

# Public Sector Intranets

EDITED BY ANNA SHAW



## Public Sector Intranets

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# Executive summary

GIVEN THE growing economic challenges and pressures on public spending, the government has put the spotlight on significantly increasing efficiency measures to maximise the effect of closely-scrutinised public spending. A well-designed and well-utilised intranet can help public sector organisations to cut costs and streamline everyday processes. It can also strengthen internal communications, provide an environment for collaboration and facilitate knowledge sharing. But to achieve this, your intranet needs to be an evolving resource that is easy to use, current and matches the needs of the whole organisation. It is, therefore, essential that you establish best practice when developing your intranet to ensure it remains sustainable, user-friendly and relevant in the long-term.

*Public Sector Intranets* is a unique guide to the particular challenges faced by those who develop, implement and manage intranet sites for public sector organisations. Based on the real-life experiences of the contributors, the report offers practical advice on topics such as securing buy-in and raising awareness at all levels of the organisation, improving accessibility and usability, use of Web 2.0 tools and ensuring relevance with a thorough and effective user-consultation process.

Chapter 1 examines an issue which is the bedrock of ongoing intranet success: ensuring that staff at all levels of the organisation are engaged, interested and, most importantly, make good use of

the intranet. The importance of ongoing, two-way communication is emphasised, so that support at the most senior level is maintained beyond just gaining initial acceptance of the business case for an intranet update project. The chapter is based on the experiences of launching a new intranet at North Yorkshire County Council, a geographically-dispersed organisation employing around 24,000 people.

Chapter 2 goes on to focus more closely on the important subject of how to gather user requirements and understand how staff use the intranet. The chapter is based on the experiences of designing and launching the InSite intranet at the New South Wales Department of Primary Industries; this site was named one of the ten best intranets in the world for 2008 by intranet expert Jakob Nielsen.

Chapter 3 offers 30 tips and suggestions to help organisations optimise intranet accessibility and usability. The chapter offers practical advice on methods for testing the ease of access and use of your intranet and uncovers some accessibility *faux pas*. The old and new Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) are also discussed. Further tips are included for how organisations can improve usability on a tight budget. This chapter is based on the experiences of the Central Office of Information and its work with other government agencies to improve accessibility and usability.

Chapter 4 goes into more depth on the subject of usability, set against the

experience of intranet redevelopment at Lotterywest in Western Australia. Different methods for achieving user-centred design are examined, including focus groups, traditional research, workplace observations and usability labs. Creating a usability report is recommended, as this allows comparison of the intranet before and after, helping to support the business case.

Chapter 5 turns to the subject of deploying Web 2.0 technologies on your organisation's intranet. The chapter examines how Web 2.0 tools can be implemented and used to best effect to meet organisational needs and how intranet managers can overcome reluctance to embrace new technologies. This chapter is based on experiences at West Berkshire Council.

Chapter 6 looks at how to overcome the challenges of migrating content from a legacy intranet to a new site, based on the Irish Health Service Executive's experiences of consolidating a number of sites into one, unified site. Suggestions are made for how to embed an effective and thorough process of review, update and validation to ensure that valuable content and tools are not lost in the transfer, but also that out-of-date and redundant information and applications are not transferred. Attention is also given to the cultural significance of a 'fresh start' for the intranet.

Chapter 7 pays further attention to how the intranet can support and drive internal change. This chapter is based on the experiences of the Child Support Agency in Australia, which used its intranet to support the introduction of the largest set of changes to Australia's child support scheme in 20 years. The chapter looks at how intranets can influence staff behaviour and how agency outcomes can be delivered through intranet improvements.

# About the contributors

## **Sebastian Crump**

Sebastian Crump has been working with the internet since he left university in the mid 1990s and joined the digital team at the Central Office of Information (COI) nine years ago. During this time he has worked with a number of other government departments and agencies advising on accessibility, usability and more recently social media.

Sebastian has a technical background and tries to keep his hand in coding and development, but prides himself in talking to others in plain English. Sebastian has been managing and maintaining COI's website for several years and is presently assisting with the implementation of a new content management system for COI's intranet.

## **Stephen McGrath**

Stephen McGrath is head of internal communications for the Health Service Executive (HSE), provider of public health and personal social services in the Republic of Ireland. There are more than 110,000 people working in the Irish health service and the HSE is one the biggest public sector organisations in Britain and Ireland.

Stephen is based in Dublin and was responsible for the launch of the HSE's national intranet site in 2007. He is also editor of *Health Matters*, the quarterly national newspaper for HSE staff.

Prior to joining the HSE he was director of communications with the Northern Area Health Board from 2002. This organisation was responsible for the delivery of public health and social services in north Dublin.

## **Kate Needham**

Kate Needham is the internal communications manager for the NSW Department of Primary Industries. She has been working in employee communications, and on intranets, since 2002. She has a degree in communications and has previously held roles in web and multimedia production, marketing and publishing, both in Australia and overseas.

## **Wendy Pain**

Wendy Pain has been the web services manager at North Yorkshire County Council for three years having previously worked in a similar role in the NHS. Wendy has a background in web and graphic design.

Her role is to manage the public-facing website and the new intranet. Wendy manages the web team which consists of three web project officers, and they form part of the communications unit for the council. The web team is responsible for the design, branding and core content that is published on both the website and intranet. The team also trains and supports staff across the council who update content on both sites, as well as managing the day-to-day administration of both sites and

some of the associated web applications. Although the web team sits within a different area of the council, it works closely with the ICT services department, which was a vital part of delivering the council's intranet project.

**Paula Wilkes**

Paula is assistant director in the technical communication team at the Child Support Agency in Australia. Paula's main role over the last two and a half years has been to manage the internal communication for the implementation of the Child Support Scheme reforms – the largest change programme in Australian Government at the time.

This included building relationships with key business areas, maintaining the consistency and integrity of the established internal communication channels and ensuring messages to staff were consistent and integrated with messages going to customers. Paula also managed the internal communication campaign to embed the agency's new strategic that supported a major behavioural shift for staff.

Paula has over 15 years' experience in the communications industry working for government departments such as Medicare and Centrelink as well as multinational advertising agencies such as Lintas and J.W. Thompson both in Australia and the UK.

**Glenn Williams**

Canadian-born Glenn Williams has been designing for the web since 1994. He has worked for banking, entertainment, software and health industries in both private and public sector organisations.

Glenn is passionate about user-centred design and enjoys learning about emerging technologies related to the web. His current role is team leader systems and web analysis at Lotterywest in Perth, Western Australia.