



# Intranet Design: Process + Planning

A Prescient Digital Media White Paper

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## Introduction

Intranet design - it is the first thing people think to change; the first thing people notice; the first thing people complain about; and it is the last thing that should be 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.

For any redesign, every intranet requires goals and plans on achieving and measuring them. By listening to your users and stakeholders 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 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 while reflecting 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 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.

## About the authors

This white paper was prepared by Prescient Digital Media's CEO and Founder, Toby Ward. His experience managing, planning and designing nearly 100 intranet projects, and his research and direction of numerous intranet studies serves as the source of the intelligence, analysis and recommendations found in this report.

Prescient Digital Media are consultants for hire and we help organizations build and design their intranet. We are a veteran web and intranet consulting firm with more than 12 years of rich history. We provide strategic Internet and intranet consulting, planning and communications services for many Fortune 500 and big brand clients, as well small and medium-size leaders. 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 intranet plans, designs and solutions.

For help with redesigning your intranet please [contact us](#) directly (416.926.8800 or visit [www.PrescientDigital.com](http://www.PrescientDigital.com)).

## Leading an intranet redesign

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 vote of those that count – particularly senior management.

It is possible to do a redesign without the support of senior management and eke out a minority victory, but your power and potential success will be severely limited without the support of those key taxpayers – the people that pony up the cash.

If your intranet isn't owned by a senior executive then you need a champion. However, 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 be able to make most people happy, most of the time; namely building a bridge between, and creating a tangible, practical marriage of both executive and end employee needs.

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.

According to Sir Alec Issigonis, "A camel is a horse designed by committee." 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 for 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 the 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 between employees, managers, suppliers, etc.

As with any critical business system, an intranet or portal must be delivering measurable performance and remain accountable to the investment. If the site's value is not being measured, then it risks failing the needs and demands of employees and management.

### Enlisting an executive champion

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

Determining which executive 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
- Business case with 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.

To learn more about developing an intranet business case, [download a free copy of our Finding ROI whitepaper](#) at [www.PrescientDigital.com](http://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 on 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 measures that are 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 Zapski, a former manager of several design teams at Yahoo: "You can't immediately tell why Yahoo is the best at anything."

Though an intranet is far from a website, there are some lessons to be learned, starting with strategy (planning).

## Methodology

Prescient's unique Intranet Project Methodology, developed over and during 12 years of planning, designing and working with nearly 200 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 employee 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 and implementing 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.



## Planning

Vision, mission, objectives, goals, strategies and tactics aren't just a collection of words dusted off at the beginning of every year or for the company or department plan. Strategic directives need to be understood if they are to be realized and goals 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 is tempting just to fall back and use site analytics and page view metrics. However, more and 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?

Why do you have an intranet? Does your answer(s) align with your 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 that 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 timely. How will you know if you are communicating successfully? Is it through use of the site? 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? How are you measuring your promotion efforts?

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 your users

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

Intranets have been initiated for a variety of reasons but at the end of the day it is the employee that determines 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 corporate objectives, and personal needs and preferences. Understanding corporate goals and getting a clear picture of current issues will enable you to develop questions that bridge the gap between where you are and where you want to be. 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. Also, 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 they want and need to access, the frequency they need to access content, and also the importance of specific content. This knowledge will provide the shape of your information architecture and layout of information (see Content Migration).

## 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 associated standards and guidelines to maintain consistency and cohesiveness. It is highly recommended that an editorial committee be struck to provide a point of contact for people involved in the site. 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 should ‘scale’ to support future requirements. Most companies started with simple intranets – internal websites with static HTML and FTP (file transfer protocol) – but now they 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; 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 home – 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. So if you want your site to be pretty, first make sure it is strategic – then it will be pretty successful.

## 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 performance.

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 appraising 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 manager to measure page views, unique visitors, average user session, etc.

A measurement plan should include regular analytics 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're server performance metrics 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 Media Intranet

The screenshot displays the Prescient Digital Media Intranet interface. At the top, there is a search bar and navigation tabs for About us, Admin & HR, Clients, Marketing and Sales, and Research. The main content area is divided into several sections:

- Home:** Features a video player with the Prescient logo and a play button.
- Discussions:** A section for sharing updates, adding documents, and posting polls. It includes a "What's Happening" sidebar with 2 members, 3 discussions, and 4 replies.
- Files:** A section for uploading and managing documents, including client deliverables, marketing/sales reports, and a recent activity log.
- Quick Links:** A list of links for personal use, including invoice schedule, Salesforce, Yammer, and conference line booking.
- Upcoming Events:** A calendar of events, including a 12-2pm Information Exchange, a 2-3pm Training - Sitecore webinar, and a 5pm-8pm Volunteer event.
- Sales:** A section for tracking sales performance, including a bar chart and a list of sales opportunities.
- Prescient Social Feeds:** A section for social media updates, including Facebook, Twitter, and Toby's blog.
- Poll:** A section for conducting polls, with a current poll about the new intranet feature.
- Toronto:** A section for local weather and events, including a 7-day forecast and a list of events.

