INTRANET DESIGN WHITE PAPER

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PRESCIENT
DIGITAL MEDIA

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

An intranet is not a website. Employees are not consumers.

Employees don't shop or seek to be entertained on the intranet. They use the intranet far differently than they use the Internet. They want something very specific, as fast as possible, and then they're gone.

No employee goes to the intranet to "see what's happening" or what's new. They go to the intranet for a phone number, a form, a policy, a document – and then they're off to a meeting, a call or email.

Don't market to employees; give them what they want, as fast as possible. Aesthetics are a secondary concern; the application of color and images – should be the last thing applied to the intranet user experience. The creative designer should be the last person involved with a new intranet 'design' or 'redesign'.

PEOPLE AND PROCESS

The intranet is not a project, it's a process. In fact, the intranet has more to do with people and process than technology, which is merely an enabler.

Redesigning an intranet requires a completely different approach to design than a consumer website (or mobile site, or mobile app). For starters, typical websites are primarily marketing vehicles, created with the purpose of selling a product, a service, an idea, a concept. Employees do not want to be sold anything. An employee uses the intranet to find information for their job, and they want it fast!

Secondarily, management requires the intranet to deliver key messages and communicate initiatives, as well as engage employees. So the intranet must cater jointly to both employee and business / management requirements. An intranet redesign is like a political campaign – you might win, you might lose. And like a political campaign, an intranet redesign requires the support and votes of those that count – particularly senior management.

Intranet design - it is the first thing people think to change; the first thing people notice; and it is the last thing that is changed.

Redesigning an intranet isn't a simple matter. People tend to think that if they just change a few colors, the font, and add a photo, their website will be a winner. But unless there is a clear understanding of the intranet's purpose and the desired audience, the intranet will not be a success.

Every intranet redesign effort requires measurable objectives and plans for achieving them. By listening to your users and management stakeholders you may implement content and applications that will achieve those goals, and provide users those tools they need to do their jobs. And of course, the best

way to know and articulate that achievement is by having defined measures that are tracked on a regular basis.

OUR GOAL

Prescient Digital Media's design goal, as should be the goal for any designer, is to create a strong, dynamic, visual identity that reflects the company brand and style guidelines.

Our design approach is strategically driven, recognizing that design should help to achieve the measurable goals defined for the intranet. Design must facilitate the usability of the site and aid in guiding users to where they need to go while also adding appeal.

Redesigning an intranet is far different from redesigning a website; there should never be an emphasis on marketing, promotion, or product PR. An intranet should be focused on facilitating the quickest possible access to information and tools that help employees do their jobs. There's no need to sell employees, they already work for the organization.

ABOUT PRESCIENT DIGITAL MEDIA

This white paper was prepared by Prescient Digital Media's CEO and founder, Toby Ward. He has worked with nearly 200 intranet clients, and his research and direction of numerous intranet studies serves as the source of the intelligence, analysis and recommendations found in this report.

The Intranet Experts since 2001. We assess, plan, design, build and manage world-class digital workplaces and intranets. Prescient works with some of the biggest names and brands on Earth such as HSBC, Harvard, Liberty Mutual, PepsiCo, Sony, and many more.

For help with redesigning your intranet please contact us directly (416.926.8800 or visit www.PrescientDigital.com).

LEADING AN INTRANET REDESIGN

It is possible to undertake an intranet redesign without the support of senior management and eke out a minor victory, but your power and potential success will be severely hampered without the people that pony up the cash.

If your intranet isn't owned by a senior executive, then you need a champion. Perhaps, two. Unlike a political campaign working for a democratic purpose, a corporation is not a democracy. Senior executives are all-powerful; they have the political clout and they control the purse strings.

The intranet leader or manager requires all of the key characteristics of a political campaign manager:

- Superlative communications skills
- Salesmanship
- Authority
- Diplomacy
- Writing expertise
- Technology knowledge
- Image (design) skills

The intranet consultant or manager needs to also walk a wire, and must make most people happy, most of the time: executives, stakeholders, frontline employees, most especially those in HR, IT, communications and finance.

However, navigating this bridge or marriage cannot be at the expense of pragmatism: like any redesign process, there needs to be one final, ultimate authority or decision maker on the final design; design by committee does not work.

"A camel is a horse designed by committee," goes the famous saying. In the world of intranets, an intranet designed by committee is an intraNOT.

BUILDING A BUSINESS CASE

The world's best intranets all enjoy one common, critical ingredient: executive support.

The need for accountability and clear measures of success is increasingly demanded for all corporate expenditures, including intranets. If you are responsible for an intranet, you need to know how to build a business case and develop a return on investment (ROI) strategy.

Intranets and corporate portals are expensive endeavors. Despite the expense, many organizations understand its implicit and/or explicit value. Intranets are widely valued for:

- Streamlining business processes and driving operational efficiencies
- Significantly reducing cost of internal business functions
- Enhancing communications and collaboration

As with any critical business system, an intranet or portal must deliver measurable benefits and remain accountable to the investment. If the intranet's value is not being measured, then it risks failing the needs and demands of employees and management. If intranet performance is not being tracked, then justifying its' existence or funding becomes guesswork.

THE EXECUTIVE CHAMPION

In organizations with successful intranets, the intranet champion is a C-level executive. In other words, the President or CEO or a senior executive that reports directly to the head chief. This could be the CIO, the CFO, or perhaps an SVP of Communications or HR.

Determining the executive that makes the best champion in your organization depends on the executive and their power and influence within the ranks. Firstly, your executive champion should understand the value of the intranet and the potential it can deliver. Secondly, your executive champion needs to be involved, not on a day-to-day basis, but when funding or a critical decision is required. As far as a time commitment, your champion need only attend an occasional meeting (perhaps once or twice per year).

Usually, in most cases, executives don't know much about intranets. In fact, most think of the intranet as a cost center. You need to educate them.

Education comes in the form of:

- Best practices and case studies
- Employee research
- The business case with measurable return on investment (ROI)

Developing a complete business case with all of the above will convince just about any executive of the need for a high-value intranet.

SELLING AN INTRANET REDESIGN

Even before you plan a new intranet design or redesign, you need to 'sell' the intranet. The truth of the matter: an intranet manger's number one job is sales – selling the value of the intranet. Most C-level executives are uninformed about the intranet and its potential, and what it can do for the organization. So, at the very beginning, before there is light, you need to put on your sales cap, and sell it.

Many intranets are four, six or even 10 years-old. Some of our clients have intranets that are 12, 14, or 16 years-old. The reason: executives don't get the intranet, and therefore don't see any value in it. So, there is no impetus to undertake a redesign, and certainly no money available for a redesign.

"You need executive buy-in," says Chris Harrer, Director, Internal Communications at Cox Communications. "You cannot do anything without executive buy-in (support). It's key to everything."

COX COMMUNICATIONS INTRANET

Cox is the third largest cable television provider in the US, serving more than 6.2 million customers, including 2.9 million digital cable subscribers, 3.5 million Internet subscribers, and almost 3.2 million digital telephone subscribers, making it the seventh-largest telephone carrier in the country.

"I knew as I was going into the funding process, my fate was in their hands," adds Harrer.

Before Cox began its intranet redesign, Chris undertook six months of research with countless dozens of executives, managers and frontline users. He approached anyone that wanted a say or had an opinion about the old, dated intranet.

"For another six months, I went and presented to anyone that would listen to me at the VP level," says Harrer. "I would (put on my sales hat) ask for 30 minutes and sit in their office and walk through the key points and tell them that I just wanted them to be aware that I am looking to create a new intranet. Then came the test…"

Chris created a detailed sales presentation on why Cox needed a new intranet. It featured research, user comments, best practices and leading intranet case studies. For the busy and easily distracted C-suite executives, he created a one-page business case. One page that 'sold' the need and benefits of a new intranet.
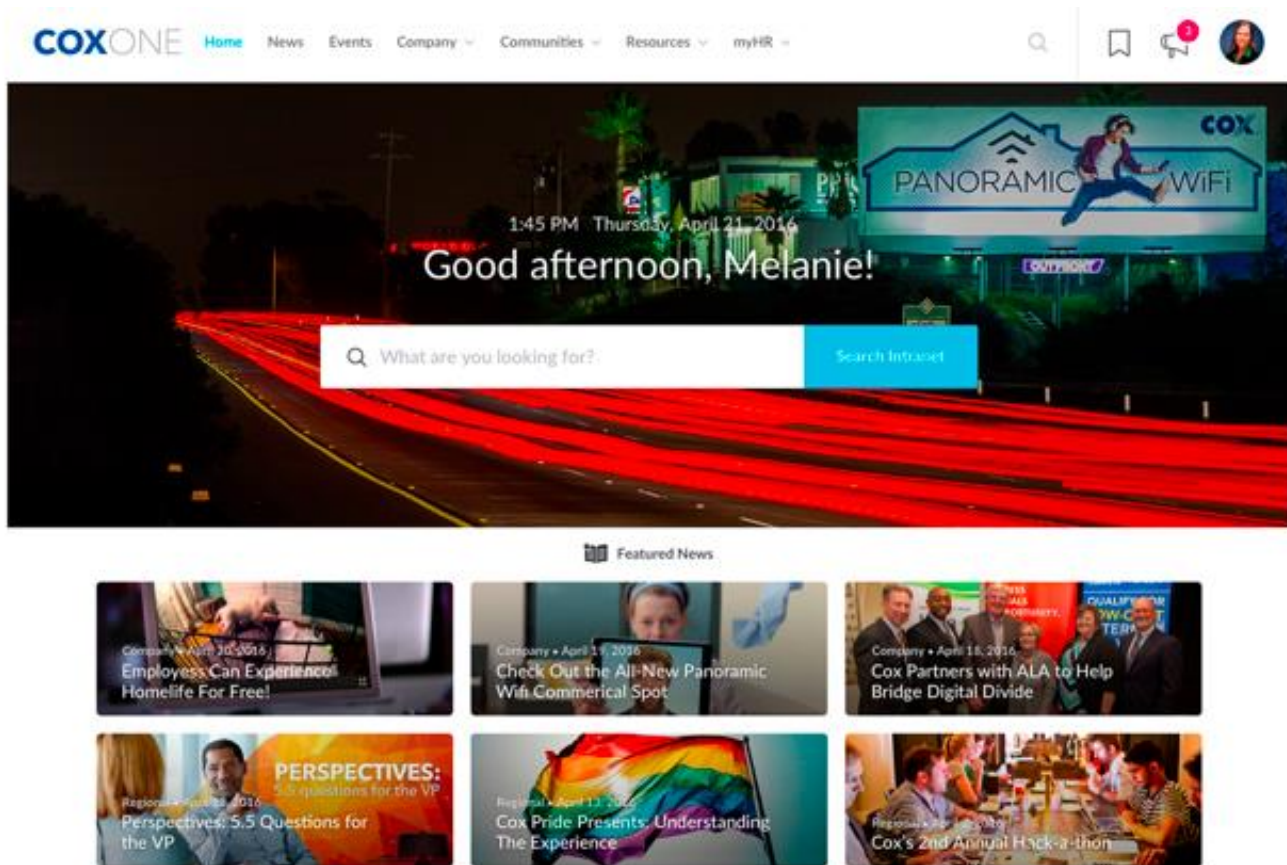
The Cox Communications Intranet, Cox One

"From this point I went and presented to each of our SVPs and EVPs with my intention to rebuild our intranet," says Harrer. "Creating the one-pager (business case) from my 45-page presentation was not easy, but I got all relevant information into one document for executives to look at."

