Social Intranet: Teamwork in the digital age
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Learn how to improve collaboration and the exchange of knowledge within your company.
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1. The intranet is dead – long live the social intranet!

In many companies, the intranet misses its originally intended purpose by a mile. Instead of providing information in a clear manner, it’s often deteriorated into a mere storage space for everything and nothing. Who enjoys working with something like that?

But it could have been so much better: in the early days of the intranet, we were promised with improved process speeds, transparency and impulses for creativity and ideas. And the fact is, the intranet did bring a lot of improvements in comparison to the usual storage spaces and closed file systems of that time. It made it easier for employees to find information. But whereas other systems were consistently improved and updated, the intranet fell behind the times in many companies.

That’s why the internal company network is in desperate need of a revival. The key to this is the social intranet. It supplements the core intranet with social media features which facilitate collaboration and knowledge exchange. The direct communication across hierarchies, processes and locations is simplified noticeably thanks to this. Social business encourages the creation of new ideas and innovations. Locational and time-based limitations are removed by implementing social software in the business context.

By creating dialog-oriented and target-oriented networks in the social intranet, companies can become more efficient and more capable to react and improve. Especially against the backdrop of digitalization and globalization, it’s becoming more and more important to use the company’s internal knowledge resources optimally. Social intranets are an important step in this process. They optimize companies for the network economy of the information and knowledge society, they can encourage employee loyalty and make businesses more attractive to younger jobholders who have grown up with modern forms of communication.

More and more companies are recognizing these benefits and using them successfully. This whitepaper provides you with an insight into the world of the social intranet. It gives you information regarding the central aspects which you should consider if you’d like to put new life into your intranet. From the status quo via the most important features through to successful implementation.

2. Study 2016: Internal communication and social intranet

The expert poll carried out in April 2016 by the School for Communications and Management and United Planet, “Internal communication and social intranet”, clearly shows that social intranets lead to greater employee satisfaction with the internal company communication. In total 196 experts, 90 percent of those from companies with more than 50 employees, gave their view on the use and value of their social intranet.

The propagation of these platforms is already relatively high: About three quarters (73.1%) of those questioned use an intranet or social intranet. Around half of the remaining quarter plan to implement such an intranet in the near future.

Are you using a social intranet for internal communication?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>72.1%</td>
<td>26.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Are you considering introducing a (social) intranet?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I don't know</th>
<th>Yes, we're searching for a suitable solution; Go live is in the near future</th>
<th>Yes, Go live is soon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>33.7%</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Improved flow of information and simplified collaboration are usually at the top of the list of arguments for the use of a social intranet. The poll confirms this: 68.1% of social intranet users are either satisfied or very satisfied with the internal communication. This is clearly lower for those without a social intranet, with a value of 27.4%. Using a social intranet therefore seems to correspond with the employees’ expectations of successful internal communication and to be a method for solving regular problems.

How satisfied are you with your company’s internal communication?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee with (social intranet)</th>
<th>Interviewee without (social intranet)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very satisfied</td>
<td>Not satisfied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfied</td>
<td>Not very satisfied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.8%</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53.3%</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>22.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the group without an intranet, too many internal emails is stated as one of the largest problems of the internal communication (by 53.2%). Only two aspects, both with 57.4%, were rated higher (multiple answers were allowed): the insufficient forwarding of information by managers and/or superiors, and missing strategic direction. It’s clear that these problems in a company’s internal communication can be reduced by using social media elements.

The trend towards the Digital Workplace is another result seen in the poll. Almost three quarters (68.4%) of those questioned use applications in their intranet for digitally modelling and automating work processes. At the moment however, the rather straightforward processes are in the foreground. 44.4% of the interviewees currently model simple processes such as reservations. One third isn’t yet using features that allow the social intranet to primarily serve the purpose of information exchange. Nevertheless, about one quarter (23.9%) are using already using their intranet in the sense of a Digital Workplace, for simplifying as many processes as possible.

Digitalizing work processes is considered to be very important by 56.6%. This leads to time and work being saved. A further 40.7% consider these functions to be important and want to use these more in the near future, so that they too can make the most of these benefits.

The majority of those questioned state that they want to develop their social intranet further in the future: 46.7% work on the basis that the intranet will play a greater role as a central, digital workplace in the future. The intranet will be a central information platform for 38.3%. A mere 3.3% see the intranet’s meaning as declining.

The role of your intranet in the future will be:

- The intranet's meaning as a central digital workplace will increase - 38.3%
- The intranet will become less and less important because it will be replaced by other systems - 3.3%
- The intranet's role will barely change in the future - 46.7%
- The intranet's meaning as a central information platform will increase - 11.7%

A social intranet doesn’t just provide employees with the information needed for each day, but also becomes a living knowledge database. With that, it can have a wide variety of functions. Some of these are fundamental, some are more of a “nice to have”. This is very individual and depends on each company. At least the following features should be provided by the platform of your choice:

### 3.1. The most important features of a social intranet

- **Instant messaging**
  - This function is designed for direct interaction between individual employees. Information can be obtained in the form of direct messages. Employees communicate more informally and quickly than with emails here.