The interface is clean and professional, with a blue and white color scheme. It provides a comprehensive overview of the company's internal communications and resources.

## 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.

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:

- Persona development
- Information Architecture
- Card sorting
- Wireframe development
- 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.

Intranet wireframes, or page layouts, are then created to show positioning of elements on the page. Usability testing can also be deployed at this stage to test the intuitive ratings of the 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.

The Creative Brief, is an essential set of instructions for directing the graphic designer that 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

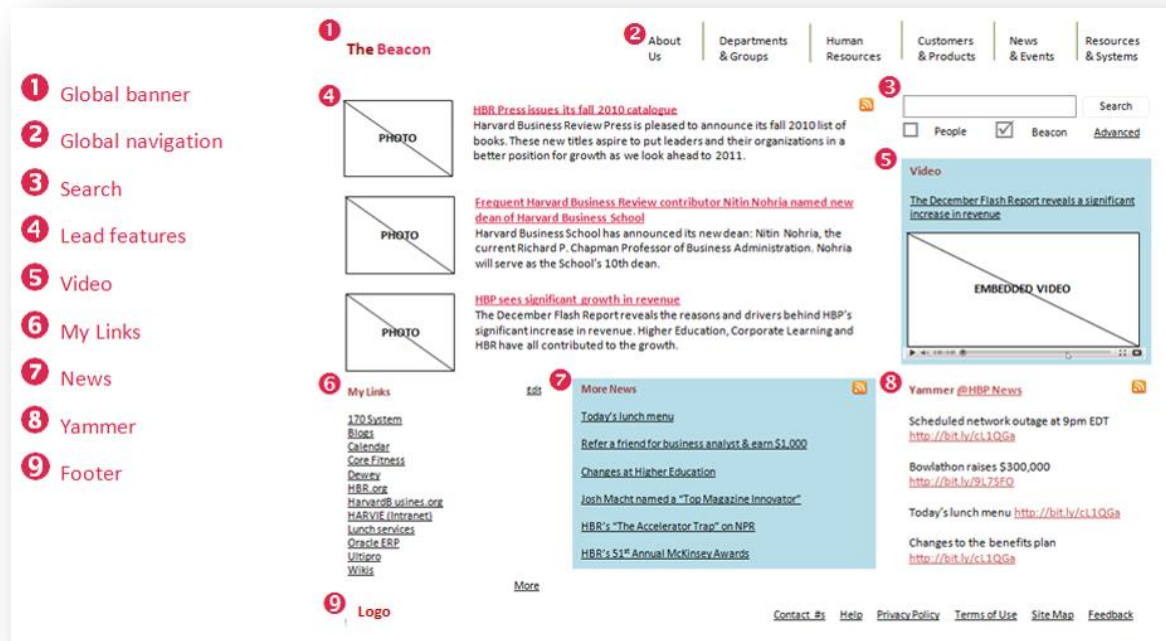
## Layout

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 vertical 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)

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
- Minimal banner (no more than 15-20% 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
- Content is supported by employee and corporate photos

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 overarching 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 page.

## Scrolling

The intranet should be used and browsed by everyone in the company regardless of source or device – from laptops, smart phones, kiosks and projectors. Make sure that your layout fits every 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, at dozens of leading, and medium size organizations in North America.

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 more information then a little information is a good option
- Most websites have scrolling home pages, and are very successful
- If a newspaper website can have a scrolling home page, then an intranet can have it

Firstly, an intranet is **not** a website! Let me state unequivocally that the assertion is absolutely correct, in North America. 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.



Although my research in Europe and other geographies is more limited, I would be shocked to learn that employees in France, Germany or New Zealand vastly differ in basic information and knowledge retrieval needs (separate of content and culture itself) compared to those in the United States (although my company, Prescient Digital Media, has a number of clients in France, and they steadfastly refuse to create a scrolling home page).

To this end, I admit my assertion may not be absolutely correct in other jurisdictions, and in all organizations. In fact, 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 on the home page. 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.