And it wasn't merely limited to print documents and presentations. Chris also mastered the art of the elevator pitch, and used it whenever he bumped into an executive.

"Your elevator speech (30 seconds, or one-minute). Get that down-pat. Executives have no time, so master the short speech."

Chris credits his executives, and their support, as the key to the entire redesign process. ""If I didn't do that, this project would never have gotten off the ground."

To learn more about developing an intranet business case, download a free copy of our Finding ROI whitepaper at www.PrescientDigital.com

PLANNING A REDESIGN

A redesign has more to do with business process and structure than design itself.

Redesigning an intranet isn't a simple matter. People tend to think that if they just change a few colors, the font, and add a photo, the intranet will be a winner. But unless there is a clear understanding of the intranet's purpose and the desired audience, the intranet will not be a success.

For any redesign, every intranet requires goals and plans for achieving and measuring them. By listening to your users and stakeholders (executives and managers) you may implement content and tools that will provide employees with what they need to do their jobs, which in turn will help your intranet achieve its goals. And of course the best way to know and articulate that achievement is by having defined objectives that are measured and tracked on a regular basis.

"Companies are increasingly embracing the idea that design is a key element of strategy," stated a memorable *Business Week on Web design*, highlighting a redesign of Yahoo.com, which despite its success, could be better. Yahoo.com remains cluttered and scattershot, almost schizophrenic. If looking at a company's home page is like reading its palm, Yahoo's tells the story of a company trying to be everything to everyone. There are headlines, celebrity gossip, e-mail logins, search -- even Web hosting for small businesses.

"Is it a media company, a services company, or a search company?" asks John Zapolski, a former manager of several design teams at Yahoo: "You can't immediately tell why Yahoo is the best at anything."

METHODOLOGY

Prescient's unique *Intranet Project Methodology*, developed over 18 years of planning, designing and working with nearly 300 intranets, takes into account the best practices of the world's best intranets, and some of the very worst. It is a unique methodology developed specifically for intranets, though equally applicable to social intranets – because a social intranet has the same needs, requirements, and end users as a traditional intranet with the only difference being 'social' capabilities.

The *Intranet Project Methodology* includes all activities to begin planning, designing, and constructing an intranet solution – including assessment or evaluation activities (sometimes referred to as discovery) as well as all of the planning activities ranging from the high-level strategic plans, to the detailed tactical requisites such as wireframes and information architecture.

Adoption
- Marketing
- Communication
- Training
- Search
- Change Management
- Adoption & Participation

Assessment
- Gap Analysis
- Business Requirements
- User Requirements
- Benchmarking
- Social Media Readiness

Implementation
- Development
- Integration
- Project Management
- Vendor Management
- Content Development
- Content Migration

PROJECT METHODOLOGY

Planning
- Strategic Planning
- Governance
- Functional Planning
- Business Case
- Information Architecture
- User Experience (Design)

Technology
- Technology Audit
- Functional Specifications
- Solution Evaluation
- Vendor Selection
- Implementation Roadmap

PLANNING

Vision, mission, objectives, goals, strategies and tactics aren't just a collection of words dusted off at the beginning of every year or reserved solely for the company planning retreat. Strategic directives need to be understood if they are to be realized, and objectives need to be measurable. Whatever your strategy, before implementing any project you need to define your critical success factors (KPIs) and how to achieve success and measure it. For intranets, it's tempting just to fall back and use site analytics and page view metrics. However, more companies are coming to believe in the importance of understanding behavior. How are users using the site and how do you want them to use it?

Does your intranet strategy align with and support the business strategy? Does your intranet have measurable objectives? Who is accountable for its success?

There are four basic goals to communicating on the intranet: to inform, to educate, to promote (indirect sales) and to collaborate (two-way, synchronous communications). Your intranet may have one or more of these goals which need to be prioritized, or perhaps more industry or company-specific goals.

Falling under the over-arching goals are specific objectives. Objectives need to be smart — specific, measurable, accessible, reachable and time-realistic. How will you know if you are communicating successfully? Is it through use of the home page? Employee satisfaction survey results? Online sales numbers? What is it that you are communicating? How often? Do you have weekly, monthly, quarterly

and annual goals that need to be reached? What happens if they aren't reached? Who is accountable? How are you promoting the site?

These are just some of the questions you need to address to develop the required strategic directives for the intranet. You must also have a strong and documented understanding of your employee needs.

ASSESSMENT

Assessment serves two important functions: it documents the needs and requirements of the user population, and those of the business and its stakeholders, while aligning project goals with corporate goals and objectives. This phase usually includes:

- a strategic and heuristic intranet evaluation (gap analysis)
- business requirements analysis (and stakeholder interviews)
- user research (reviews, survey(s), focus group(s), usability testing, log analysis)
- technical infrastructure analysis
- benchmarking and best practices

In short, the design of the intranet must be a marriage of business requirements (executive needs) and user requirements (employee needs).

UNDERSTANDING USERS

The design of your intranet must reflect the needs of employees, but not at the expense of executive needs and requirements.

Intranets are initiated for a variety of reasons but employees determine its success. Demographic information like age, role, department, and geographic region, will provide you with some basic guidelines, and the more detail the better for addressing your employee needs. In order to understand your users, data must be collected using qualitative (interviews and focus groups) and/or quantitative (surveys and log analysis) research. A mixture is recommended as qualitative information will give you details and depth in understanding issues; quantitative provides statistical data for baseline comparison (comparing results over time).

Research questions should relate to both corporate objectives, and individual user needs and preferences. Understanding corporate goals and getting a clear picture of current issues will help you to develop questions that bridge the gap between current and future state. Personal needs and preferences provide insight into the individual user.

Once you've collected sufficient information on your users, and have analyzed the results, you need to confirm your goals and develop tactical plans.

Your tactics in fulfilling your intranet strategy also need to include an assessment of your resources — content and digital assets, staff, as well as technology and functional requirements.

CONTENT REQUIREMENTS

A site content audit is highly recommended prior to redesign. If you are building a new intranet then an assessment of all relevant material (employee research, corporate directives, communications plans, etc.) should be completed prior to research activities in the assessment phase. The audit should also include a compiled list or matrix of new content, including: static and dynamic content, structured and unstructured, and digital assets (graphics, images, documents) that may require treatment.

User research will reveal what information is wanted and needed, the frequency users need to access content, and also the importance of specific content. This knowledge will shape your information architecture and the layout of information (see **Error! Reference source not found.**).

Most intranets redesigns result in the retirement or deletion of 80-90% of the existing content. At Cox Communications, the new intranet only featured 3% of the 200,000 documents that existed on the old intranet.

STAFFING REQUIREMENTS

Content authors and owners need to be identified, and their roles defined so that content is maintained and updated regularly. Every intranet needs to have an executive champion – someone who understands its strategic directives and who is accountable for its overall success. Publishers, designers, and content authors should meet on a regular basis to discuss issues as well as to ascertain whether or not the intranet is meeting strategic directives and objectives.

An editorial policy should govern all content creation, publishing and management, and all affected staff must understand the policy and any associated standards and guidelines needed to maintain consistency and cohesiveness. It is highly recommended that an editorial committee be struck to provide a regular of discussion for content creators and providers. The intranet has unique challenges but providing clearly established roles and accountability ensures there is less opportunity for internal politics.

TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

Technology should support business and user requirements and be scalable to support future requirements. Most companies started with simple intranets – internal websites built with static HTML content and FTP (file transfer protocol) for content publishing. Companies now recognize the need for more advanced requirements, tools and process. Technical requirements and limits should consider the number of users managing new content, publishing and workflow; collaboration applications; social media; application access; file management; document retention; user permissions; HR and finance application integration; search; etc.

You may require a content management system, a document management system, a portal, or other technology to support your requirements. There may also be specific existing applications, or new ones, that users must access via the intranet homepage – databases, dashboards, reports, etc. Knowing your corporate strategic objectives as well as the day to day requirements of your users will enable you to create a list of functions and features you require in your technology.

Design isn't simple. It will need to be redone if it isn't reflective of both user and business requirements that have defined success measures.

MEASURING SUCCESS

Measurement is a must. Each intranet must be measured by a set of pre-determined critical success indicators (CSIs or KPIs) that measure both quantitative and qualitative effectiveness.

Measurement is perhaps the most important element for justifying your intranet's existence and budget. One of the great advantages of an intranet is the availability of multiple measurement channels - both online and offline - for evaluating performance. Popularly employed measurement channels include:

- Site analytics or log analysis
- Online and offline surveys
- Focus groups (also available online)
- Feedback email channels
- Help desk calls and email
- Usability testing
- Return on investment (ROI)

Metrics are also important for yearly, monthly, weekly and even daily measurement of intranet traffic and usage. Popular site analytics or log analysis software packages such as WebTrends and Omniture (Adobe Marketing Cloud) empower an intranet manger to track page views, unique visitors, average user session, etc.

A measurement plan should include regular analytical measurement of:

- Page views
- Visits
- Unique visitors
- Referrals (what URLs did the user come from)
- Entrance pages
- Exit pages
- Most common searches
- Broken pages
- Top sections, pages, downloads, etc.

Weekly, monthly and annual comparisons are important for updating and tailoring the intranet according to user demand. **Hits** are not business metrics – they are server performance measures and can be very misleading.

In addition to log analysis, periodic user surveys (coupled with focus groups and usability testing) are prescient tools for gaining valuable insight into what users want and need from your site.

THE PRESCIENT DIGITAL INTRANET (2020)

THE PRESCIENT DIGITAL INTRANET (2014)

REDESIGN PROCESS

The process for arriving at the stage where a designer applies color and images to a design concept is one that should be taken seriously, and is the underlying foundation of a successful intranet design. Sound intranet design follows a process that incorporates the aforementioned stages during the assessment and planning phases.

Your focus as an intranet manager must be on speed, access and content. Employees want information fast. They want it on all their devices. And they want it tailored to their specific situation. So the intranet design, the look-and-feel, must come last in the design process.

However, the look-and-feel shouldn't be overlooked. The visual appearance of your intranet is the first thing companies seek to change; it's the first thing people notice. It should be just be the last item on the to-do list.

Case in point: what is the first and most frequent complaint about the intranet? "I can't find anything."

STRATEGIC INTRANET DESIGN

An intranet is a business system – the gateway to the digital workplace – for supporting the entire business, and fostering communications and collaboration.

The design approach must be strategically driven: aligned to the goals and objectives of the company, it's organization and management. The end intranet user experience design must help employees find what they need, and also support measurable goals of the business.

