

Planning and Deploying a Successful Intranet

A modern office interior with large windows, indoor plants, and people working at a table.

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Your Intranet “Why”

Modern intranets are a cohesive solution for companies to communicate and share information among employees. Typically hosted on an internal network, an intranet allows the secure sharing of information, the distribution of company policies, the sharing of documents, and the delivery of corporate news and announcements.

An intranet also allows staff to work from home or while traveling. Setting up an intranet is a significant undertaking, and each organization will have specific needs and challenges when planning and building one. However, necessary groundwork is essential to launching a successful and dynamic intranet that benefits the company and employees.



“It’s definitely the centralized location of all employee documents, it is employee driven where they create their profile which I think is a good tool. We have our employees upload pictures. And to be able to have a digital file vs a paper file.

As for Workmates, we like using Kudos to communicate with employees.”

—— MorseLife

MorseLife is *More Life*

Start with Clear Goals

When planning for an intranet, begin with defining clear goals for its use. The lists below are a sample of goals for an intranet platform.

- ◆ An intranet allows for creating a space, whether an internal network or cloud-hosted, to keep a calendar for important dates, events, deadlines; and other pertinent scheduled activities.
- ◆ It allows for secure, fast sharing when a document needs input from several staff members in different departments.
- ◆ Secure encryption protects hackers from getting access to company data.
- ◆ Spaces are established within an intranet to facilitate teams and panels working on different projects. All information is shared in one group, with only employees who have specific access rights.

Establish the Purpose

Intranets are meant to bring staff members together, allowing them to collaborate no matter where they are. An intranet makes it easier to solve problems or create new methods of doing business. Managers can create a space within the company's intranet where teams share and brainstorm ways to solve a problem within their department.

Employee ideation campaigns allow team members to jot down and share ideas through ideation tools. And innovative collaboration and knowledge transfer across departments are a way to spark other team members to participate. These spaces allow for an expedient and thorough process that significantly benefits the company.

While your goals and purpose will differ from these examples, establishing what an intranet needs to accomplish is the beginning of planning for a robust and purposeful implementation.

The “Who” and “What” of Your Intranet

Creating an effective intranet means knowing the content — information and software tools, the scope — what departments will be involved and the audience — who the users are. An intranet is an information repository that requires pre-planning to avoid confusion from mismanaged data. By choosing the right applications and features and organizing the data using metadata and auto-tagging, your content and users will benefit.

“Our staff has praised the increased communications level Workmates delivers. We use it to communicate important project matters and give staff specific ‘kudos’ or even recognize their birthdays. More importantly, we use Workmates to clarify important project details that needed rapid dissemination among the entire team.”

—— Medlinks



Content

The company intranet houses content such as policies and manuals, a company values statement, product or services offered information, and an employee directory. These are the basics most company intranets include.

Breaking the content down further includes:

- ◆ Departmental directory
- ◆ Employee directory
- ◆ Company calendar
- ◆ Interdepartmental calendars
- ◆ Company announcements
- ◆ An HR space
- ◆ New hire spaces
- ◆ Administration spaces
- ◆ Drive and folders
- ◆ Reports and analysis
- ◆ Company news feed
- ◆ Newsletters and blogs
- ◆ Encrypted sensitive company information

Scope

The scope of an intranet includes deciding who will have access to the system. Use the following points and questions to formulate a list of who, what, and where your intranet needs to address.

- ◆ List all department heads and ask each one what they want from a company intranet
- ◆ Determine the permission levels for each department's employees
- ◆ Will staff be accessing the intranet off-site?
- ◆ Will the intranet store sensitive company and employee information?
- ◆ How should data be organized?
- ◆ Will the intranet include a social channel?

