

# Cut Costs with Smart Intranet



Flawed internal structures and document management can cost a company a lot of money. *Florian Zeim* has some effective IT solutions.

**M**ANY BUSINESSES IN SHANGHAI have grown somewhat organically rather than according to any strict plans. Internal collaborative structures were not of high priority earlier, but in recent times, when growth has slowed down, companies are looking for ways to save costs, consolidate their internal structures and become more competitive. One measure which is often underestimated as a cost-saving option is internal collaboration and the Intranet.

A surprisingly high number of companies still use Excel as their primary database and a file server to store data and share it with others. But as soon as a team of people need to work on the same document, this setup uncovers its limitations. Employees are often left wishing for a system that tracks the versions of the documents they create.

## Advantage Intranet

At this stage, version history and digital footprints become essential in order to avoid a typical worst case scenario—the accidental overwriting of files. But besides document management, an efficient Intranet can provide a further range of advantages:

**Productivity** – Employees can locate and view information faster and use it when relevant to their roles and responsibilities. As a consequence, they can work faster, more accurately and with confidence that they have the right information.

**Timing** – An intranet has the advantage of providing information to employees on demand, which means they determine when to “pull” the information rather than being deluged indiscriminately by emails.

**Knowledge database** – Undoubtedly the biggest advantage of Intranet is the storage and sharing of knowledge, and its accessibility through hyperlinks, tags, wikis and other web technologies. Typical examples are employee manuals, research information, business standards, newsfeeds or training.

**Corporate culture** – A mutual platform can help to promote corporate values and

encourage social interaction, be it with a photo gallery of the latest company outing, announcements for social activities or the voting for the employee of the month.

**Integration of new staff** – The Intranet can serve as a major tool for the integration of new team members by giving a face to the company culture and people, providing training materials or explaining particularities, such as specialised terminology used in the organisation.

**Cost factor** – There is a high potential for reducing internal cost burden by providing data view via web-browser instead of maintaining

---

**The perfect Intranet is a virtual image of the company, therefore, planning an Intranet system starts with the visualising process and practice.**

physical documents. This can potentially save businesses money on printing, duplicating documents and the environment as well as document maintenance overheads. The cost of having to re-do work, finding a lost file, or recovering hard drives have decreased dramatically, if not fully resolved.

## How to Get Started

The perfect Intranet is a virtual image of the company, therefore, planning an Intranet system starts with the visualising process and practice. Once the business requirements are defined, further issues can be cleared, such as: people and responsibilities; hardware and software decisions; security and confidentiality; implementation schedules; level of interactiv-

ity; input of new and existing data.

The key challenge is user engagement. It is useless to facilitate an Intranet if the people, who are supposed to work with it, do not accept it. Naturally, employees see the introduction of new systems as burdensome and endangering their comfortable working habits.

Integrate key employees into the setup process and assign responsibilities to them. Their participation will automatically lead to higher user engagement among other staff members.

Launch the system step-by-step and start with applications which have fun-value and enforce collaborative engagement, such as voting, image galleries or personal profile pages. Most employees will evolve from silent watchers into active contributors, but they need their time to observe it first.

Interact, listen and allow your users to create content. Social networking must be part of an Intranet project, if a company cares about feedback of their employees.

## User-friendly Systems

The choice for the right system depends on the requirements of each business. There are collaboration tools such as Basecamp or Microsoft Groove, mostly used by smaller companies and for project-based collaboration. Building more powerful Intranet systems require advanced technology, such as Vignette or Microsoft Sharepoint.

In any case, the system should have some basic functionalities. It should be browser based, personalised, scalable to processes and changes within the organisation. It should also have other basic features built in, such as document folders, lists, calendars, news boards.

But no matter which system you opt for, remember to put practice and process before tools. **SBR**

*Florian Zeim is the managing director at Mediaman, an agency for online communication in Shanghai. The company provides Internet, Intranet and Extranet solutions to clients in China.*