The risk of having a web-designer with little intranet experience attempt an intranet redesign is obvious: they focus on creating a highly visual design, but often overlook the core online behaviors that drive intranet value: content, transactional content and business processes.

A strategic intranet design is driven by business requirements, recognizing that design should help to achieve the measurable business goals. Design must facilitate the usability of the site and aid in guiding users to where they need to go while also adding appeal and encouraging engagement.

Sound intranet design follows a process that incorporates:

- Business requirements (as expressed by management)
- User requirements (as expressed by employees)
- Strategic & functional planning
- Governance modelling
- Information architecture and wireframes (usability)
- Personas (employee roles)

INTRANET DESIGN PLANNING

When redesigning an intranet, you need to follow a process that is grounded in a thorough understanding of the current environment (not the least of which are senior management concerns and needs, business requirements, and user needs), and then plan accordingly.

The intranet plan begins with strategic planning (vision, mission, measurable objectives, KPIs), governance (ownership, management, policies), and moves into functional planning (intranet features), information architecture and wireframes.

Intranet information architecture, the key foundation for effective content structure and navigation, begins with understanding user needs (as they relate to the strategic plan) and is supported by card sorting, relying on experience and applying best practices for usability.

Intranet wireframes, or page layouts, are then developed to show positioning of elements on the page. At this stage some usability testing can be conducted to test the intuitiveness of the navigation. Then design is applied to the approved wireframes based on brand guidelines.

Follow Prescient Digital Media's intranet methodology, which establishes the strategic elements long before it's time to consider applying graphic design and color to the home page. Detail your organization's business requirements, undertake extensive user research, apply best practices, and then develop detailed plans. Among the plans that must be created prior to engaging a graphic designer or intranet design consultant, is the creative brief with detailed design elements including color palettes, font types, etc.

By listening to your users and stakeholders you are better able to implement content and tools that will provide employees with what they need to do their jobs, which in turn will help your intranet achieve the desired business goals. And of course the best way to know and articulate that achievement is by having defined measures that are tracked on a regular basis.

Once you know and intimately understand the needs of management and employees, and deliver the subsequent plans, including content management and information architecture, then you can worry about the creative design.

Once the assessment and high-level planning (strategy) is completed, the intranet manager and/or intranet consultant may begin developing the finer points and functions of the intranet plan including:

- Personas
- Information architecture
- Card sorting
- Wireframes
- Usability testing
- Design concepts
- Design guidelines (creative brief)

Intranet information architecture, one of the key elements of effective design, should be driven by key findings and strategic plans, with the help of employee card sorting exercises, usability testing, and best practices in information management and usability.
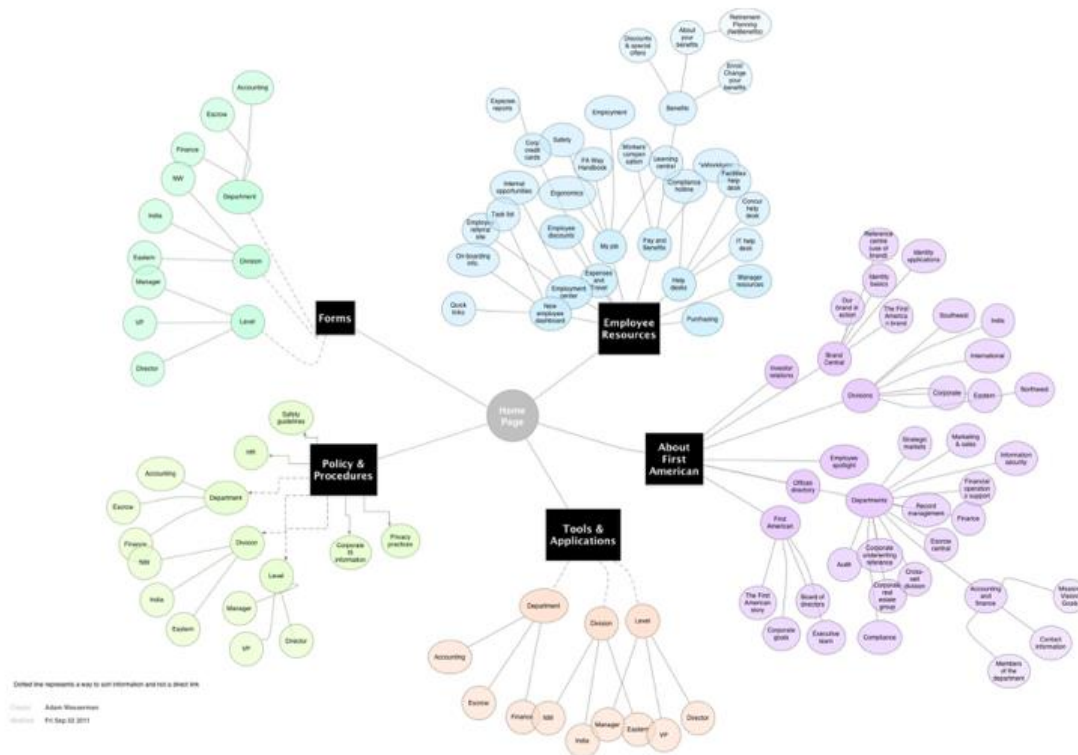
LAYOUT

The page layout of your intranet speaks to how the page elements are presented, spaced, and relate to each other. Layout in its purest form contains no design elements: no color, no images, no graphical elements; layout is pure spatial orientation.

Among the main components of intranet layout are:

- Columns (vertical text blocks)
- Banner (the uppermost horizontal block that typically features the logo + navigation)
- Individual text blocks (e.g. news headlines, features, quick links, etc.)
- White space (the space that fills the spaces between blocks)
- Navigation (global navigation, information architecture, and link blocks)
- Search engine (block for page search and/or people search)
- Image blocks (e.g., feature photo, promotional photo, etc.)
- Footer (the bottommost block that typically features disclaimer and links)

Intranet wireframes, or page layouts, are then created to show positioning of elements on the page. Usability testing can also test the intuitive positioning of content blocks and tools, layout and navigation.

Upon completion of the wireframes, a creative brief or design guidelines should be created that document the specific design instructions and rules for using color, images, iconography, etc.

Layout is best represented by a wireframe that describes the main components, and applies labels to each:
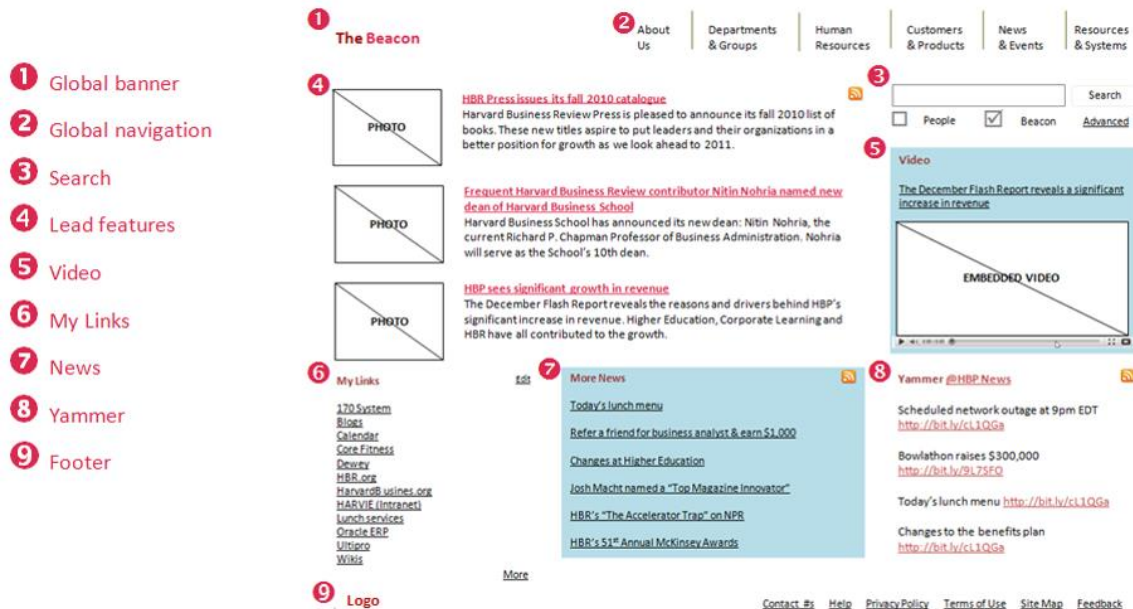
Optimal layout of the intranet home page, and sub-sections and associated pages, depends on the organization's culture, employee preferences, and information usage patterns and demands of employees. During the design process, different layouts and designs are typically tested with users, often in focus groups, and usability testing. While the optimal layout therefore can differ from one organization to another, some universal intranet layout best practices and approaches have been noted and reused by Prescient Digital Media:

- Two to three columns per page (two on simple content pages; three on landing pages)
- Minimal banner (no more than 10-20% of the page)
- Emphasis on one or a few headlines with supporting text
- Minimal global navigation or parent categories
- Text to white space ratio of 60/40 (or approaching 50/50)
- Global navigation is minimal if not limited to a single home button & search engine
- Search engine is an input box rather than a link
- Access to social media tools from home page
- Key content accompanied by photos or images

One notable key lesson relates to white space: it's difficult to have too much white space. The tendency of most intranet managers and consultants is to put as much information, and as many links as possible on the intranet home page. But hundreds of intranet focus groups with intranet users reveal one over-arching desire of employees: less is more. Nearly 90% of tested intranet designs are 'too busy' and too

crowded for the average employee. Prescient recommends fewer links and text blocks, and more white space on the home page, and standard sub-section or parent pages.

SCROLLING

The intranet should be used and browsed by everyone in the company regardless of their position, role or access source or device (laptops, smart phones, kiosks, etc.). Make sure that your layout renders well on any screen. Do not force people to scroll horizontally and make sure that important functions, such as *Send* or *Submit* buttons are never out of reach.

By and large, employees demand a clean, white home page with absolutely no scrolling – no vertical scrolling, no horizontal scrolling. This is a fact, supported by hundreds of intranet employee focus groups conducted at dozens of leading and medium-size organizations in North America. Some organizations may opt for a scrolling page, but the majority of average employee users prefer no scrolling.

This remains controversial as many design and usability experts and pundits regularly purport – often with little or no research – that there is nothing wrong with a scrolling home page. Among the many intranet design fallacies:

- Information scent is too important
- It is always better to provide more information than less
- If employees want lots of information; as much as possible
- Most websites with scrolling home pages are very successful
- If a newspaper website can have a scrolling home page, then an intranet can have it

Again, an intranet is not a website! If your organization has a majority of employees that want a scrolling home page, you are in the minority. The fact remains, when employees go to the intranet, they go for a very specific reason, and not to browse. Therefore, when they hit the home page, they're off to find something fast, and very rarely scroll the page to see what might be new.

However, the more technology and information savvy the employee, the more likely they're amenable to a scrolling home page. But the vast majority of knowledge workers have a different expectation of the intranet than the corporate website, and desire no scrolling at all. Scrolling on a specific content page is expected and understood – detailed content requires long pages that may scroll for many screen lengths. The no-scrolling recommendation relates to the home page and landing or parent category pages only.

