



Intranets

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You may have heard the terms “Intranet” and “Extranet” used - but are unsure about what they are, and how your business could benefit.

In this Fact Sheet, our E-Business Advisers discuss Intranets:

1. What is an Intranet?

An Intranet is simply explained as an internal web site.

It's essentially very much along the lines of a web site found on the Internet. The difference is that whereas an **Internet** site available for 'anyone' to use, an **Intranet** is a 'private' site held within the confines of a private company network, only accessible by users within that company environment.

An Intranet is hence a private web site, utilising the same web browser technology to view it as a public web site (e.g. by using Internet Explorer).

The underlying system and structures are the same as a web site, albeit an Intranet is a secure resource, held internally and protected from unauthorised external access by firewall security (see “Firewall” Fact Sheet in this series).

Our E-Business Advisers talk about Extranet's in another Fact Sheet in this series too.

Briefly explaining the difference - in essence, an Extranet is a web site held externally on the Internet, which allows only authorised users access to the information and resources held within (e.g. through a password protected area for members of a network or a group of

suppliers). An Intranet performs the same kind of function - but internally within a company.

2. Information is a key requirement in today's businesses

Every company, regardless of size, has an issue with the collation of data and the sharing of information and resources. This sharing of information is important for staff at all levels, to ensure smooth and efficient every day working.

In our modern, more fluid work environments, with ever increasing workloads, employees need to keep up to speed with the latest information and data.

Intranets can greatly enhance existing communication across a company. They can be an efficient, cost effective mechanism for sharing of information, data and resources - bringing all the electronic resources of your company together.

3. Intranets - the Business Benefits within...

Business Applications

- **Document Sharing & Management** - viewing, printing, publishing and working collaboratively on office documents (e.g. spreadsheets / letters).
- **Training and Resources** - delivering various types of e-learning to your staff at their desktop (e.g. Knowledge base, Staff Handbook, Staff Induction programme, audio, video, Powerpoint presentations etc).



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- **Efficient Workflow** - automation and streamlining for a more efficient and effective administration process.
- **Front Door to Company Systems** - providing a common interface to company wide databases and business information systems.
- **email** - integrating the content of your company Intranet with email services to enable information to be distributed effectively.

Business Benefits

- **Communications** – important information can be stored centrally and accessed by company staff "as required", notices, reports, documents and a wide range of multi-media resources can be published company-wide.
- **Sharing of best practice** - internal communities or shared interest groups can be developed and work online in a virtual community environment.
- **More efficient processes** – organisation for your business: by department by team, by shared interest, by key subject, project, product or category.
- **Improved customer service** - better access to accurate and consistent information by your staff leads to enhanced levels of customer service.
- **Reduction in paperwork** - forms can be accessed and completed on the desktop, and then forwarded as appropriate for approval, without ever having to be printed out and if set-up, the benefit of an audit trail.

4. Planning your Intranet

From the outset it is important to consider some key points:

- You need to have a clear understanding of the Intranet's purpose.
- Understand the processes involved and how it will operate
- What features and functions will make it a valuable addition?
- How will existing staff (at each level) and new starters use it?
- The process will need to be carefully planned and managed - by whom?
- Time will be required to build the structure and content - whose time?
- Time will be required to maintain and develop resources - whose?
- An Intranet will cease to be a useful tool if not kept up-to-date and relevant
- It is important to decide who will be involved
- Consider how it will be updated: when and how will content be added to it?

5. Key Tips to Success

The success of your Intranet will be greatly dependent on how the following issues are addressed:

- **Usage** - An Intranet can turn into a dead end if it's not regularly used



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- **Getting started** – You could possibly start by recommending that your Intranet is used as a mechanism for future induction courses for new company staff
- **Navigation** – Staff will find it difficult to use an Intranet which is clumsy and badly designed.

You need a clear and simple navigational model and effective search mechanism to help both hunters and browsers

- **Sense of community** - Shared information benefits from using a certain tone or style. This makes users feel as though they are contributing to a shared experience. Your Intranet needs to foster a sense of community
- **Transfer an existing need** - Look at any existing paper distribution which could be replaced.

For example, agenda documents can be turned into an electronic bulletin, posted on your Intranet - and savings made on printing and distribution costs. It would encourage those interested in agenda content to use the Intranet

- **Compulsory applications** – A successful strategy is to pick at least one ‘compulsory application’. This could be a compulsory reporting mechanism, weekly submission of statistics etc. By forcing users to use at least one application on a regular basis, usage will become habitual
- **Internal marketing** - A “marketing campaign” with a pre-release phase, launch and follow-up should also be implemented
- **Useful hyperlinks** - An Intranet will be used only if it proves useful. Provide useful

hyperlinks to other web sites, Intranets, Extranets etc

- **Keep it fresh** - You need to both “feed” and “weed” an Intranet. Old information needs to be archived and new information made readily available. It’s the frequency and quality of new information and services that will bring people back to your Intranet site.

6. Useful Links

www.intranetfocus.com/information - Useful web site with good tips on Intranet strategy, design, and implementation.