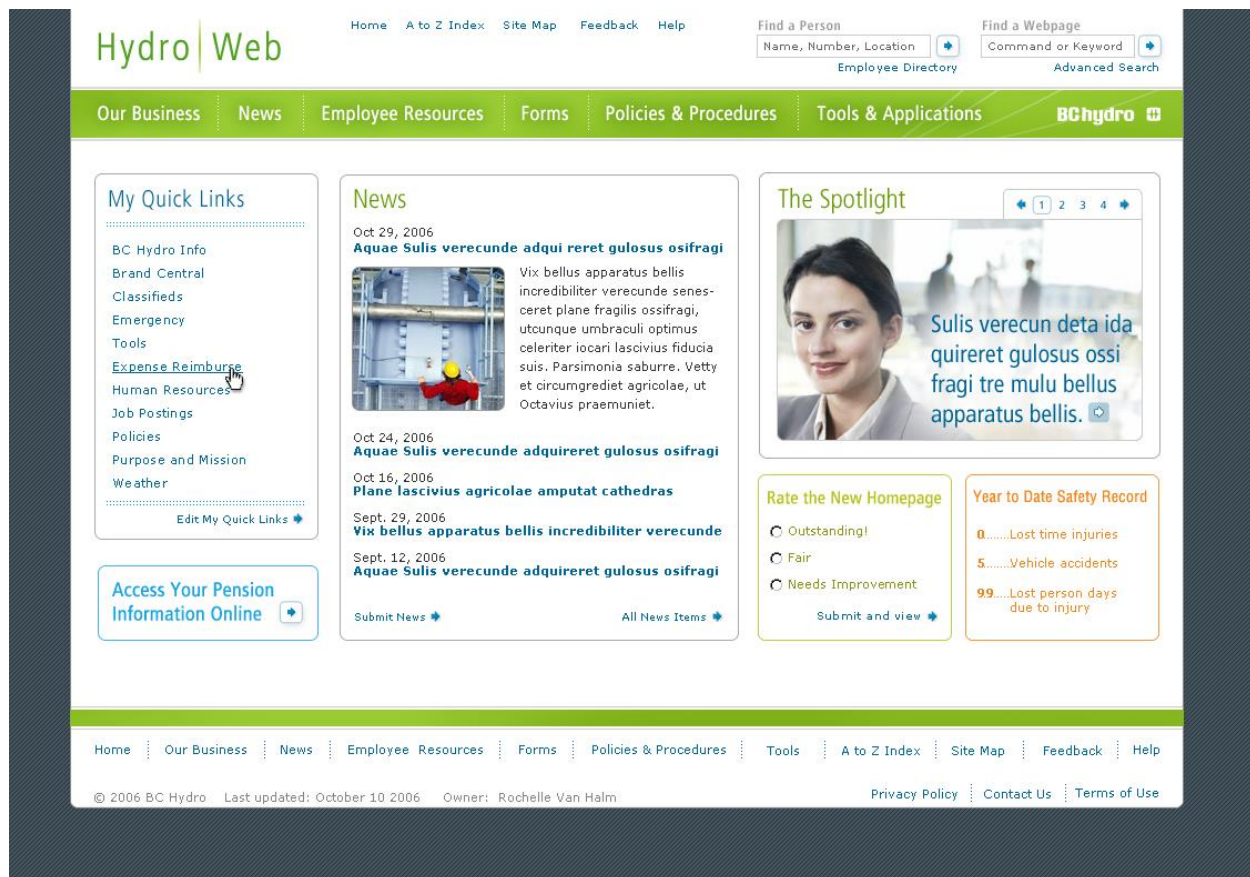
Prescient conducted employee focus groups, surveys & card sorting with three leading organizations in the U.S. in the same week, all with a combined total of close to 100,000 employees with employee intranet access. One over-arching topic was researched and tested with a predictable conclusion: employees expect a very simple, uncluttered home page with half as many links as most intranet home pages today. Additionally, and very specifically, employees do not want a 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 in IT and communications are often considered 'power intranet users' and do not mind a scrolling home page. But these employees typically comprise only 5% 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.

In fact, I myself do not mind scrolling on a home page – and my fellow employees at Prescient agree. Playing to this very rare preference, our intranet home page does scroll, three pages in all. But we are the exception to the rule, as are most power users (who typically represent less than 5% of the user population). In fact, I recently conducted an intranet user focus group comprised entirely of IT staff, eight employees in all, and their response to intranet home page scrolling was unanimous and definitive: no 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 use the home page for a glance, and the glance is incredibly important to understand: if you have information below the fold, it will be missed 98% of the time, or more often. 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, but believe they do not have time to scroll down.





*The highest scoring intranet design, tested with hundreds of intranet users over five 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

You probably know that web users – and intranet users alike – 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 Web designers have about 50 milliseconds to make a good impression," according to Dr. Gitte Lindgaard of Carleton 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 Web site 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 which combines the look and feel, the 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.