Prescient conducted employee focus groups, surveys and card sorting exercises with three leading organizations in the U.S. in the same week, all with a combined total of close to 100,000 employees with employee intranet access. One overarching topic was researched and tested with a predictable conclusion: employees expect a very simple, uncluttered home page with half as many links as most intranet home pages offer today. Additionally, and very specifically, employees do not want scrolling on the home page – absolutely no scrolling.

Is the no scrolling phenomena universal? Are there exceptions to the rule? Of course, beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Some employees, particularly those in IT and communications, are often considered 'power intranet users' and do not mind a scrolling home page. But these employees typically comprise only five per cent or less of the entire company population. Most employees are in customer service, manufacturing, operations, etc., and are not considered typical or traditional knowledge workers.

However, a recent intranet user focus group comprised entirely of IT staff –eight employees in all-- revealed a telling result: no IT employee wants any scrolling on the intranet home page! So in fact, the exceptions to the rule are few and far between.

Most employees want to find information to do their jobs as quickly as possible, and do not have time to rifle through a busy home page. Many are content to glance at the home page, and then move onto the task at hand (query the phone directory, retrieve a policy, check their benefits statement, or read the lunch menu).

Employees consume the home page with just a glance, and the glance is incredibly important to understand: if you have information below the fold, it will be missed at least 98% of the time. Power users may scroll down below the fold, but the vast majority will not scroll. In fact, even worse, many employees become frustrated with the home page if they know there is information below the fold, believing that they do not have time to scroll down.
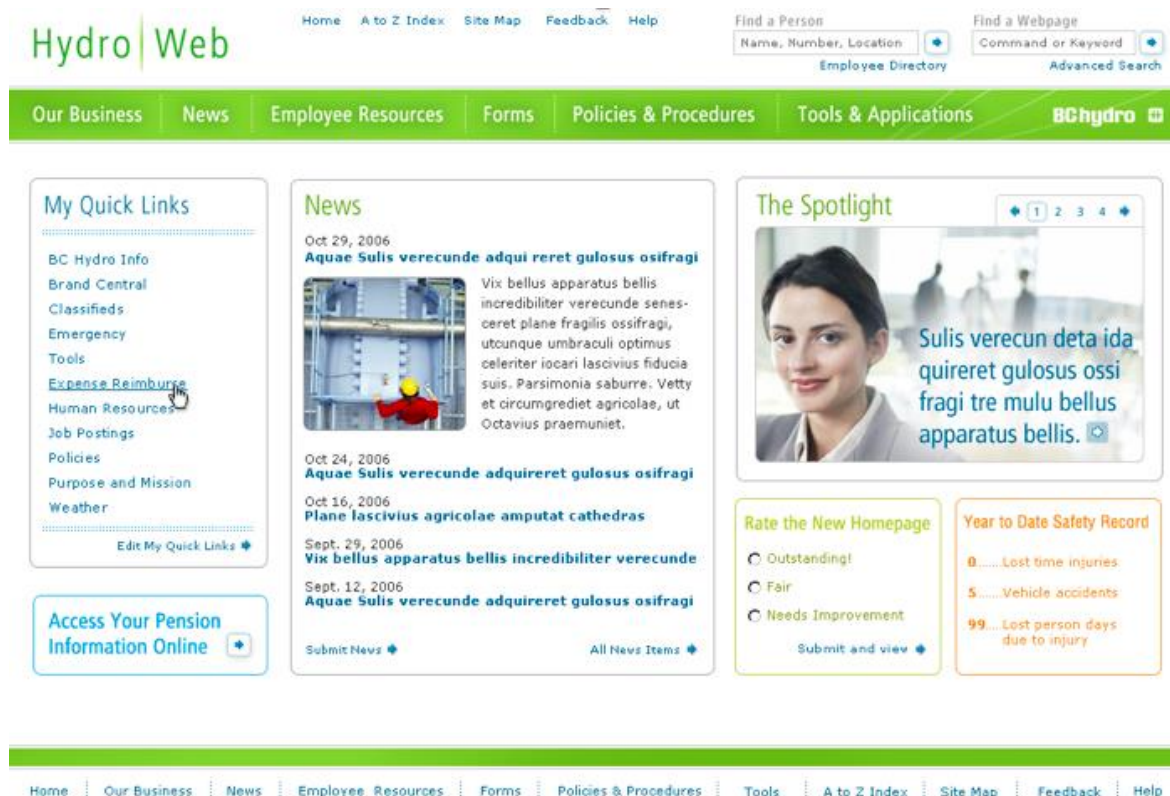
The highest scoring intranet design, tested with hundreds of intranet users over ten years, features a great deal of white space and no home page scrolling

Remember, a browser is not a newspaper nor is the intranet a public website. Employees want to find work-related information as quickly as possible. Most employees demand a clean, uncluttered home page, with no scrolling. Design with the majority in mind, not based on your personal preferences, or those of the clear minority.

DESIGN ELEMENTS

Let's face it: making and sustaining a good first impression is important. If you only have one-quarter of the time it takes you to blink to create a good impression, then the intranet's design elements (namely color and images) must make an immediate, positive impact.

COMMUNICATING A MESSAGE

Intranet users make rapid decisions about a site's quality, but you might be surprised to learn how quickly.

"Visual appeal can be assessed within 50 milliseconds, suggesting that designers have about 50 milliseconds to make a good impression," according to Dr. Gitte Lindgaard of Carleton University, speaking in a *Times* article regarding user behavior & information technology (web technology).

"If the user thinks the site looks good, the impression translates to other areas of the site, like its content. Since people like to be right," Lindgaard reasoned, "they will continue to use a website that made a good first impression."

Determining how best to generate that positive judgment in the first few milliseconds is not easy, and requires a number of best practices:

- Contrast – effectively using color and background contrast, fonts and graphics.
- Branding – follow your brand and style standards including use of logos, typeface, color, use of photos and graphics, and position (see [Building a web brand).](#)
- Consistency – even if you break the rules do so in a consistent manner.
- Research – understand your users.
- Planning – follow your site plans to fulfill set business requirements that you are measuring.

GOOD DESIGN

In general, an impression is made from the overall design of the site—the combination of look and feel, layout and the ability for the user to find what they need. Good design follows some basic rules for color, fonts and graphics as well as in its layout.

COLOR

Color is complex. The human eye can discern over 16 million colors. The most important thing to remember is that color can be used to emphasize or to de-emphasize certain content. Color can evoke emotion, establish mood and create themes. Today most intranets base their color schemes on their corporate branding. For example, the Pepsi intranet primarily uses the red and blue pantones found in its well-known logo.

Designers recommend using no more than three to four primary colors in a home page design. Designs should typically use lighter shades; overly bold, contrasting color can dilute the overall impact and fail to emphasize key page elements (and can lead to rainbow syndrome where the intranet can be perceived as unprofessional or childish).

BASIC COLOR WHEEL

Too much color can be overwhelming; too little color can be drab. If you avoid any colors, your intranet can look uninspiring and forgettable. If you use too much color, the intranet could look gaudy and garish.

There are three main colors you should adopt for the intranet:

1. A dominant color represented in the corporate brand and logo
2. One or two accent colors to extend the color scheme
3. A background color to complete your design

Color best practices:

- Use corporate brand colors.
- Use three or four main colors and then shades of those colors.
- Either use complimentary colors or contrasting colors.
- Do not use bright colors in contrast to others.
- Be consistent.

Tangerine
Saffron
Canary
Lemon
Flaxen
Sweet Leaf
Fern
New England Ivy
Willow
Emerald
Juniper
Glacier
Lagoon
Peacock
Crystal Blue
Pacifica
Sapphire
Pansy
Eggplant
Thistle
Raspberry
Blossom
Pixie
Bashful
Pomegranate
Ruby
Cranberry
Poppy
Smoothie
Sorbet
Goldrush

FONTS

"Good design is design that is readable."

Typography enhances and extends the meaning of words. Fonts also aid in readability and support the corporate brand.

Rules of font readability:
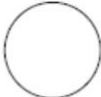
- Underlining words actually make them harder to read. On websites underlining is a signal that something is linked – therefore, don't use underlining – leave it as the default for links.
- Italicized text is also harder to read – this includes cursive fonts that emulate handwriting.
- Bolding text adds emphasis but also makes letters thicker which can hinder readability if used too much.
- ALL CAPITALIZATION is hard to read. Upper and lower case allows the eye to quickly recognize the look of words for reading. All caps create a reading block as the eye has to slow down and read each letter to create the word. All caps or uppercase should be used sparingly, at the most reserved for titles.
- Left alignment is easiest to read in Western culture since we read left to right. The eye knows where to return to at the end of each line.
- Centered text is a bit harder to read and should only be used for smaller chunks of text like titles and quotes.
- Right-aligned text is the hardest to read since the eye needs to search for the beginning; this should be used sparingly.
- Be consistent. Using heading styles will aid readability and search engine positioning which seeks out keywords by importance which includes use of words in headings.

CREATIVE BRIEF

The creative brief is an essential set of instructions for directing the graphic designer who prepares the final design concepts. With strategic and functional plans, information architecture, and wireframes in hand, all the designer needs is guidance from a creative brief. The brief details a number of elements including:

- Color palette
- Fonts
- Images / photos
- Iconography
- Technical limitations

It is important that these color conventions remain consistent for usability

Dark Blue is reserved for Links
Red is reserved for Rollover Stage of links and navigation elements
Expanded palette is used for backgrounds borders and other graphic elements.

The color palette for the Pepsi intranet / extranet

The Pepsi intranet / extranet

GRAPHICS

The saying "A picture is worth a thousand words" is true because visual elements aid in our understanding of content and appeal to us on several levels. Visual elements are used in design to:

- Enhance understanding
- Grab attention
- Aid memory
- Add clarity
- Generate mood
- Convey themes, symbols and intangibles

PHOTOS VS CLIPART

Photographs convey a more professional look while clipart/cartoons can convey a comical/fun feeling. Animated clipart, a trend popular 10 years ago, can be visually distracting. Whatever you decide, be consistent – either use photos or clipart – avoid using both as they do give different impressions of your site. Though clipart is not recommended on a business intranet, a professional set of custom clipart could be helpful on specific subsites where photos would not be relevant.

Best practices for photos:

- Use ALT (alternative text) attributes – if any user can't see the image at least they will know what should have been there; search engines and readers for the blind read them so this is a best practice for accessibility.
- Photos should lead the eye into the page/screen – have photos of people looking into or at your page and have graphics lead into the page and not off it.
- Choose your photos carefully. Portraits should be consistent in size and perspective; they should be head and shoulders.
- Photos should be interesting. They should show movement or action as that creates interest. Some branding strategies include the mandatory use of action photos.

Note that copyrights apply: purchase photo and art licenses, or use royalty-free images.

FLASH

If you are using Flash animation be conscious of the download times – no one wants to wait while something takes more than 10-15 seconds to load. Use Flash to convey a story and add emphasis to messages – don't use it just because it looks cool; always think of your user and audience.

