

Creating a Successful Law Firm Intranet

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Executive summary

Building or redesigning an intranet or portal is challenging, and doing it without a plan is close to impossible. Creating a successful intranet, like any big project, starts with making a good business case in your firm.

Chapter 1 of *Creating a Successful Law Firm Intranet* begins by outlining the key elements of an intranet business case. Writing a good business case is critical to getting the support necessary to make an intranet project successful. A good business case includes:

- Identifying the situation or current problem;
- Describing the project;
- Describing a potential solution;
- Providing a cost and benefit analysis;
- Identifying an implementation timeline;
- Identifying critical assumptions and risks; and
- Conclusions and recommendations.

Chapter 2 defines the importance of governance. There are two types of governance – project and long-term. Before starting an intranet build or redesign, it is critical to identify and communicate the criteria that will govern the roles, responsibilities, decision-making, success measurements and accountability of all members of the project team. Once the intranet is launched, these same things need to be addressed, especially if members of the team change.

This section of the report describes:

- Who needs to be involved;
- What roles are critical to staff;
- How to make good decisions; and
- How to measure success.

Chapter 3 addresses the process models to follow for a successful intranet project. Redesigning anything is a big endeavour. The good news is that it can be made simpler by breaking the process into phases. The most effective approach to redesigning a firm's intranet/portal is to use a five phase process:

- Research;
- Design;
- Implementation;
- Rollout; and
- Maintenance.

This chapter provides a methodology and guidelines that firms can use to create a successful intranet within their organisation. It also analyses why intranet projects fail.

The following chapters include detailed information about these five process phases that are critical to any successful software and technology project.

Chapter 4 on the research phase explains how to collect data, research a firm's use of their current intranet and research the current processes a firm uses to share knowledge and complete administrative tasks. This chapter also details the types of data to collect and how to analyse and compile the information to be useful throughout an intranet redesign project.

Chapter 5 looks at the design phase and explains the five areas – requirements, project plan, architecture, visual and content – in detail. This chapter also describes the role users play in the design of a firm’s intranet. Working with users to validate and test design deliverables aids the intranet development team to build the right things.

Chapter 6 on the development phase begins with a discussion of build versus buy when it comes to technology tools. This chapter provides an overview of some key tools that are important to a law firm’s intranet and details the five pitfalls to avoid during development.

Chapter 7 covers the rollout phase and outlines how to plan a successful intranet rollout to the users in a firm. This chapter describes the three steps to a successful rollout and five communication ideas to put into the rollout strategy.

Once an intranet site is launched within a firm, it is critical to measure its success. Chapter 8 on measurement and maintenance describes what to measure and how to plan for changes to a firm’s intranet for the future.

Chapter 9 draws conclusions from the best practices described in the report. By following these best practices, firms will be able to create a successful intranet management team, design a successful project plan and use the methods described in this report to successfully develop, launch and maintain their intranet into the future.

Even though the examples and case studies contained in this report are specific to law firms, the information and methodology in this report will be beneficial to anyone who is responsible for the creation of an intranet in any business or organisation.

About the authors

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Nina is a former law librarian and AmLaw 100 firm library director who has worked with knowledge management (KM) in law firms since 1986. Her work with law firm intranets has spanned the last 11 years. She has written and delivered numerous articles, presentations and papers on both KM and intranet-related subjects. Nina believes that a firm's intranet or portal is the platform for delivering KM to the firm, whether it is work product or knowledge about practice areas, best practices, marketing, clients and more. A flawless intranet is the key to a successful KM programme.

Laurie Southerton, CUA, owner, Southerton Consulting & Art, LLC

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Laurie is a certified usability analyst and a certified business analyst providing clients exceptional results with intranet planning and design since 1994. Her company specialises in user-centred research and design, marketing, communications and training. Laurie's passion is making complicated stuff simple. She believes that technology is a tool meant to make work easier, not more difficult. Helping organisations figure out which technologies and what information they need to provide better service to their customers is what gets Laurie up in the morning.

Amy Witt, consultant, Nina Platt Consulting, Inc.

Amy has over eight years of experience in planning and managing intranet projects and teams. Previous to her work with Nina Platt Consulting, Inc., Amy was intranet manager at an AmLaw 100 firm. She is passionate about intranets and believes that involving end users in all stages of intranet development and design is the only way to make sure the intranet becomes a truly valuable tool for an organisation. Amy's experience in both the legal and health industries confirms her belief that, in order to be successful, an intranet is a constant evolution of new tools, content and enhancements – it will never be 'done'!

