

The background is a vibrant blue with a network of white lines and dots. Several white circular icons containing a person silhouette are scattered across the page, with some being larger than others. The text is centered in the upper half.

10 ESSENTIALS

FOR CREATING AN INTRANET THAT EMPLOYEES WILL LOVE

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Do you find it hard to get employees to use your intranet? Is it a moribund series of links rather than a vital hub that launches employees into their work?

Innovative companies are finding ways to make the intranet a powerful platform for collaboration, sharing, relevant searches and plain, old fun.

To get employees involved, “make it personal, and make it relevant,” says Tracey Grove, internal communications director at Microsoft’s 21,000-employee worldwide services unit. “If it’s not, then you’ve just got crickets.”

Here are some ideas that will help you create an intranet that employees can’t wait to log in to. The key? Mirror what employees see in their everyday experiences online.

1. Allow for mobility.

Your intranet should run easily on any device anywhere, particularly for employees on the go who don’t spend most of their day at their desks. According to Shel Holtz of Holtz Communication + Technology, most workers today have mobile phones, and they expect to receive internal communications in the way they get other information.

“The most important thing is for it to be mobile,” he says, “and not just making the Web version of the intranet fit on a mobile phone, but rethinking it so that it is relevant to people who are not sitting at their desk.”

2. Offer internal social capabilities.

One of the hottest trends in intranets is making them social spaces where employees can converse and collaborate, as they do on external social media. This could be through an enterprise social network or on a platform such as Yammer.

Social business starts with allowing comments on articles so that employees can ask questions, share perspectives and post links. People in large organizations can also dig up knowledge they couldn’t otherwise access.

Internal social capabilities have allowed The Hershey Company to “connect people to people, and people to content so we are able to work smarter together,” says Michael Wetzel, manager of business transformation-corporate systems.

“We have seen an increase of knowledge-sharing and collaboration across business units and even with our external partners,” Wetzel says. “Our new capabilities have allowed us to access information and knowledge anytime, anywhere, from any device.”

3. Gather feedback, and update frequently.

If your intranet design does not already include a “feedback” link, consider adding one. With an intranet, your employees are your customers, and you want to know what is working for

them from an architectural perspective and a content perspective, as well as what isn't and what they would like to see.

Plan to make numerous iterations of your intranet based on this feedback to continually improve the user experience. When the intranet is being adapted to employees' needs, you will find a higher adoption rate and subsequently higher effectiveness of your communications.

4. Make it a one-stop shop.

For global organizations, it can be challenging to integrate numerous sources of internal communications. You can cut through the noise of news feeds and bulk emails by providing a hub for disparate sources of information.

Instead of having to blast out emails to make important internal announcements, use intranet adoption strategies to train your employees to access your intranet as soon as they turn on their computers. If it's done well, they shouldn't have to open a bunch of apps. Instead, your intranet should provide news, social media, documents, access to frequently used portals, and other internal resources.

Pradeep Bokinala, senior domain manager at TomTom, says: "Our vision was for a single intranet that would span all of our companies and allow managers to keep employees fully informed about the business. In addition to providing a platform for internal communications, the new intranet delivered a range of services across a number of platforms and devices."

5. Empower intranet content creators.

Some 27 percent of tech budgets are controlled by departments other than IT, according to Gartner research. Take the burden off IT by allowing for a simpler intranet user experience.

Doing so enables communicators to set user interface designs to their liking, monitor content relevant to their roles and teams, and share documents that are compliant and legal. Content managers should tag articles and documents by department so that targeted audiences are sure to see them in their intranet content feeds.

Prioritize essential links based on employee role, integrating processes into their intranet to make certain their responsibilities are seamless. Examples include accessing ordering systems, integrating with e-commerce and onboarding new staff.

6. Maximize your digital real estate: Avoid 'sacred cows.'

Ensure that every element of the new intranet has purpose, especially on your home page. Your screen real estate is limited and valuable, so challenge the status quo. Get rid of your "sacred cows"—parts of the home page that are reserved for a particular function because of internal politics.

An intranet is intended to be the first thing employees see when they start work, so the appearance and features should hook users right away. Panos Mitsikis, SharePoint developer at Wiggle, says that “operating in retail, attention to design, detail and aesthetic value is fundamental to our business, and we wanted our new intranet to really reflect this.”

Once you have determined that the content on your intranet has a purpose, communicate it. A key feature of a successful intranet is full transparency on your communication strategy.

Make sure that announcements, headlines and key elements of your intranet address the vital question: What business problem are we trying to solve?

7. Help employees find one another.

Employees should be able to find their colleagues not only by name but also by location, skills, job title and interests. Beyond that, make it easy for them to connect directly from whatever screen they are on via mobile or Skype.

Grove says that Microsoft employees can update their own profiles via SharePoint, giving it a personalization similar to Facebook or LinkedIn. They can list their skills and work experience or urge others to contact them about their areas of expertise, and they can follow others in the company.

In addition, employees want to be able to search all of the intranet—not just the profiles—in a hierarchical fashion. They want the sort of predictive search that their favorite search engine offers.

8. Make document management easy.

Make it easy to publish content or share it with colleagues or within a work group. Employees should not be slowed by a lack of technical knowledge.

Grove explains that document sharing could be used in two scenarios. Microsoft uses SharePoint for collaboration on a file or document when input is needed from multiple co-workers. OneNote is also great for this purpose.

Organizations also must push out documentation to a broad audience—not for input, but for the employees’ information. Microsoft can share information about strategy that leaders can download and customize for their teams.

9. Target & personalize content.

Employees should be able to personalize content. Some information should be pushed to them from the corporate tier, but employees should also be able to target content based on their job, location and interests.

Give them the option to include a news app from their preferred external media source or to receive updates from the IT department and not from the sales team, if they so choose. Employees, like customers, love choices, so tailoring their intranet home page to their interests will increase use.

“We are currently witnessing a re-architecture of the Web, away from pages and destinations, toward completely personalized experiences built on an aggregation of many individual pieces of content,” says Paul Adams of Intercom.

10. Ensure proper translation.

Even when an organization has a *lingua franca*, translation makes an intranet truly global. At Hershey, articles sent from the United States to Brazil can be translated with the click of a button, making information easy to consume.

Marcel Sacco, Hershey’s general manager in Brazil, says the English-Portuguese translation feature makes connection “easier than ever.”

All these elements can help you create an intranet that is relevant to your employees’ lives and work.



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We've guided hundreds of clients through the intranet process, changing the perspective that an intranet is a place to put 'stuff', to being a central hub of the Digital Workplace. By incorporating the crème of collaboration functionality such as SharePoint, Office 365, Yammer, and Unily, your intranet will be a dynamic, personalized and social platform, supporting employees in their everyday tasks. Not just a place to view documents and find policies, but a platform to connect together the digital tools employees use on a day to day basis into a single digital experience.