LAYOUT

A good information architecture is all about getting visitors to where they want to go quickly and will drive the way your site is laid out. Ensure that there is a good white space ratio to give the eye a break so that you're emphasizing what you want; overcrowding your page causes viewers to get confused and frustrated.

The layout of each page should lure and hold a visitor's attention. The layout design should serve a purpose and help to achieve the objectives of the site through its look, size, shape, arrangement of copy and pictures.

Page size:

- Today, most users have a screen resolution higher than 1024x768 pixels
- 90% of readers have a screen resolution greater than 1024x768
- The most common display resolution is 1366x768

PRINTABLE VERSION

In traditional page layout (for print) the general rule for design is that if you place a dollar bill on the page (vertical, horizontal or angled) it should cover a design element (including headings). If it doesn't, it means you have too much unbroken text which is hard to read – especially on an intranet where content should be chunked.

CONSISTENCY

Consistency in design reveals that there are standards and plans in place. Consistency conveys professionalism. It also shows attention to detail and pride in everything you do. If your intranet isn't consistent, what impression do you think you're conveying to your site visitors?
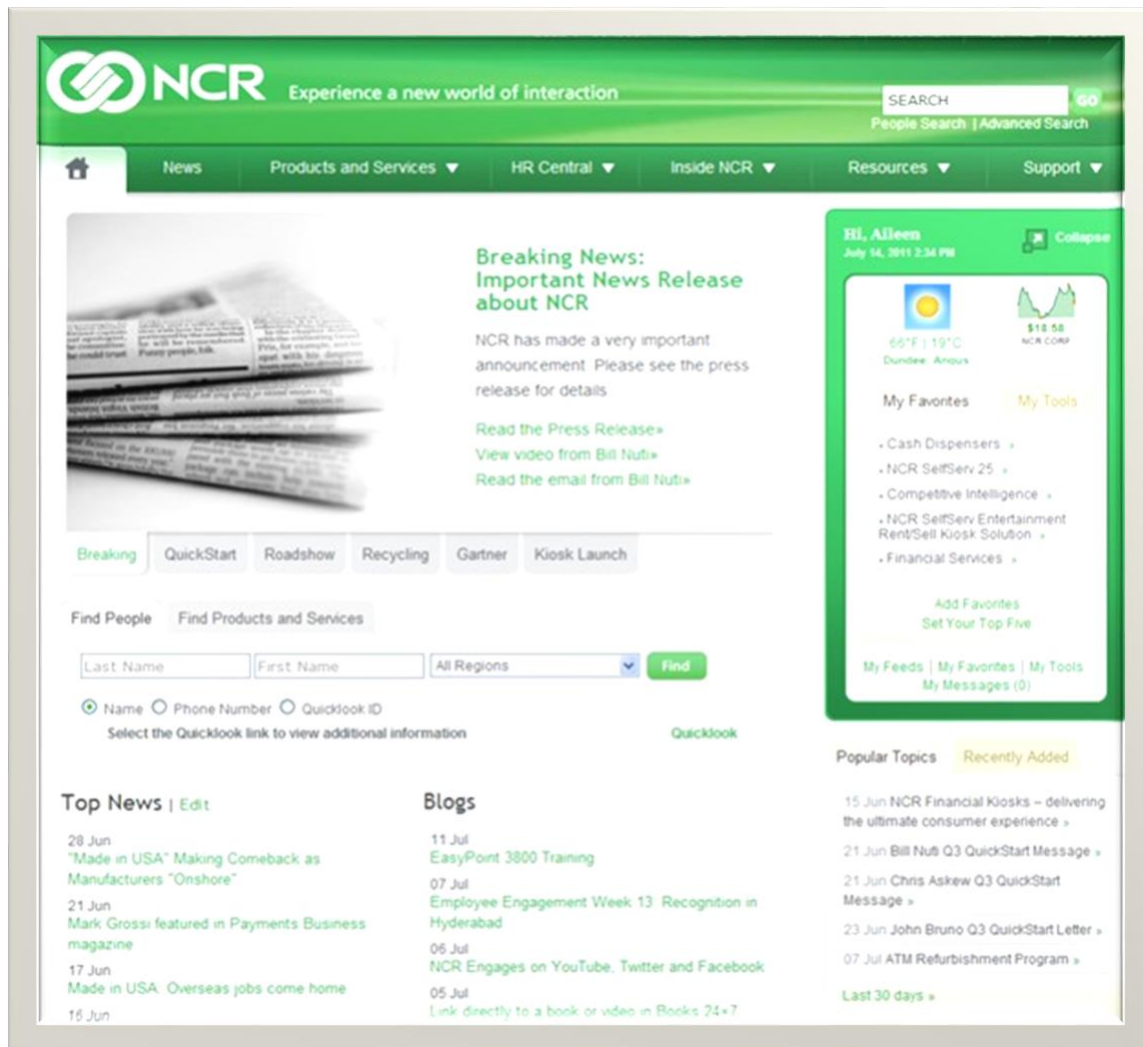
The NCR intranet home page features only one primary color

CONTENT MIGRATION

Why are so many companies planning to redesign their intranet? Well, it's time. The corporate intranet, in most organizations, has changed very little in the past five or six years. Meanwhile, the available technology and platforms – such as content management systems and portals and self-service applications – have evolved considerably. In addition, the intranet, like the business it represents, is in constant flux and evolution. A redesign forces the necessary change and process revisions to keep pace with the business and the market.

A redesign should be driven by business needs and a business case that details the needs, requirements and value of a redesign.

Part of the process, prior to any designing or redesigning the look-and-feel, is addressing the little monster known as content. The monster requires constant feeding and likely has been well fed. As such, a number of key questions must be answered:

- What content from the old site needs to be migrated as is?
- What content has to be edited and updated?
- What content has to be forgotten and deleted?

One client undertook an intranet content audit and was able to rid themselves of 80% of their content. Yes, 80%. Others have eliminated up to 90% of their old content and migrated just a few dozen or few hundred pages to their new intranet. Cox Communications eliminated 97% of the 200,000 documents on the old intranet prior to launching the new intranet.

A content audit aids the intranet manager, and associated team, to identify the valuable content that should be preserved and migrated to the new intranet. The content audit is best represented by a detailed spreadsheet that identifies and documents the content on your intranet, and grades it accordingly:

- Migrate
- Edit & Migrate
- Delete (Archive)

The spreadsheet should contain columns for content type, name, location (URL), owner, date and grade (among others, if called for), and organize the content by grade or priority. This is a task easily undertaken by a junior employee or intern.

In larger organizations, with tens of thousands, or hundreds of thousands of pages or documents, the content audit should take on a different focus or approach: content sales. Put the onus on the content owner to make the case for, or 'sell' the value of, preserving and migrating content to the new system. In other words, rather than focusing on auditing all of the content on an intranet, only identify and migrate key corporate content (e.g., About Us, News, Directory, Policies, Forms) and leave all of the remaining content to the various content owners to make the case for migrating their own, additional content.

Alternatively, provide the option for content owner training in operating and publishing with the new content management system, to empower the content owners to migrate or re-post their own content onto the new intranet.

Pre-Migration	Migration	Quality Assuarance	Post-Migration
1. Analyze source system	1. Export Content	1. Identify Errors	1. Apply/implement branding
2. Implement Domain Logic Layer on Alfresco	2. Export Users	2. Remove Faulty Data	2. Transition Users from the Old System to the New
3. Identify Content to Migrate	3. Export Groups	3. Resolve Errors	
4. Specify Attribute Mappings	4. Export ACLs	4. Repeat Import steps if necessary	3. Shut down / Archive "Old" system.
5. Implement Source "Freeze"	5. Export Metadata		4. Implement missing functionality from source system
	6. Import Content		
	7. Import Users		
	8. Import Groups		
	9. Import ACL		
	10. Import and apply Metadata		

The recommended content migration checklist by Alfesco

KEY LESSONS

Intranets require a lot of work, and an intranet redesign is more than visual design itself.

Successful intranet design is strategically driven and helps achieve measurable goals. Design must facilitate the usability of the site and aid in guiding users to where they need to go while also adding appeal and assisting with engagement.

Redesigning an intranet is far different from redesigning a website; there should never be an emphasis on marketing, promotion, or product PR – an intranet should be focused on facilitating the quickest possible access to information and tools that help employees do their jobs. There's no need to sell employees, they already work for the organization.

A successful intranet redesign must have:

1- Executive support
2- A strong, skilled, and experience intranet manager
3- Business and user requirements
4- Detailed planning
5- Information architecture
6- Wireframes
7- Design concepts
8- Content migration plans

Key lessons:

- An intranet is not a website! Repeat: an intranet is not a website!
- Intranet design must be driven by business need, not creative whimsy.
- Speed kills on roads; lack of speed kills on the intranet.
- Follow a design process that includes thorough input by management & employees for consideration, but remember that a design by committee leads to certain death.
- Soft colors are appreciated; darker, bolder colors such as dark red and black should be used with extreme prejudice.
- Employees love employee photos, not clipart (individual photos, team photos, event photos).
- Design with the majority of users in mind, not based on your personal preferences, or those of the clear minority.
- Most employees demand a clean, uncluttered home page with no scrolling.
- White space is good.
- Less is more.

INTRANET DESIGN CASE STUDY: IBM

The IBM intranet has undergone many redesigns since the turn of the millennium. One of the biggest redesigns was undertaken in 2011. A team of more than 40 IBM consultants led a massive redesign of IBM's web properties: a galactic redesign that included both the external website and internal intranet.

The core objective: a single design system that converges the intranet (W3) and Internet standards, incorporates reusable design patterns and evolves the design system through collaboration.

Among the key design goals:

- Redesign w3 and ibm.com so that they clearly communicate IBM and IBMers at their best
- Design a new digital experience for IBM.com that looks, sounds, thinks and performs like IBM
- Introduce IBM experts, innovators and collaborators across the web, both internally and externally (.com and external web)
- Encourage behaviors that support the workforce enablement strategy

The massive redesign project is design version 17 (v17; v9 of the intranet, w3). Among the new design undertakings:

- One design system: converging www & w3 design systems
- User interface design: templates, elements, guidelines, standards
- Technical: HTML, CSS, JavaScript
- Process: Community, iteration, design patterns, compliance
- High level information architecture: masthead categories, footer
- Only have four persistent links in the w3 masthead (w3 Home, BluePages, Help Central and Feedback) and no page Footer
- The new masthead includes over 100 links to w3 sites and applications employees use most
- Over time, new features like your ODW Essential Links, Alerts & Notifications, and collaboration features will be added
- New visual design: masthead, content space, etc.
- Browser "layout", page width, column grids, templates
- Local navigation
- Right column

Among the audacious design changes is the elimination of the old, corporate "big blue" colors and a more progressive white and black look and feel. Left-hand site navigation was eliminated and instead replaced with large, drop down menus – or "mega menus" – that fall under the main, global navigation buttons.