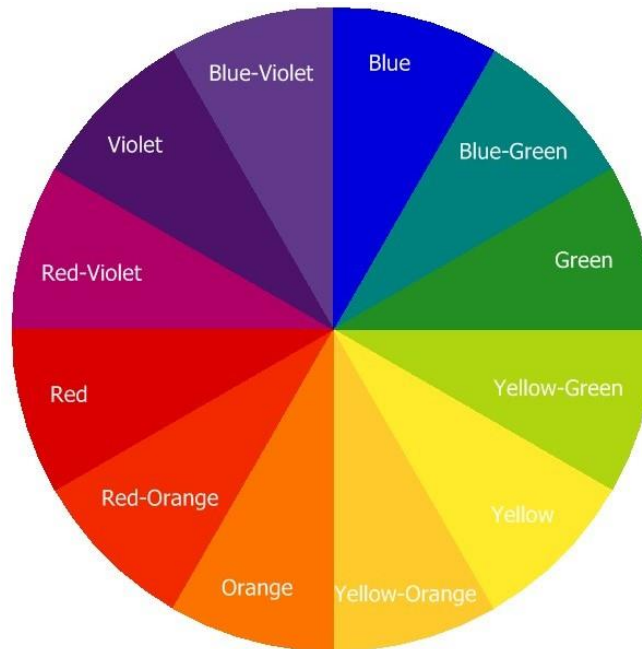
#### Color

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 websites and intranets base their color schemes on their branding. Usually three to four colors maximum with lighter shades – overly bold, contrasting color can dilute the overall impact and fail emphasize key page elements (and can lead to rainbow syndrome where the intranet can be perceived as unprofessional or childish).

## Basic Color Wheel

Color best practices:

- Use your brand colors.
- Use three or four main colors and then shades of those colors.
- Either use complimentary colors or contrasting colors.
- Be consistent.



## Fonts

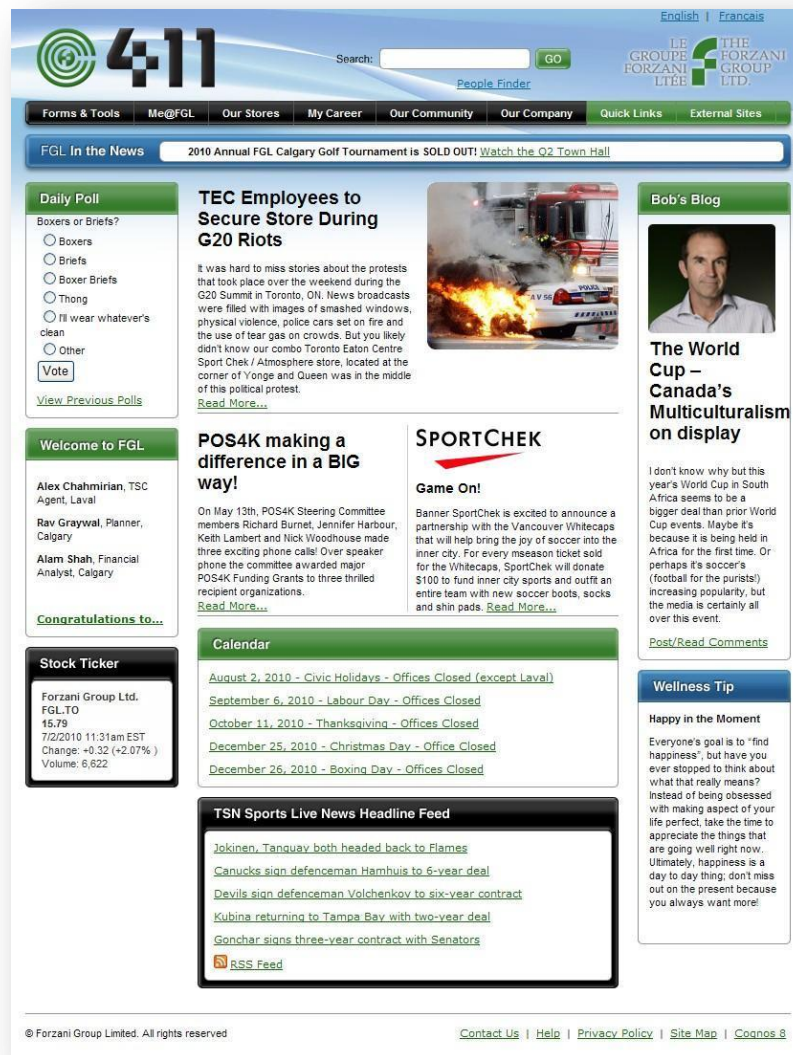
Typography enhances and extends the meaning of words. Fonts also can aid in readability and be part of your overall brand. “Good design is design that is readable”.

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 and 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 block and therefore 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 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 in headings.

*The Foranzi Group intranet takes a 'sporting approach' to its intranet design*



## Graphics

The saying "A picture is worth a thousand words" is true because visual elements aid in our understanding 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 have a comical/fun feeling. Animated clipart, so popular 10 years ago, can be distracting. Whatever you decide, you should be consistent – either use photos or clipart – avoid using both as they do give different look and feels to your site. And remember copyrights apply: purchase photo and art licenses, or use royalty free images.

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 best practice for accessibility.
- Photos should lead the eye into 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 & perspective; they should be head & 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.