- **Tagging**
  - With tagging, users can specify keywords in the content and thus make them easier to find. Furthermore, individual users can be tagged meaning their attention will be drawn to the post.

- **Activity stream**
  - This is the core of your social intranet. The public communication is carried out here. Employees can, for example, ask questions and receive answers from the corresponding experts in the company. Its visual appearance is usually similar to that of the social networks that users know from their private lives. Some solutions go a step further: they don’t just show notifications from colleagues but also provide information from the implemented software systems, such as reminders or tasks.

- **Team rooms**
  - These serve as digital project groups. Here, documents are collated and made available for working with to the whole group. Team rooms or groups are used for a wide variety of tasks, such as to prepare for meetings, this leads to shorter meeting times, or also for collaboration on long-term projects.

- **Content**
  - The social intranet lives – just like every portal – from the information it contains. Content is generated by users from the communication between employees. However, there are often positions in the company with a focus on internal communication and the deliberate creation of posts. With an integrated Content Management System (CMS), these posts can be prepared and then made available in a suitable place. 80.6 percent of the participants in the expert poll “Internal communication and social intranet” consider the editorial work and provision of information to the employees as the most important function of their social intranet.
**Department-specific applications**

While the earlier intranets were mainly used to present information, much more is now possible today. Make the most of these capabilities and provide your employees with specialized applications on this central interface. This allows you to go beyond the mere depiction of information. About one quarter (23.9%) of social intranet users state that they use the intranet not only for its communicational function but also to simplify as many processes as possible. A further 44.4% model simpler processes such as room reservations and leave requests digitally. Digital workplaces are increasingly becoming the central work platform.

**Individual home, area and application pages**

An individually customizable homepage increases usability. This is achieved by allowing users to select and move portlets themselves or to choose a suitable font size in the portal. Furthermore, providing users with the option to choose between different layouts can, in some cases, be a good idea. For example, this means that the Marketing department will have a different user interface to that of the Finances department.

**Integration of data from third-party systems**

Using connectors, you can integrate data from all sorts of third-party systems. This means employees can, for example, access information from SAP or a CRM directly from the social intranet. And the best thing about this is that they can also write directly to these systems from the social intranet. If, by way of example, a task relating to a customer is discussed in the social intranet, the corresponding information from the CRM flows directly into the discussion. 15% of those questioned in the poll “Internal communication and social intranet” even state that this is the most important functionality for them today.

**Integrated process management**

Use processes and workflows to convert your intranet to a digital workplace. Time-controlled and event-controlled processes guarantee that those responsible receive, forward and update information at the right time. Automated reminders and notifications create smooth procedures.

**User management**

In every company, there are different groups of users who require completely different functions. Using a role-based user management system, each employee can only see the applications and documents for which they have the corresponding read and write access permissions. Each employee has an individual view with the information relevant to them.

**Mobile availability**

The modern working world is constantly changing; mobile end devices are more and more becoming the standard in companies. That’s because work is done where it best suits the customers and the project. Jobholders are increasingly using mobile end devices to complete their tasks successfully. A digital workplace therefore needs to also provide all information, processes and applications for on the move – ideally with responsive design for any end device and screen size.

**The introduction procedure**

To make the very most of a social intranet, the platform’s introduction needs to proceed based on a clearly defined strategy. This should be determined by the specific requirements and culture of the respective company. A prototypical procedure model with six steps can serve as a guide.

1. **RESEARCH**

   In this first phase, it’s about coming to grips with the requirements of social business and gathering know-how. Provide the project team, which is responsible for the social intranet, with the freedom to try things out. Knowledge can be obtained from seminars, online, or at conventions.

   Furthermore, it’s important to examine the technical and functional requirements. Representatives from the IT, as well as from specialized departments (HR, Internal Communication, Change Management etc.) should be included from the very beginning. In this phase, demo portals of the offered solutions should be tested.

2. **DEFINE THE REQUIREMENTS**

   Based on the experience from the first phase, initial definitions and requirements are developed. Identify as many enthusiasts, innovators and early adopters as possible; their feedback can provide important impulses for the project team.

   Identify use scenarios for your company and develop a first use scenario for a small pilot group. Test possible technical solutions here as well. Make sure you also add a competent contact person from the IT to the team; their task is to research and test the technical capabilities and restrictions. In many cases it can be a good idea to get an external perspective – for example from an independent consultant – on your own ideas and to investigate other options. Define the goals and benefits clearly.

3. **PILOT PROJECT**

   Once you’ve defined a specific use scenario, this will be tested in a pilot project by a group of manageable size. Depending on the size of the company, 10-20 participants from various departments and hierarchical levels should be involved. For the pilot, you can potentially come to a temporary agreement (e.g. by using rental license for the selected platform), in order to keep technical investments low.

   Communicate the planned introduction of the social intranet in good time, regularly and transparently in the company. Encourage dialog among the staff and work through the feedback.
6. About United Planet

United Planet is one of the trendsetters in the area of Enterprise Social Networks and the Digital Workplace. With the innovative portal software, Intrexx, we are the market leader for SMEs.

**United Planet’s areas of expertise:**

- Digital Workplace
- Enterprise portals
- Social Business
- Intranet and extranet solutions
- Web applications
- Mobile applications for smartphones and tablets

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