"The new design uses darker and more subdued colors in the masthead and footer but brighter colors and more readable fonts in the content space making it easier for you to focus on where the real action is happening on the page: the content space!!," says Peter Ceplenski, Manager User Experience, IBM, and one of big blue's redesign's commanding officers.

The old IBM intranet; one of the lowest scoring intranet designs, tested with hundreds of intranet users over five years, features far too many text blocks and links (circa 2006)

"The w3 portal, also known as the OnDemand Workplace (ODW) has been the corner of the intranet you can make your own. However, customization hasn't always been easy or intuitive," says Ceplenski. "The new design makes it incredibly easy for you to add and remove widgets from the page, to change the layout of the page, and even allows you to easily add and remove your own pages customizing each for the way YOU work."

"Don't like where we've placed a widget? Drag that widget to a different part of the page or remove it all together replacing it with something that will make you better informed or more productive!"
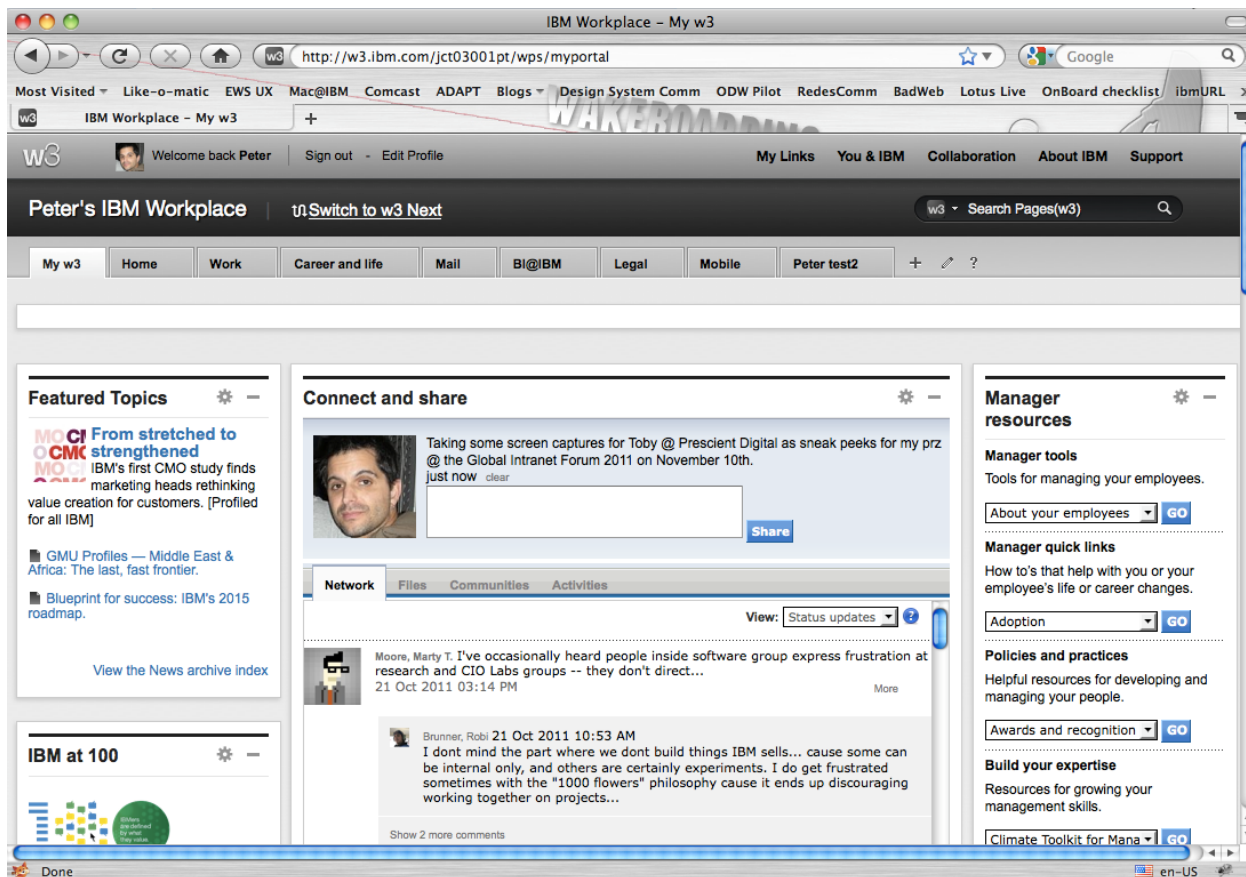
The IBM intranet home page, W3, in 2013 (version 17)

Among the many benefits of such a massive redesign revolution:

- Reduced time and effort needed for maintenance and design improvements via:
  - Common, universal design elements via common CSS and services. (This will simplify design updates in the future, leading to some design updates where adopters won't even need to touch their pages.)
  - Converging w3 and www design standards. (One set of standards to know, and greatly simplified development for sites in both spaces.)
- Allows adopters to easily leverage strategic widgets and features through an agile digital design framework
- Dynamic delivery of merchandising and Expertise Locator services through our services framework (higher conversion through personalization and contextual positioning)
- Improves the user experience
  - Easier navigation through use of mega-menu's (higher conversion through ease-of- use)
- Showcases IBM at its best through a more modern look and feel and innovative user interactions
- Synchronizes Smarter Planet and Centennial design strategy, look and feel

The Intranet is Dead

The redesigning process was not over. The new 'Apple' approach to design didn't resonate will with user in the long run.

In 2015, IBM developed a new mission for their intranet, a Jerry Maguire-esque mission statement manifesto on how the intranet should evolve… beginning with its death. In IBM's own words:

> *No longer is there a single information workplace. No longer are we bound by the strict confines of a firewalled digital destination. The way we work transcends the binary notions of 'internal' and 'external'. The body of knowledge we access and to which we contribute is now globally distributed across individuals, communities and disciplines. And our communication is constant, immediate and ubiquitous.*
>
> *The vehicle through which we interact with our colleagues, customers and communities of practice needs to reflect this shift. As an organization, we must reconceive how to serve and empower a global workforce – professionally and culturally – in a way that enables everyone to achieve his or her full potential.*
>
> *W3 must change to serve the expanding needs of IBMers by seamlessly integrating with IBM.com – evolving from distinct toolkit to integrated service; from a walled garden to a mode of engagement. W3 can become the service through which digital citizens (users/employees) engage to make the world work better.*
>
> *In the future, w3 will cease to be a separate destination for IBMers. Instead, it will seamlessly integrate into IBM.com and the Web, serving as the frame through which they relate to their colleagues, the enterprise, their clients and partners. It will inspire and enable each of them to be a steward and standard-bearer of the IBM brand.*

In the future, the intranet was to service will exist as a series of permissioned information modes, customized to perform a variety of functions:

- As a private space (Individual) for IBMers to be served, supported and advised by IBM
- As a forum for dialogue (Enterprise), collaboration and learning with IBM
- As an inviting workspace (Partner) for the communities of practice both inside and outside of the company
- As a clearinghouse (Global) for essential information, news and content

The new intranet was redesigned quickly, with a focus on search and news for all, and better integration of social media on the home page. Much cleaner, and less crowded the intranet was taking a step in the right direction.
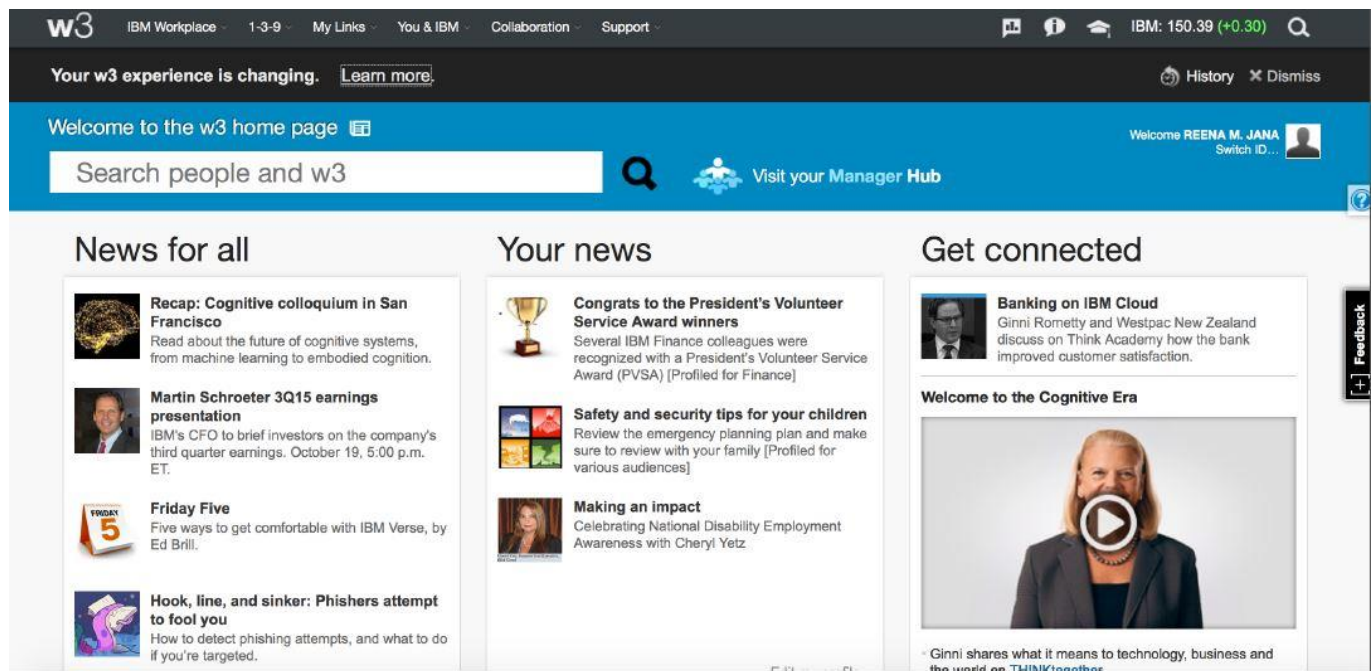
The new IBM intranet home page, W3, in 2015

However, the intranet team still failed to hit a home-run. Although the 2015 redesign was a step in the right direction, users were still only lukewarm to the latest redesign. No one ever said intranet design was easy, nor is it easy to satisfy all employees all of the time.

Employee surveys found that satisfaction levels were dropping far too low for the intranet team's liking: overall satisfaction had dipped to 67%, which meant in some geographies outside of the U.S. it was below 50%. Slow load times were also a frequent complaint of the 400,000 approximate users.

At the heart of the redesign though were a number of problems uncovered in the user research:
- Unavailable – the home page crashed too often (though available for more than 99% of the time, when it went down it was a big deal)
- Slow – slow download times
- Crowded – the home page was too busy
- Search – on an intranet with tens-of-millions of pages and documents, search results were underwhelming if not poor
- Mobile – more and more employees were logging onto the intranet via a mobile device, and finding the interface cumbersome

In other words, IBM took employee feedback to heart and really dove deep into the research to find out what employees really wanted.

IBM Intranet Home Page

IBM took notice, undertook scads of additional user research, and undertook yet another redesign. The intranet redesign goal was simple: make employees happier and more productive.