### Flash

If you are using Flash animation be conscious of the download times – no one wants to wait while something takes forever to load. Use Flash to convey and add emphasis to messages – don't use it just because you know how to or because you think it's cool – always think of your user and audience first.

### 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 aid in luring and holding 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:

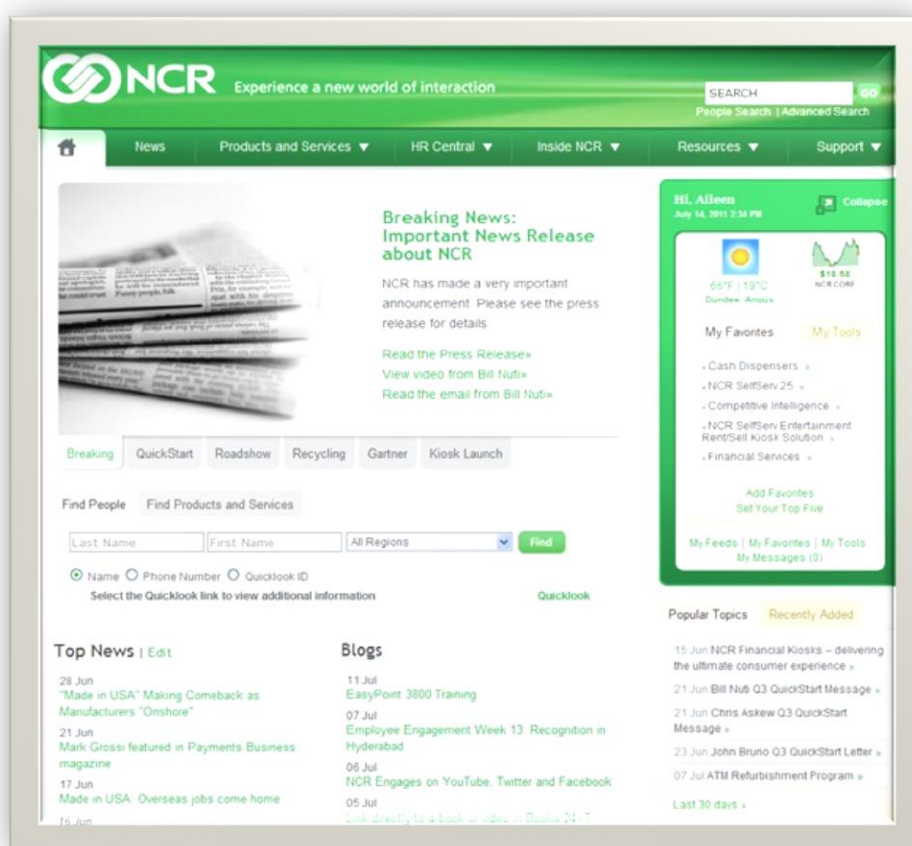
- Today, most users have a screen resolution higher than 1024x768 pixels
- 90% of readers have a screen resolution greater than 1024x768
- The most common display resolution is 1366x768

### Printable version

In traditional page layout (for print) the general rule for design is that if you place a \$5 dollar bill on the page any way (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.

### Be consistent

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 in a position 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 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 70% of their content. Yes, 70%. Others have eliminated up to 90% of the 'old' content and migrated only a few dozen or few hundred pages to the new intranet. Run those savings through the ROI calculator for your redesign business case!

A content audit aids the intranet manager, and associated team, 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, 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.





## Key Lessons

Intranets require a lot of work, and an intranet redesign is more than just 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 experienced 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 whim.
- Speed kills on roads; lack of speed kills on the intranet.
- Follow a design process that includes thorough input by management & employees, but 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 clip art (individual photos, team photos, event photos).
- Design with the majority 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

A team of more than 40 IBM consultants have undertaken a massive redesign of IBM's web properties in 2011: 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:

