



Realize the Value of Your Intranet or Extranet

Corporate Extranets and Intranets have come a long way. From early beginnings as file sharing depots and online phone directories, today these sites support critical business transactions from enabling web-based supply-change management to improving office workflow processes. Although the extranet and intranet differ in function, their goals usually align--that is to provide for secure communication and collaboration, and to offer a more efficient content management solution.

An intranet serves employees and an extranet, a more recent phenomenon, offers organizations a way to extend the Intranet experience to external business relationships such as partners, members, analysts, franchisees, sponsors, investors, resellers etc. The benefits of these sites are potentially huge as they increase the speed and efficiency with which employees or partners connect. Tangible results of extranets include increasing sales and extending business channels. The value of an intranet is not always apparent and as such sometime taken for granted, however, its benefits to an organization can be immeasurable in terms of improving operational efficiencies, enabling information distribution to employees across locations, and enhancing productivity.

So, why hasn't every organization jumped on the Intranet/Extranet bandwagon? After all, unlike corporate website and e-commerce site which struggle to attract visitors, corporate intranets and extranets have captured target audiences that aren't going anywhere. As the popular idiom goes, "You can lead a horse to water but you can't make it drink".

The reality is, while some global corporations have sunk in millions of dollars and hired teams to manage model sites, many intranets and extranets languish because they provide inadequate value to their users. Without employee and partner enthusiasm, these sites are likely to turn into the "white elephant in the corporation" no one wants to acknowledge. From inefficient content management resulting in too little, too much, outdated or disorganized content to overall system failure, intranet and extranet sites fail for many reasons.

On the other hand, some companies have found that setting up a private site need not cost millions or require extensive technical support. Frontbridge Technologies, for example, opted with ReadyPortal, an ASP web solutions platform from Red Dog Software, and built five partner extranets and a corporate intranet as a tiered, interdependent multi-site system. With an ASP offering, Frontbridge bypassed complex and time-consuming development and site management processes. To easily create multiple sites, Frontbridge leveraged ReadyPortal's inheritance application which allows for deployment of pre-populated sub-sites with minimal effort, while offering maximum control.

“Our sites have been very well received by our partner community. With ReadyPortal, our web and marketing teams can work together effectively to respond to their needs immediately. That’s the real story here--technology should work for the user and not the other way around,” explained Penelope Delgadillo, partner marketing manager at FrontBridge.

The bottom line is intranets and extranets are all about cultivating and growing relationships, thus only sites that can respond to this dynamic environment will thrive. Following are 10 steps to ensuring the success of your project:

1. **Manage Your Content** → Plan, organize and categorize your content to avoid clutter.
2. **Own Your Content** → Someone needs to own the content. The best individuals or departments for this job are the ones originating the content to ensure the information is fresh, accurate and relevant.
3. **Take Control** → With multiple contributors and sites, things can get out of control. To avoid anarchy, a lead administrator needs to oversee the sites and its content. Consider a content management solution that allows multiple editors and authors to add and modify content directly within a flexible workflow and classification system.
4. **Keep it Flexible** → Businesses, as with technology, have life cycles, your sites are no different. Frontbridge cites ReadyPortal’s centralized administrative tool as a major component of its winning strategy. Site managers create new pages and sub-sites to meet ongoing business demands. Furthermore, the ability to add or delete features to each page gives administrators control over the functionality of each page.
5. **Start Small and Grow** → As your intranet and extranet following grows, your system should have the ability to scale from one to an unlimited number of sub-site to serve niche interests. The advantages of using a comprehensive web platform system are consistency of branding across sites, better control of content, and management of multiple sites at one time.
6. **Build on a Solid Foundation** → Choose a robust web platform that also offers an intuitive user interface and site navigation system.
7. **Is it Interesting?** → We are creatures of habit, most of us will want to work a certain way and may refuse to change regardless of how inefficient it may. You can help eliminate user ennui by making your sites more engaging. For example, publish a monthly newsletter, add a quick poll or discussion board, let employees or partners to contribute articles, and introduce chat sessions with key management.

8. One is Not Enough → You may wish to start with one, but eventually separate, quasi-independent sites may be necessary to manage multiple audiences requirements.
9. Is it Secure? → Administrators need to manage permission settings at every level, so individuals, groups or departments can only obtain access rights to content and pages that match their responsibilities and roles.
10. Effective Search Technology → Would you visit a site again if you can't find what you're looking for? Search features are fundamental for a positive user experience. ReadyPortal, for example, offers Site search, Feature search and Search all applications to support the user.

About Red Dog Software

Red Dog Software was founded in 2003 by the original ReadyPortal development team members to serve existing ReadyPortal customers. Now in its fourth version, ReadyPortal is a leading web platform provider for Fortune 500 companies, trade associations, and non-profits. Customers include Procter & Gamble, Xyleme, and the U.S. State Department. Headquartered in Denver, Colo., Red Dog Software sells and implements customized web site, portal and extranet platforms based on its ReadyPortal proprietary framework. Red Dog Software also offers a full line of services including training, installation, technical support, custom software development and consulting. For more information, contact Rajiv Chatterjee, Executive Vice President of Business Development at 650-575-7586 or go to www.reddogsoftware.com.