Denoted as Project Butterfly – a broader initiative of which the intranet home page was one component, but also extended to a manager's intranet hub and mobile apps for employees.

"How it looks DOES matter," says Jason Blackwell, Cognitive Psychologist & Human Factors Engineer, IBM Enterprise Web Solutions. "Waiting is not engaging. "Temporarily unavailable" is not engaging." The research also uncovered a finding that most take for granted – employees were mostly using the intranet to search (either the search engine, or the employee directory).

"A lot of what was inspiring the redesign was something really fast and stable, and improves all the spaces that most IBMers use," says Blackwell. "Click data found 70% of home page activity was just searching. So we set out to learn their interests, work habits (and) predict their navigation / search needs."

The IBM team turned their focus to a number of key priorities:
- Design – engaging design: build systems to audience, their needs, and tasks
- Cross-platform – mobile access and scalability for future mobile interactivity
- Social engagement – collaboration (social media) should not be a destination – engage with whom you need, when you need them.
- Speed – fast, resilient

- Personalization – intelligent, adaptive systems – build the workplace around the user
- Search – adapt and improve search

DESIGN

The new design is a dramatic departure from the typical portal design chalked full of content boxes and webparts. Instead, the new design deconstructs the portal box look, emphasizes the search engine front and center, and limits the remainder of the page to three columns of 'cards' which individually slide with the click of a button. Employees can choose what portlets (webparts) appear on their home page, and the information architecture was dramatically simplified.
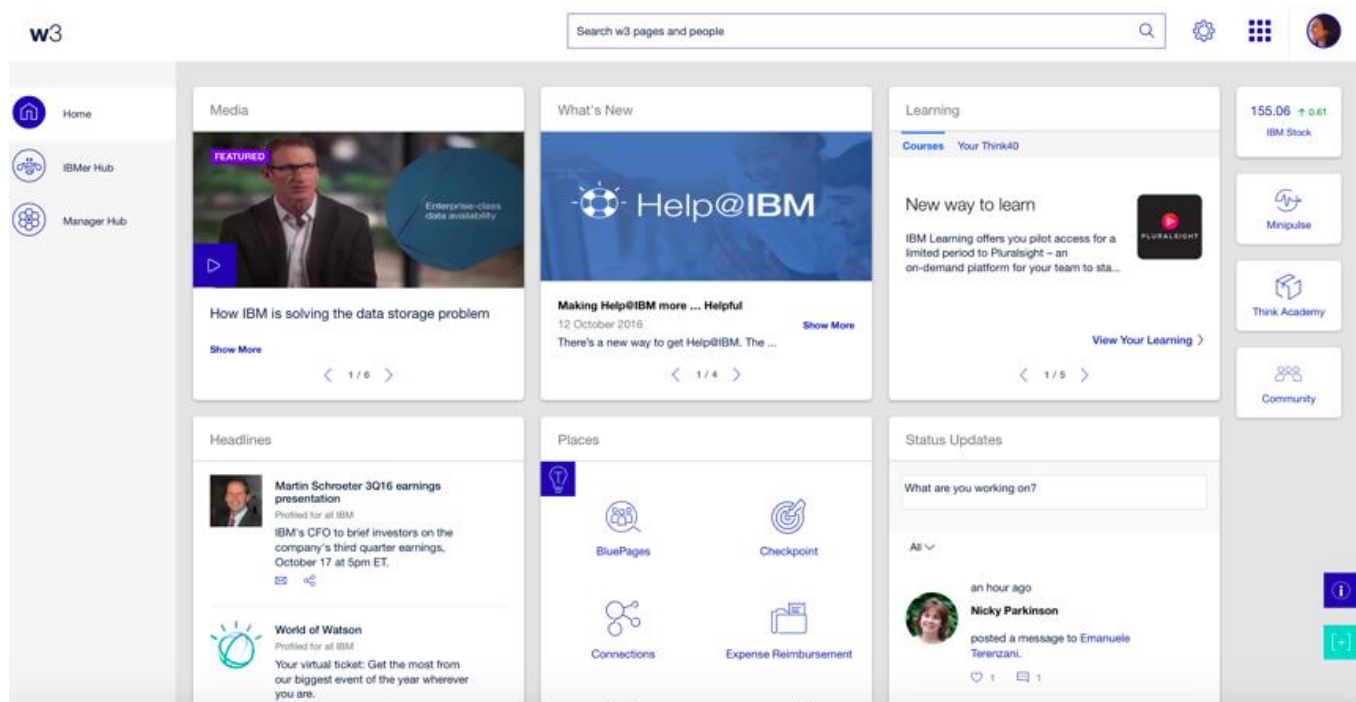
The new IBM intranet home page, W3, in 2018

Other Notable Intranet Designs
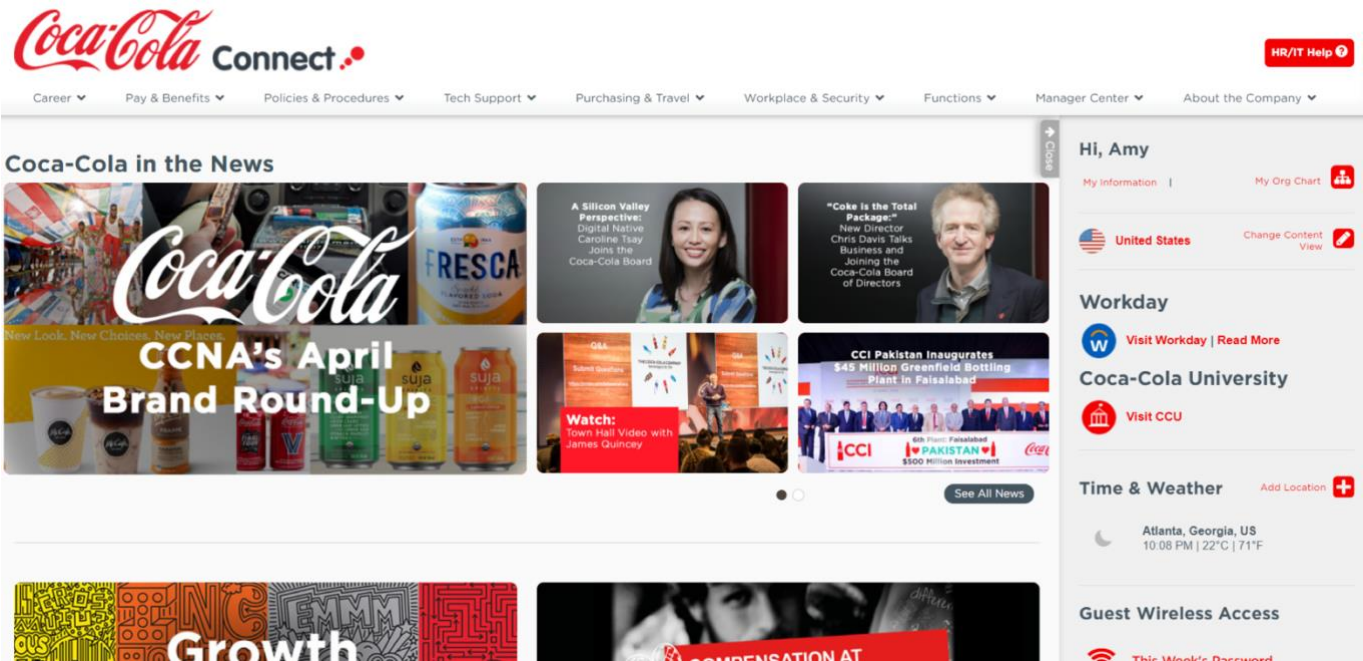
Coca-Cola's enterprise intranet home from the Digital Workplace & Intranet Global Forum conference (ATL)

