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Get ready for intranet 3.0

Paul Miller – Intranet Benchmarking Forum

It's coming, it's real and it will change the way we work

What are the key intranet trends to watch?

At the start of 2007 I wrote a piece for Communication World Magazine about the main intranet trends for that year. The accusation directed at those who happily predict the future is that they do not re-visit their forecasts. So before looking at my latest intranet predictions, how did I fare last time? Here is what I forecast and how I performed - in my view.

Shift to high level process and workflow

Intranets will be digital environments for daily business activity

Verdict = Correct in virtually all cases but the journey still continues.

Universal access from anywhere

Online services become available to staff from any location

Verdict = Correct but progress has been slower and more fragmented than expected

Lovely user experiences and accessibility for disabled staff

Advanced intranets to display more user centred design and enhanced access for disabled staff

Verdict = Correct in that many major intranets look far more engaging and accessibility standards have risen

Primary culture and brand experience for employees

Intranets become the "glue" that binds your organisation together.

Verdict = Not achieved in the main as few organisations have exploited this facility

Content upgrade via collaboration and community

Social software and web 2.0 will be a richer content experience for staff

Verdict = Correct and the pace of this adoption of 2.0 is increasing ever faster

My 2008 Key Intranet Trends

So buoyed by some previous success, here are my latest key intranet trends:

Progress by organisations is never consistent. Some sectors move at a different pace than others. For example retail is slower to advance than telecomms due to technical literacy and access to suitable tools.

So if you look at this list above and feel you have a long way to go on those, don't despair, just be reassured you are moving on the right lines.

Trend 1: Access to online services will be managed through "identity" controls.

Sounds complicated but what it means is that staff, contractors, suppliers, customers etc will be able access a range of intranet (and extranet) services based on the organisation knowing who you are. Your identity will define your access.

If you are a senior manager, your identity will allow you a free reign across all online services offered to staff and external suppliers and customers and partners.

While for a frontline employee within a manufacturing plant, their identity will exclude them from secure areas containing strategic plans, new product development, research and development projects, management information etc.

This shift to “identity management” is already happening via self-service HR systems such as SAP and People Soft and this trend – popular or not - is aligned with national and international political developments that focus on ID cards and identity control.

The attractive part is if the system knows who you are, you can then navigate freely no matter how you connect: at work, home pc, hotel lobby, mobile device etc.

Trend 2: Younger staff don't care what they use, they just want stuff that works!

Creating one over-arching technology solution that delivers information and process integration in a “big band solution” will prove a fruitless journey.

Workforce demographics require a range of web-based providers that meet specific needs depending on who people are, where they are located and who they work with.

A sandwich chain in New York has a surplus of tuna sandwiches at one branch and a lack in another branch – right now. So they use the instant mobile message service Twitter to link all shops together and ensure the tuna is where it needs to be. The trick is to make sure Twitter is integrated into the intranet platform.

As new web services are deployed by staff, the IT guys will no longer control the technology but instead be asked to ensure integration, governance and searchability.

Trend 3: Access will become low cost for all by using the devices they already have.

It has always been a struggle to give intranet access to manufacturing staff, frontline retail or those working in the field in developing countries. How do we get a PC or laptop to them?

But instead of providing devices to such staff, intranet services will be made accessible by staff using whatever technology they do have. Just as BA staff use their home PCs or laptops to access the BA intranet, so this ability to log in from the home PC will advance.

On the other hand staff with no home PC, do often have mobile phones and those phones have ever higher specs. Why not deliver news, payslip information, location information etc to the mobile phones of your workforce or have them log onto a mobile version of the intranet?

Trend 4: Dedicated resource will be in place to handle “search” and “findability” across the enterprise.

PricewaterhouseCoopers have one person internally who just handles “search” effectiveness. His job is to help people in PWC find what they want and need. This is a neglected area but a vital component. As organisations become ever richer knowledge banks and information containers, helping staff find what they need to do their jobs becomes an essential efficiency driver.

Trend 5: Optimised Employee Directories

Finding people and connecting with them, will accelerate and grow richer. Nokia use GPS so you can find people's details but also see where they are right now! Presence information and social software style connecting will operate so the employee directory becomes the hub for your organisation.

Trend 6: The conflict between the desire to open up will be tempered by risk management and control.

The technology and internet trend is to connect, share and liberate content. But against that is the need for organisations to know and manage their risk for legal, compliance and financial control reasons. This battle of two opposing forces features large now in major banks particularly and will continue.

Trend 7: Intranets will drive a low carbon/low travel/low cost agenda

Intranets will offer richer online meeting and collaboration. These tools will be part of the intranet environment. In a low carbon/low travel corporate world, such offerings will be increasingly valuable to staff

Trend 8: We will discover the financial value of large intranet environments and this will re-shape the intranet career and status.

As a financial value is placed on intranets and accepted at CFO level, the status of intranets and the people who manage them will rise markedly. If you are an Intranet Manager of a mature intranet in a FTSE 100 company, a typical valuation will be at least £100M, with a likely annual investment of less than £2M.

IBF is currently deploying a new Financial Value Benchmark within BT and this knowledge will become essential for any major organisation to see the actual intranet value at a balance sheet level plus the unexploited value level in hard figures.

Intranet managers will move in consequence to VP and Director level with significant salary rises that match this new status.

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Paul is a business and social entrepreneur with a focus on communication and business. In 2001, he founded the Intranet Benchmarking Forum, which has a global influence on the standards and practice of intranet management and performance across more than 200 major European, North American and Global Organisations. He wrote "Mobilising The Power Of What You Know" (Random House) and was involved in the birth of intranet and related online services within major organisations.