Audience

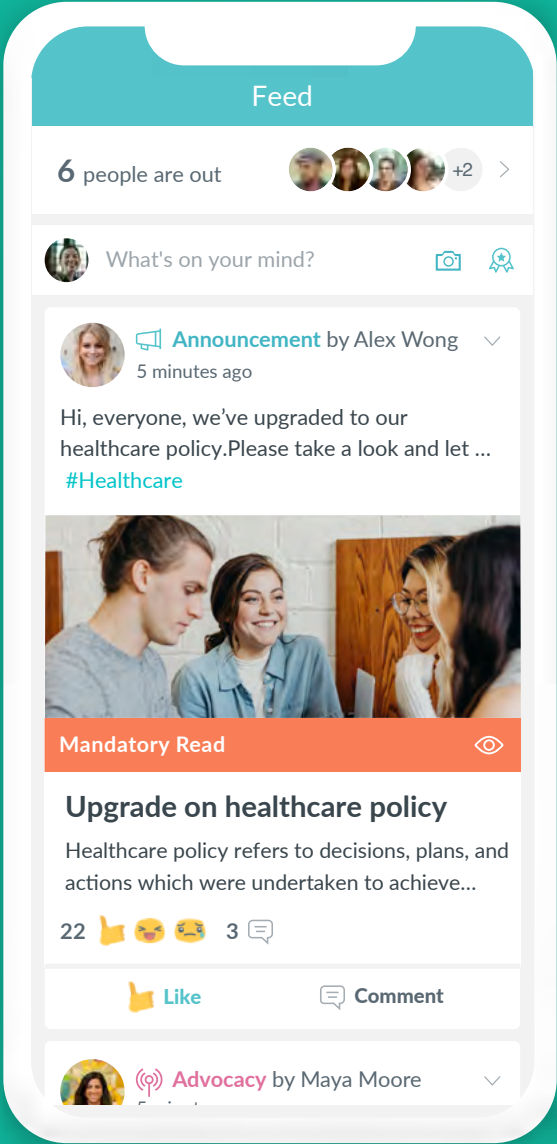
Some companies may include an extranet for customers or suppliers. An extranet is an area of their intranet allowing outside access. However, companies are realizing their most important audience is their employees. A Gallup news story shared the benefits of highly engaged employees resulting in a 21% higher company profit. A robust intranet that makes employees a top priority leads to a company culture that supports them in their jobs.

Employees using a company's intranet who feel they're valued team members are more committed to reaching the business goals and doing their best to complete and exceed their job expectations.

Intranet Software & Apps

Intranets often come with a reputation for being useless or merely a dumping place for data. Since the internet emerged and the intranet followed in 1996, technology went from cumbersome and complicated to today’s modern intranet. With countless applications and software available, an intranet administrator needs to ensure they install the necessary software for employees to get their job done. However, be careful not to overindulge in applications and extras. Too many options and areas for employees to gain skills using can discourage intranet use.

Software for intranets includes cloud computing and software as a service (SaaS), which are essentially intranet-in-a-box services. Intranet providers free up IT teams from configuring, calculating use, and implementing an internal company intranet. Eliminating considerable hardware and software preparation allows IT to concentrate on intranet training for employees and their daily IT job duties.



The Top Intranet Employee Application Goals

Creating a company culture and increased productivity through an intranet requires several functions to be present:

- ◆ Communication within the intranet environment
- ◆ Interaction tools
- ◆ Great content
- ◆ Personal services for employees

Within these top categories are the applications to implement employee use.

Communication

Communication is enhanced by making your intranet mobile. In-office employees use their desktop computers, and when at home or on the road, they use their mobile devices. A company newsletter using an integrated app or a word processor keeps all employees in the company loop and fosters community.

Interaction Tools

Managers can assign group-specific employees a task. The team works on the project instantly, sharing data, documents, and information while also working on the same document simultaneously. Real-time updating allows ideas to flow effortlessly. Instead of emailing documents or sending a link for Google Docs, everything is in one place. When employees work in communities, they have the opportunity to be heard. The intranet encourages knowledge exchanges, shared information, and team networking.

Content

Content shared within and among departments connects the company's staff and facilitates a single community. Content on an intranet is either open to all users or shared within spaces as pages. If information needs to be restricted, passwords allow only au-

thorized users. With proper organization and high-level search capabilities, employees can find the content they need quickly.