*Genuine Parts Company (NAPA) enterprise intranet home from the
Digital Workplace & Intranet Global Forum conference (ATL)*
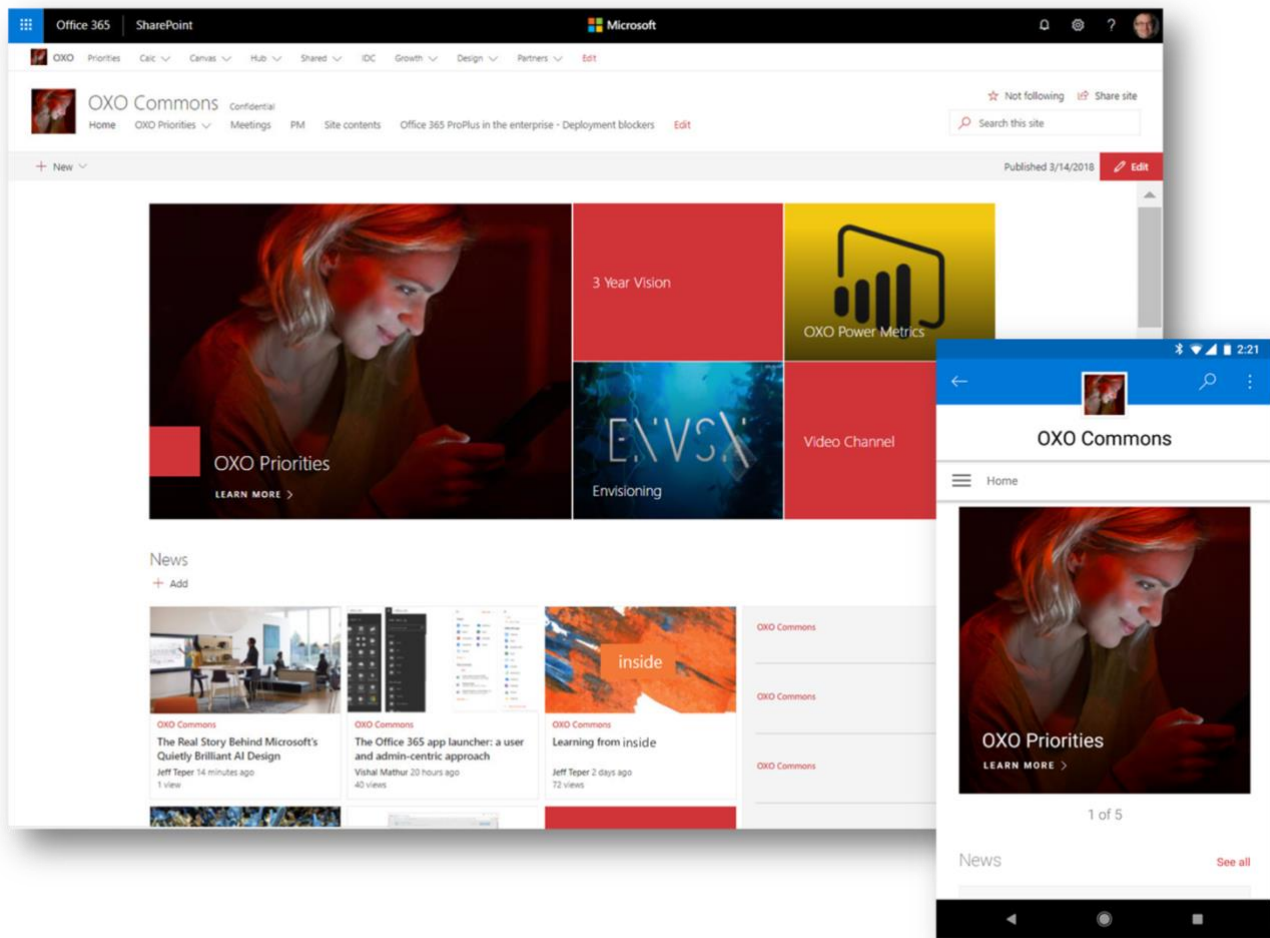
Microsoft's intranet (OXO) from the Digital Workplace & Intranet Global Forum conference (ATL)
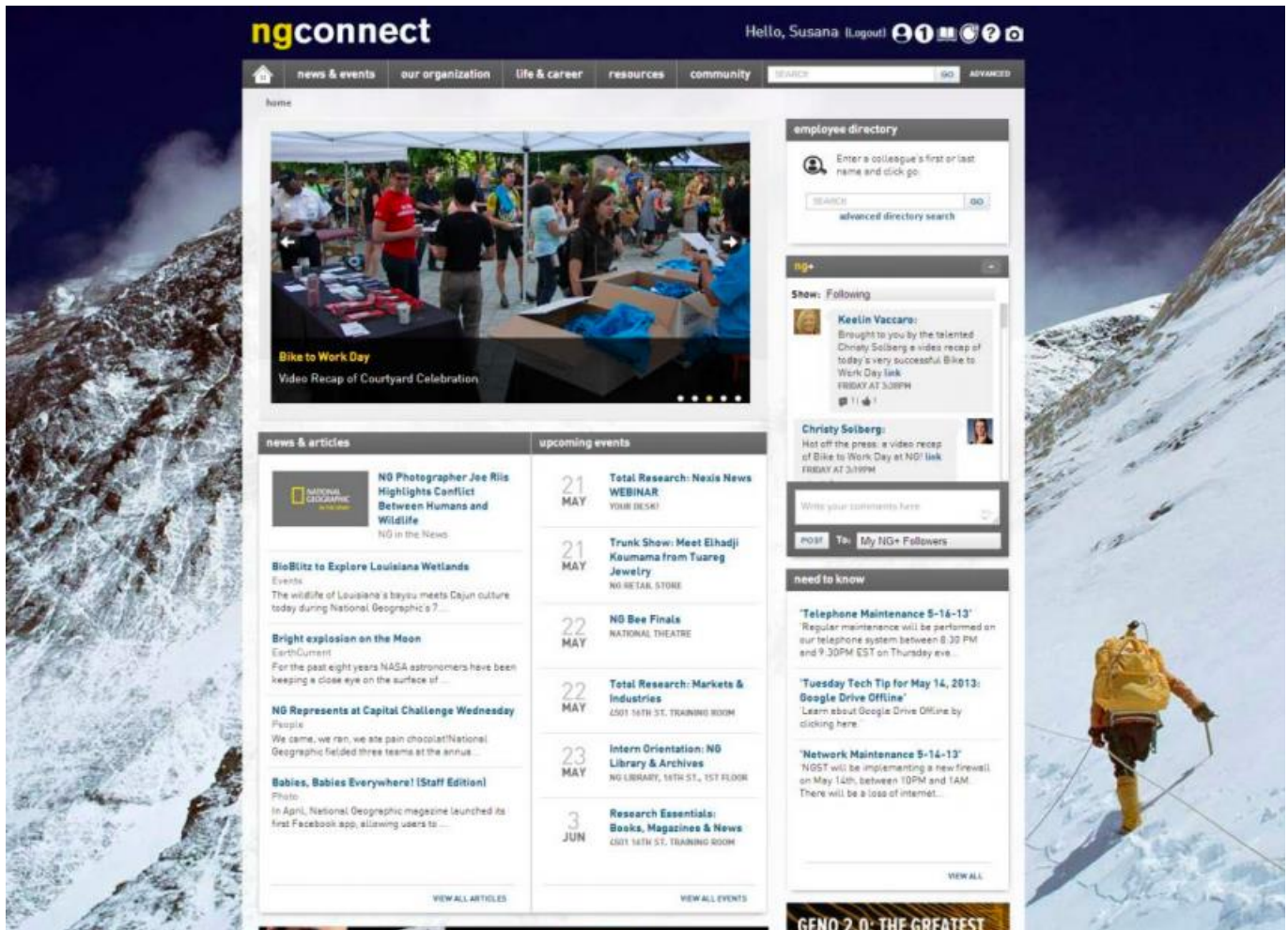
National Geographic's enterprise intranet home

Messer Construction's enterprise intranet home from the Digital Workplace & Intranet Global Forum conference
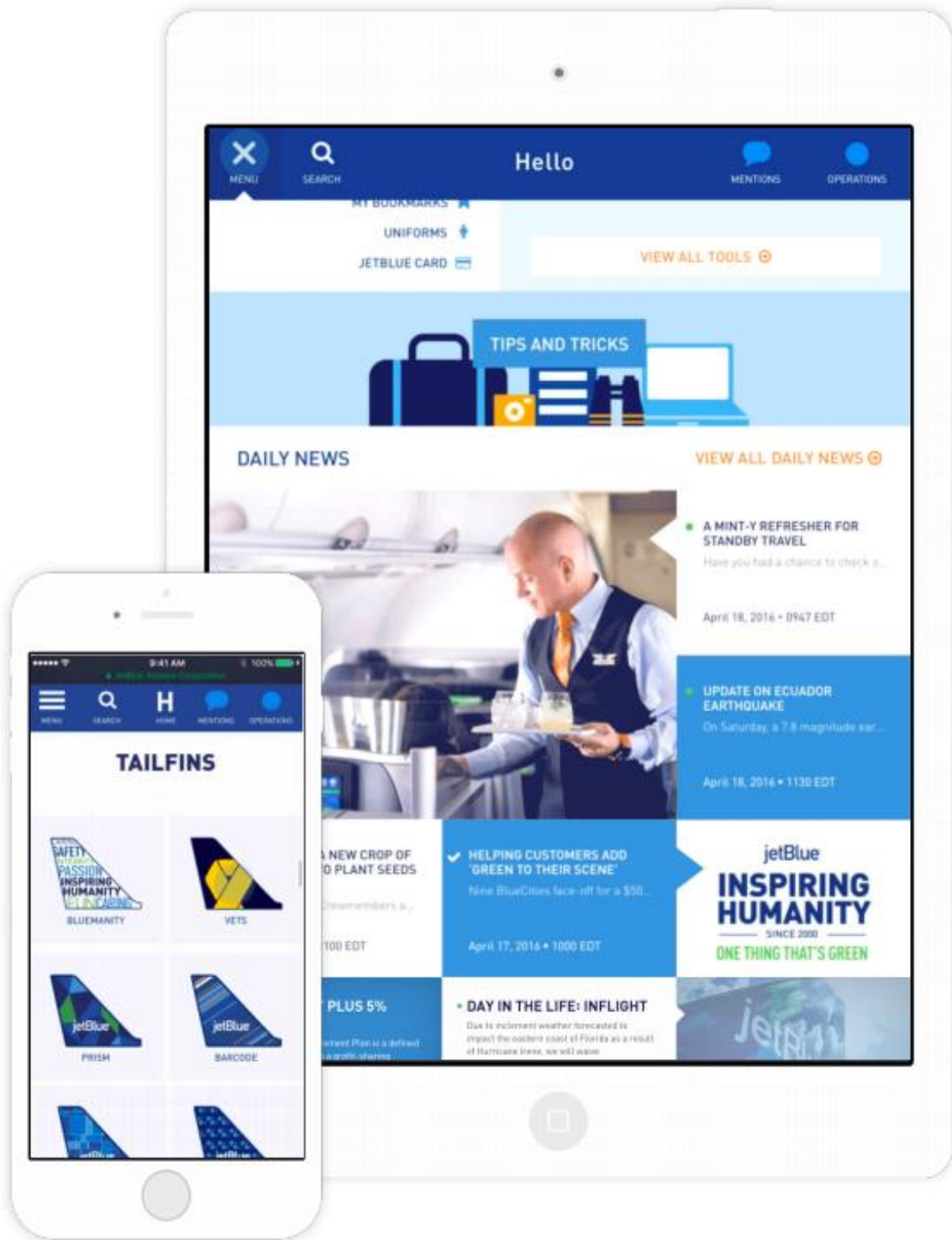
The mobile-friendly Jet Blue enterprise intranet

ABOUT PRESCIENT DIGITAL MEDIA

Listen. Understand. Deliver.

We are the original intranet consultants; The Intranet Experts.

Prescient Digital assesses, plans, designs and builds world-class intranets and enterprise solutions for Fortune 500 and big brand leaders. We are recognized experts in this space for more than 19 years working with over 300 organizations. We are technology agnostic, working with many technology platforms, but most of our clients run SharePoint and Office 365, for which we have particular expertise.

Headquartered in Toronto, with US offices in New York City, Prescient works for global corporations in various industries and sectors worldwide. Our core strength lies in understanding and balancing the digital needs of our clients' business models, with the goals and intents of the people who will ultimately use these digital solutions. We see the digital workplace as the primary means to manage your most important relationships with your employees, beginning with the hub or gateway, the intranet.

We treat each client as unique; we listen to their needs, goals and challenges; understand a client's requirements and potential; and deliver highly effective and innovative website and intranet plans, designs and solutions.

Some of our clients

Having worked on more intranets than any firm of our size, we are simply one of the best at planning, designing and delivering highly effective intranets and digital workplaces. We are the:

- First to develop an intranet specific methodology and service approach
- First to study and define a social intranet
- First to study and define intranet governance
- 15+ awards including a Webby Award

Why Prescient

- Prescient boasts a full roster of world class, Fortune 500 clients.
- We build success measures (key performance indicators) into every project.
- Prescient has an extensive list of global, expert speaking engagements with dozens of conference, seminar and webinar events every year.
- Our work has won more than 15 awards including a prestigious Webby Award.
- Prescient has the most published team of experts of any firm in its class with hundreds of published articles to date.

Expertise

Our leaders have rich, hands-on expertise and 25 years of experience. We know the industry inside out because we've been inside it as it evolved. We have worked alongside hundreds of customers, from Fortune 500 companies to small and medium sized businesses alike. Our leaders have held senior management positions at reputable companies and brought all their expertise and knowledge together in Prescient. We use proven methodologies, to deliver measurable results that are superior relative to other companies.

Focused on Each Client

No two clients are the same. All organizations have different cultures, structures, workflows, communication channels, resources, directions, objectives, and so on. Therefore, your intranet must be customized to your business, to meet all your unique needs. This is the reason why our in-depth consulting methodology (Listen. Understand. Deliver.) is so central to our work and focus on our clients.

We are the original intranet consultants; The Intranet Experts.

For more information, call us at 416.926.8800 or visit www.PrescientDigital.com