranet. As well as focusing on implementing the strategy and plan, the team will also be responsible for publishing, updating, and managing the accredited type of content like policies and official news items. Requests for information to be published will be sent to the team from owners across the business units.

Decentralised

This is likely to be a small team who take a strategic role with managing the intranet. The intranet manager will focus on implementing the strategy and prioritising the team's activities based on the action plan. The team will mainly coordinate and direct improvements agreed in the plan. The day to day publishing, updating, and managing of content will be at a local level with the owner of the information responsible.

Intranet publishers

It is important that publishers are clear on their roles and responsibilities - what they need to do and why they need to do it. All too often publishers forget this. They are publishing not for their own benefit but for the employees who need to use this information to help them with their work. A support site to help intranet publishers, both new and existing ones, can help.

Starting up

New BT Intranet publishers will first choose what type of content they want to publish. This can be authoritative, formal, content published using a content management system. Publishers will follow a process and their manager can decide whether to approve their request. Team and crowd types of

content like wikis and personal content like blogs can be requested or be available on demand. You need publishers to sign up to the terms and conditions for publishing each type of content.

Training

Publishers need to be trained on how to publish information. This will be for accredited content like policies and news and collaborative content like blogs and wikis. As well as being trained on how to use the publishing tools, publishers also need to be aware and understand the publishing standards, particularly how to make their content accessible, usable and readable. You may want them to pass the training for accredited content before you allow them to publish. Online training helps reduce costs and travel time and can be audited to show who has completed it.

Support

Support can be provided in different ways and costs will vary. Publishers need an easy source of helpful information to quickly answer any queries stopping them from publishing. A site on the intranet can help provide guidance on how information needs to be published. A wiki gives publishers the chance to share tips on how to do things the best way and build up a knowledge base.

For publishers who need more detailed advice you can provide frequently asked questions (FAQs). A discussion forum can provide self-help for publishers who have enquiries that other publishers can answer. This reduces the support costs for an organisation. The funds can be used for a help desk to support more complex issues which FAQs and a discussion forum won't solve.

Standards

Publishers need to understand what the standards are and why they must comply with them. Standards are needed to meet legal (web accessibility), regulatory (protecting sensitive information) and business (information retention) or user (ownership) needs. Standards need to be written in an easy to understand style avoiding technical jargon.

It is important to have the minimum number of standards that have a vital influence on your organisation and need to be complied with. Having a larger number of best practice standards that are advisory, not mandatory, can confuse publishers and dilute their impact.

News

Publishers need to keep updated with any changes or developments that affect what they do and how they do it. This can be provided in a number of ways. It can be through a news desk showing the latest articles or a blog that publishers subscribe to and feedback their views on postings. You can email any urgent and/or important news directly to publishers. Ask your publishing community what are the best channels for updating them.

Compliance

The publishing standards need to have some means of enforcement if publishers do not comply with them. The best method after educating publishers on best practice during their training is to have an automated tool which can information either before or after it was been published.

Ideally if it is checked at the point of publishing it prevents employees seeing non-compliant information. The alternative is to retrospectively check information published and the publisher to review the content and correct it or remove it. If the publisher fails to do this, you need to be able to escalate the issue until the issue is resolved or the content automatically removed if nothing happens.

Never forget that employees must always be confident in the integrity of the information published and tools needed to be used for their work.