Personal Services

Applications to allow employees to adjust or change their schedule and message other employees to cover them is a sample of self-service abilities. Messaging helps employees quickly get help or information from peers and feedback on projects. Areas of the intranet that provide other employee services include a vacation calendar, time clock, time-off requests, polls, carpooling requests or opportunities and business travel booking.

Identifying Roles and Permissions

Intranet governance, establishing who can add to and change areas of the intranet, includes levels of access developed by roles and permissions. Companies often create a team of staff members who are integral in implementing and maintaining the company intranet to create a governance document. This document outlines the levels of permissions and the purpose for each level to avoid unauthorized access or conflicts between employees.

When defining roles and permissions, start the governance document with the top-level responsibilities. Choose these levels and who is assigned to them by creating a duty list:

- ◆ Who is responsible for complete access and decision-making?
- ◆ Which IT members will handle technical operations and security?
- ◆ Which employees will be responsible for adding documents and other data?
- ◆ Who can contribute to news, blogs and updates?
- ◆ Who will be monitoring use and compliance?



Common Roles and Permissions

The most common intranet roles include:

Super Admin

This role provides permissions to all intranet channels and the ability to mimic users for IT personnel who need to troubleshoot specific employee issues.

Supervisor

These staff members have permission to override content from their department users and add or remove user permissions.

Group Rights

Group Rights allow team members working on a task to access particular areas of the intranet.

Site Owner

Department sites are updated and maintained by department heads. They have full control over their department's intranet channel and can change the content and design.

Admin

Can access all the content as a Super Admin but cannot mimic users. Admins perform duties such as ensuring vacation coverage and handling new hires.

Application Owner

These employees can manage their applications and content also with restricted access to administrator sections.

Page Owner

Page owners have full access to their pages and content but restricted access to administrator sections.

Approval Manager

An Approval Manager can either approve or reject content for specific spaces.

Roles and permissions should not be an indication of an employee's worth and value. A properly written governance document belays any assumed prejudices due to role assignment and keeps departments and teams cohesive. When promoting company culture and community, take care not to separate employee importance.

Costs and Budget

Whether you're upgrading your existing intranet or planning for a first-time system, price is always the first concern of management. However, there are numerous variables when calculating the cost of an intranet. Expedient measures should be taken to plan for all possible costs to ward off budget-breaking surprises later.

When planning for your intranet project, remember to plan on a system of benchmarks to calculate a return on investment (ROI). The goal is that proper planning and implementation will result in an ROI and not a loss. How the costs and budget are determined for an intranet relies on what a company needs it to do. A large corporation that requires an extensive content management system (CMS) can expect a much higher cost. Smaller organizations that need an internal sharing and communication system can manage well with a scaled-down intranet platform.



What Elements Drive the Cost of an Intranet?

While there is no formula to calculate the cost for an intranet installation instantly, numerous factors determine a range for any company size and needs. The majority of intranet solutions include multiple features and options. While it's tempting to use all these bells and whistles, it takes time possibly needed elsewhere to install and set up each one. Below are samples of intranet options and applications available:

- ◆ Cloud intranet or in-house deployment
- ◆ Intranet bot to assist employees with searches
- ◆ Employee self-service channels
- ◆ Blog and social intranet applications
- ◆ Artificial intelligence (AI) - remembers employees searches and preferences
- ◆ Help Desk application
- ◆ Cloud-based content management
- ◆ Administration tools
- ◆ Corporate calendar



Cloud Intranet or In-house?

In-house intranet requires appropriate infrastructure and hardware. Upgraded or new servers and network connections are a hefty up-front cost. A myriad of additional costs includes IT work hours, system setup and software installations.



Cloud Intranet

Public Cloud

Public cloud solutions using Office 365 are a good alternative and have your intranet up and running quickly for much less than an in-house system.

Private Cloud

An intranet solution hosted on a service's private cloud is much more expensive and puts a strain on IT technicians to set up and troubleshoot the intranet platform.

SaaS

Intranet provider options are a monthly payment intranet system. The costs generally average \$35 to \$50 a month. The fees are based on the features you sign up for and the size of your company.