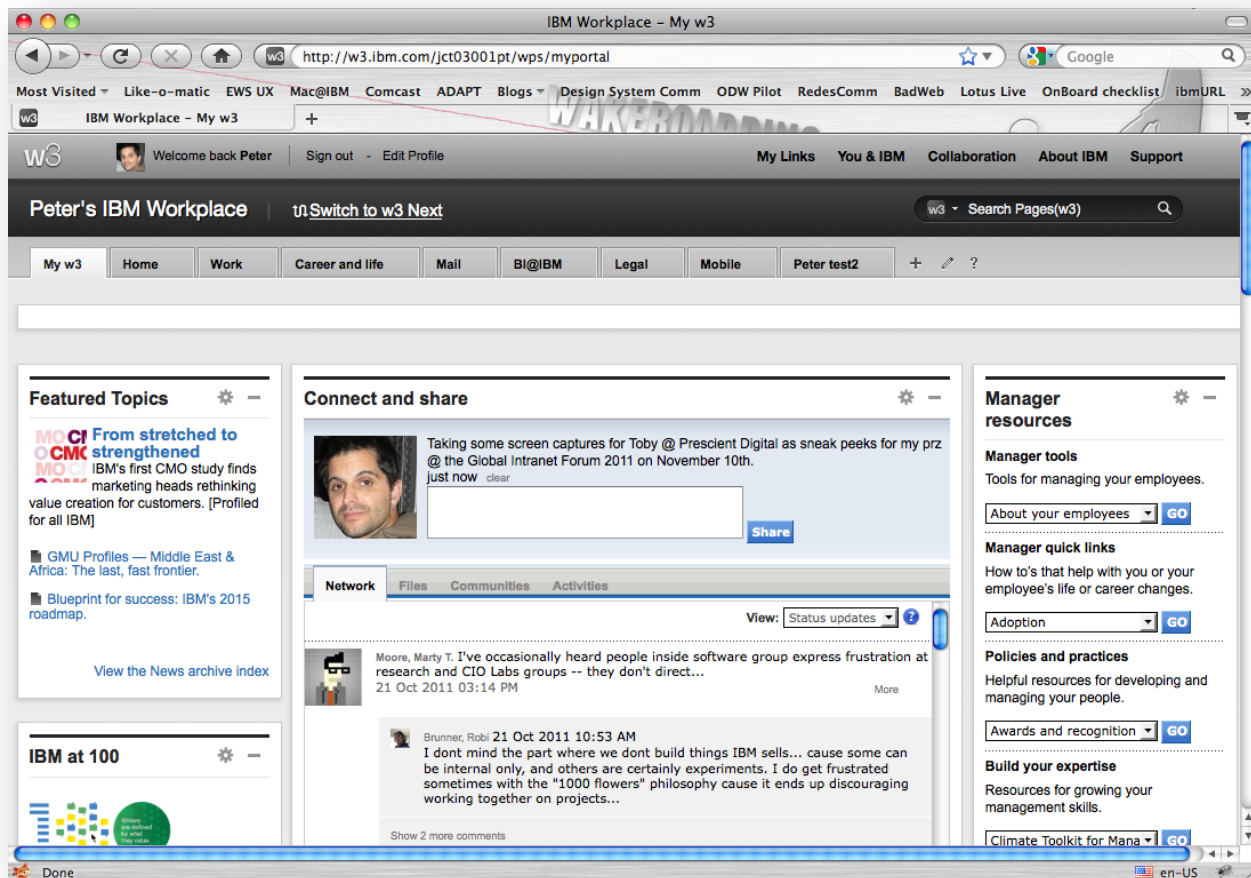
- Redesign w3 and ibm.com so that they clearly communicate IBM and IBMers at their best
- Design a new digital experience for IBM.com that looks, sounds, thinks, and performs like IBM
- Introduce IBM experts, innovators, collaborators across the web, both internally and externally (.com and external 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 4 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 new IBM intranet home page, W3, takes an 'Apple' approach to its color palette*

"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!"

Among the many benefits of such a massive redesign revolution:

- Reduced time and effort needed for maintenance and design improvements via:
- Driving design elements through the 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.)

- Enablement of further evolution of the site in support of the Digital Strategy
- 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