The answer to budgeting for the cost of an intranet? It may cost anywhere from \$5,000 for a small company to \$250,000 for large corporations.

Assembling Your Project Team

Organizations need a great intranet team, and the number of team members does not always affect success. Team members typically come from three departments: Human Resources, Corporate Communications, and IT. Specific industries may include other departments such as financial organizations and banking where content, including forms, policies and procedures, are crucial and confidential.

“*Interim Healthcare SLC needed HR technology, and we’re pleased with the results we’ve gained from HR Cloud’s solutions for recruiting, onboarding, and employee engagement. Yet it’s really an opportunity for all Interim franchises. It would be so great if each franchise owner could implement similar solutions to replace legacy systems that might not work as well as they should.*”

—— Interim HealthCare SLC



Intranet Team Size

The Nielsen Norman Group, a computer user experience consulting firm, holds an annual intranet development contest. Their 2021 Intranet Design Annual Winners exhibited the fact that the size of intranet teams did not determine the ultimate success of a company's intranet.

"This year's winning teams had, on average, 17 members, but team size this year ranged from as few as eight (at both Commonwealth Care Alliance and Keysight Technologies, Inc) to as many as 34 at Johnson & Johnson. [...] Intranets teams of 2021 were small, but amidst unimaginable challenges, produced their designs effectively and quickly."

Through detailed computations, Nielsen Norman arrived at a method to calculate intranet team size by the size of a corporation. The 2021 intranet design winners averaged teams of 2 staff members for every 1,000 employees or roughly 0.2%.

Intranet Team Models

Within a medium to large organization, there may be more than one intranet team. Below are the common intranet team categories.

Core Intranet Team

Power users, admins and support

Technical Team

Software and hardware technicians

Content Team

Create, import, approve and analyze content and data

When assembling intranet teams, ensure each member has the skill set to perform the items they are responsible for and have some administrative experience.

Intranet Team Models

Every intranet team needs organization, so everyone knows and understands their position and duties. The following is a sample intranet team model:

Intranet Sponsors:

2 members - Sponsors are usually the investors and help to steer the projects

Intranet Project Manager:

1 member - The project manager juggles project duties and assignments, communicates and updates the sponsors and keeps track of the intranet project's progression to keep it on schedule and within budget.

Content Representatives:

Members based on departments - The content representatives provide the content and data for their department's channels.

Technical Team:

1-2 members - Employees from the IT department needed to implement software and hardware installation and updates.

Vender Representative

Typically 1 rep - The vendor representative is provided by the SaaS software if utilized. They are available to troubleshoot, answer questions and help facilitate a well-planned launch.



Intranet Timeline

Once the intranet planning is complete, the cost and budget are presented to the sponsors and stakeholders, and the team is assembled, there is one more task—creating a timeline to completion and launch. At times, sponsors and stakeholders may want the timeline with the cost projection. During the early stages, the timeline may be a moving part. However, it's essential to create a solid timeline to facilitate the installation and success of your intranet.

Consider a few things before the actual timeline is created to help when choosing completion dates:

- ◆ Approximately when do you want to have the launch, and what will it entail?
- ◆ Will there need to be a company town hall to discuss the upcoming intranet implementation?
- ◆ Will the intranet team have enough bandwidth for the launch, and can they work on implementation full-time?
- ◆ Will all employees have intranet access from the first day?

While gathering all the structure and needs, use a project calendar to establish landmark dates. If using an SaaS package, there will likely be a calendar already built-in. With team models ready and a site map created, it's an excellent time to take an inventory of content importing. Assign each team member the task of outlining the type and amount of content their department will have. What applications are needed to process the content, and who will be responsible for the upload.

Finalize loose ends for design and branding. Branding is the look and feel that reflects the company culture. A graphically immersed intranet promotes company pride and encourages employee adoption. Be sure to create the initial home page and feed to make the transition easier for employees. Welcome each employee and make it fun.

A Sample Intranet Timeline to Completion and Launch

- ◆ Design the home page and schedule training for employees before the launch: 1 week
- ◆ Inventory content: 2 to 3 weeks plus
- ◆ Actual content migration and uploading: 4-5 weeks
- ◆ Meet with department heads to access their spaces and discuss needs or issues: 1 week
- ◆ Run a pilot test and correct and operational problems: 1 week
- ◆ Gather team members to plan the launch. It helps to create the launch as a company event with incentives, activities and even a contest with prizes: 1 week (see Chapter 9)

Once your timeline is completed, present it to sponsors and stakeholders. Then, encourage team members to work together to meet the deadlines and launch the new intranet on time.



Intranet Launch Events

A new intranet provides many benefits to the employees and company. Building excitement and staging a creative launch party is a way to foster employee participation. Your intranet team has months or more of working with the intranet platform. They're already familiar with its inner workings and benefits. Although they may go through preparatory training, employees are not familiar with this new tool and may be hesitant. A successful launch will ease their hesitancy and encourage them to begin using the intranet from day one.

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Employee engagement is no longer a “nice-to-have” on HR’s wishlist. It’s proven to help the entire business become more productive — and more profitable.



Pre-Launch Activities

Create a small group of intranet team members to prepare pre-launch material. The following are some examples of effective pre-launch activities:

- ◆ Have a contest among employees to name the new intranet and award simple prizes such as gift cards
- ◆ Create and distribute a handy postcard with the branding, the intranet's name, and information such as a navigation map and how to log in.
- ◆ Create teaser videos with demonstrations of the new intranet's usability
- ◆ Share some screenshots of team members profiles with all the personalizing options
- ◆ Create a countdown clock

The Launch Day

Choose the most creative and innovative intranet team members to develop the launch day activities and schedule. It's important to keep the graphics, colors, handouts, and documents aligned with the company branding. Hold events on launch day such as:

- ◆ Have the launch in a space where all the employees can gather together. If not, have a virtual gathering at all locations. Remember to set up the event with all the same promotional items for each area.
- ◆ Start the launch after everyone has gotten to the office and settled in, perhaps at 10:00 am. Provide breakfast or finger foods, coffee, tea and beverages.
- ◆ Assemble a launch gift bag for each employee. Fill it with items such as a printed brochure with the intranet's layout and information, a pen, notepad (some people still like to hand-write notes), travel cup, t-shirt, USB drive with company branding on it or other promotional items.
- ◆ Have a demonstration of the intranet on a big screen. Highlight employee profiles and customization.
- ◆ Allow time for plenty of questions.

Maintain Your Intranet

Every intranet requires a manager who has all permissions and unlimited access. They are the one who ensures proper use and performs periodic maintenance. An intranet manager needs good people skills and technical knowledge, and they should be a member of the team who was instrumental in building the company's intranet. The role of an intranet manager is a full-time job and essential to the ongoing success of your intranet platform.



Performing Intranet Maintenance

Regular maintenance in several key areas will keep your intranet running smoothly and show employees the importance of the system. It's like a landlord who maintains the landscaping, freshens paint and keeps the building's systems in working order. Tenants will want to partake in keeping their home in good shape. The same is true for an intranet.

Technical Troubleshooting

If the intranet produces error codes, has bugs or hangs up during busy times, employees will not get their work done. Plus, their frustration may discourage them from continuing to use the platform. Have IT correct any errors or problems immediately.

Measure Usability

Find what areas are used the most and what spaces are left unused. Do this through employee surveys and analyzing use metrics. Ask employees to submit feedback on what they would like to see more of and what they may need for their particular job. Provide solutions and implement them promptly.

Prevent Your Intranet from Becoming a Junk Drawer

After a certain amount of time, content that isn't archived clutters the intranet, slowing down searches and frustrating staff. Enlist the help of department managers to purge their space of outdated or obsolete content periodically. Remind them to vet and approve all content going forward correctly.

Track Analytics Regularly

To quantify ROI, a manager must track various analytics and create reports for sponsors and stakeholders. Schedule analysis and reporting and put it on an administrative calendar.