IBM has developed a 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.*

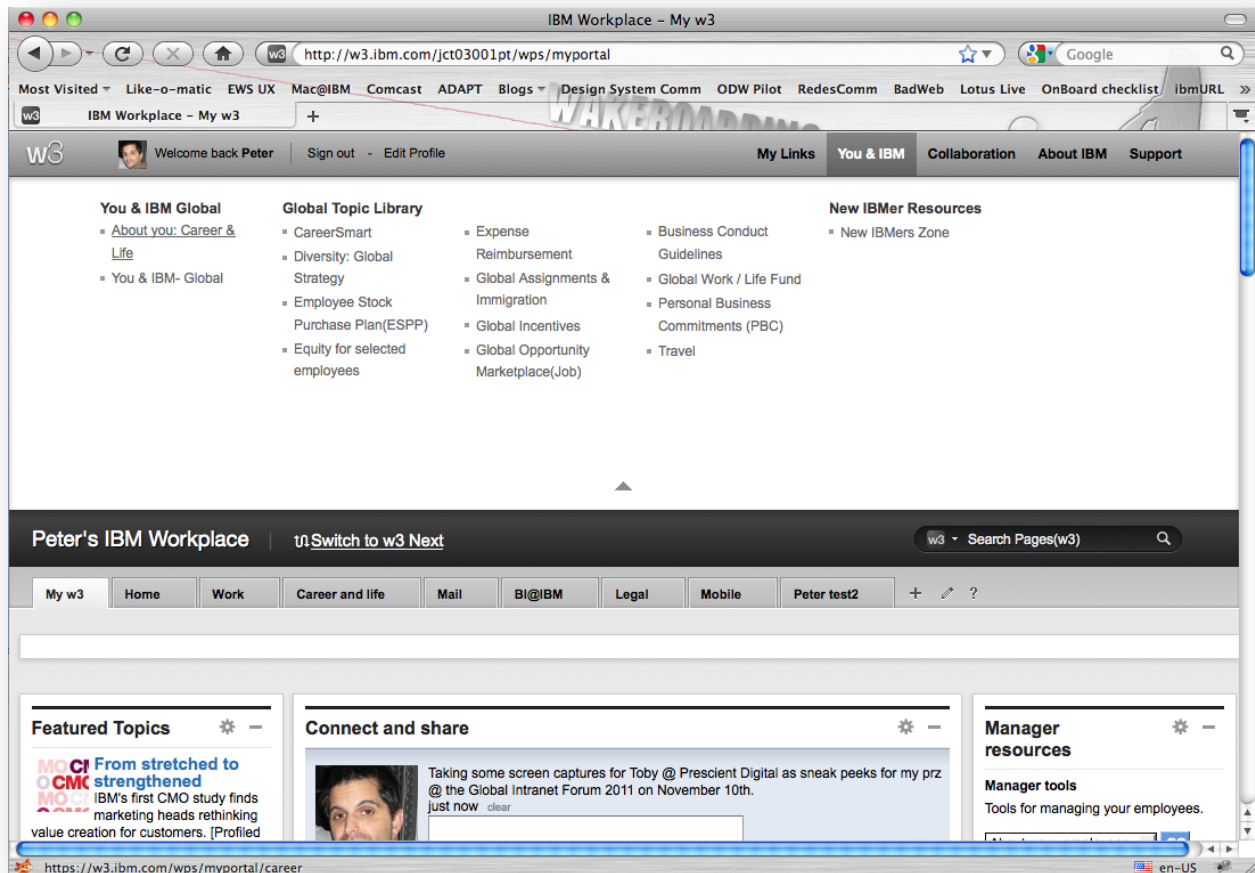
*In the future, w3 will cease to be a separate destination for IBMers. Instead, it will seamlessly integrate into IBM.com and the Web, serving as the frame through which they relate to their colleagues, the enterprise, their clients and partners. It will inspire and enable each of them to be a steward and standard-bearer of the IBM brand.*

This service will exist as a series of permissioned information modes, customized to perform a variety of functions:

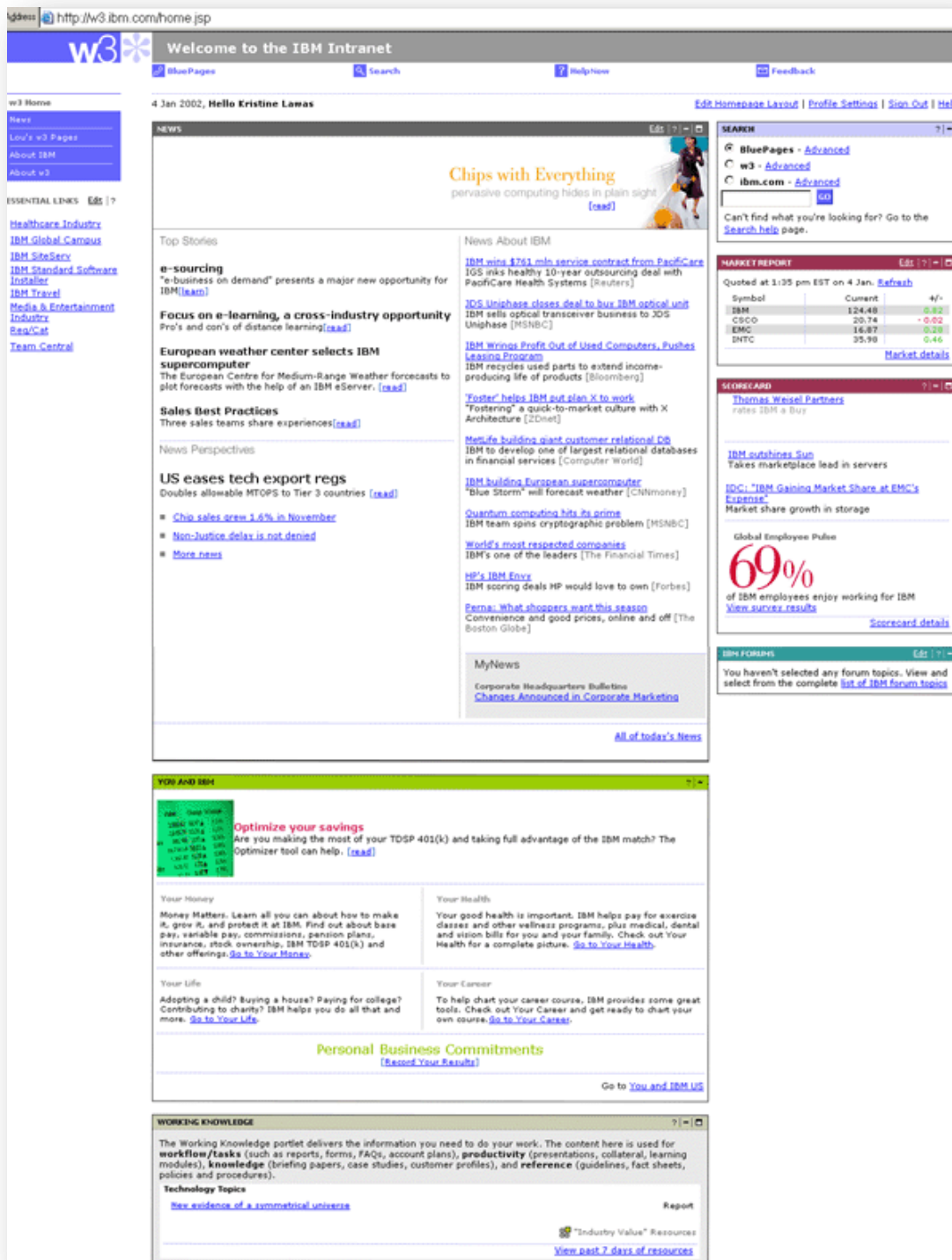
- As a private space (Individual) for IBMers to be served, supported and advised by IBM
- As a forum for dialogue (Enterprise), collaboration and learning with IBM
- As an inviting workspace (Partner) for the communities of practice both inside and outside of the company
- As a clearinghouse (Global)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