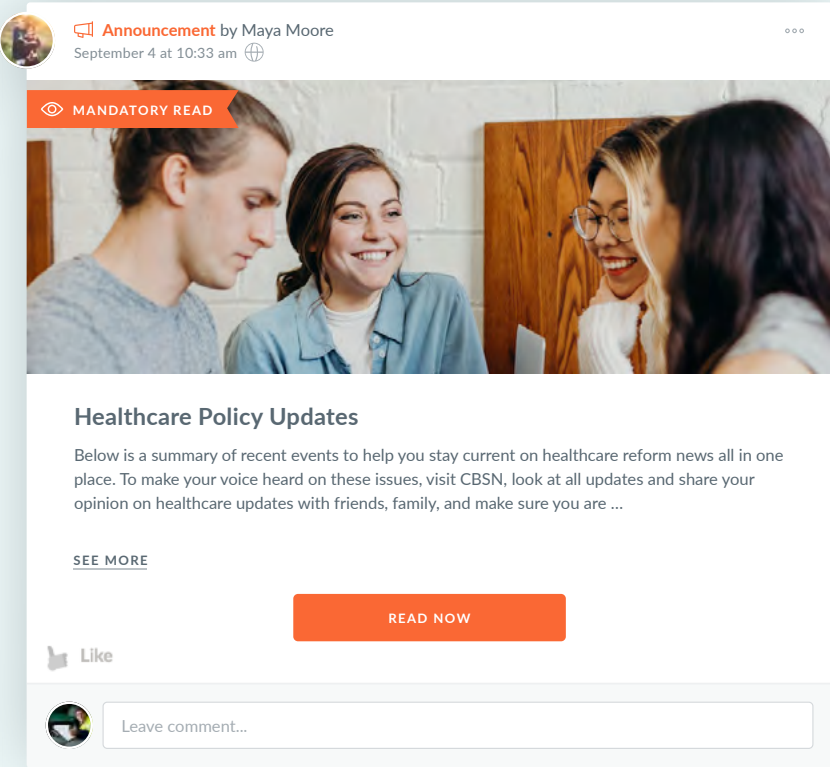
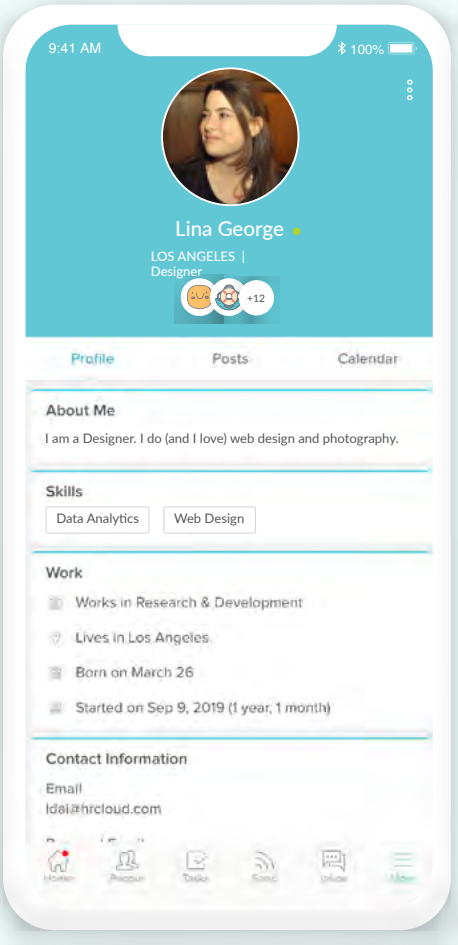
Maintain Company Branding

Although this seems like merely design-oriented maintenance, branding may become watered down after a long time of intranet use. Branding keeps the company's goals and values at the forefront for all employees using the system.

Keeping the Future in Mind

Your intranet is likely to get plenty of use. Keep an eye on improving user experience and preventing stagnation by updating applications or adding new tools—research current intranet trends and how they may offer your employees more ways to be productive. Include user personalization and self-service spaces to keep the company culture and community together. The social aspects of an intranet are crucial to collaboration and team-building.

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