Whatever the name or label, it's clear that the intranet is evolving, and IBM is one of the leaders of the evolutionary revolution; a technology neutral revolution that is above and beyond the advent of social media, personalization, and the latest and greatest technology.



*The new IBM intranet home page, featuring the drop down mega menus (this one shows the sub-category navigation links for the "You & IBM" parent category for the main intranet home page, W3)*



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



## About Prescient Digital Media

### Listen. Understand. Deliver.

Prescient Digital Media is a veteran web and intranet consulting firm with more than 12 years of rich history. We provide strategic Internet and intranet consulting, planning and communications services to many Fortune 500 and big brand clients, as well small and medium-size leaders. 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.

Prescient was founded in 2001 by Toby Ward with the premise that the corporate website and intranet have business value, and should be planned and executed accordingly. Internet and intranet business consulting was and remains our focus today. First and foremost, we are business management consultants that have a superb knowledge of the technology, but we are technology neutral.

### Prescient plans and builds highly effective websites and intranets that...

- Are demonstrably better than the competition.
- Secure stakeholder engagement and support management objectives.
- Deliver measurable value by increasing business results and employee productivity.

### Prescient's web and intranet experience is wide-ranging and includes, for example:

- Planning, launching and managing all aspects of a consumer portal with more than 55 million hits per year;
- Transforming an existing intranet (SMB) into a high-powered business system with a two-year ROI of 700% (\$1.5 million); and
- Transforming an enterprise's intranet and website into highly functional, user-friendly portals that prior to a redesign scored benchmarked ratings of 4 out of 10, and now score better than 8 out of 10, with many accolades from management and customers alike.

### Prescient's focus includes the assessment, planning, technology selection, content and launch of intranets, websites, and web-based tools for:

- Health and life sciences
- Financial services
- Energy
- Government
- Manufacturing and High-Tech

### Prescient services for intranet, Internet and e-Health include:

- Analysis (evaluation, business requirements, user research, benchmarking)
- Planning (strategic planning, functional specifications, information architecture)
- Technology (platform and application evaluation, selection, and implementation)
- Implementation (design, integration, content, tools)
- Adoption (communications, content management, operation, marketing, SEO)

Some of our clients include:

Prescient Digital Media has had the privilege to work with approximately 200 clients including: AMEX, CBC, Dow Chemical, Gartner, Fidelity, HSBC, Harvard, Liberty Mutual, Manulife, MasterCard, Nintendo, Pepsi, PNC Bank, Ralph Lauren, Royal Bank, and others. See our complete client list.

### Why should you hire Prescient?

- Prescient boasts a full roster of satisfied, world class, Fortune 500 clients.
- We are the only known technology consulting firm that promises to build success measures (critical success indicators) into each and every project.
- Prescient owns no software or hardware; we are technology neutral. We find the best technology for our clients based on their business requirements.
- Prescient has an impressive and extensive list of global, expert speaking engagements with dozens of conference, seminar and webinar events every year.
- Prescient has the most published team of experts of any firm in its class with hundreds of published articles to date.
- Our work has won more than a dozen awards including a prestigious Webby Award.

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