

IMPROVING INTRANET USAGE: UX DESIGN METHODOLOGY

WHITE PAPER BY BELINDA REICH
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Illustration credit: Ragan Staff

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this white paper is to explain how user experience design (UX design) can be deployed for effective functioning intranet systems. The paper is primarily aimed at communication departments within medium to large companies who need to improve participation and usability of their intranet systems for better employee and business outcomes.

INTRODUCTION

Intranet participation and usage within companies have not always delivered on their promise. Many times, the intranet is assigned to a communications department with little or no design expertise. Engaging user experience (UX) design methodology will place a proven framework into the design and implementation of an intranet system.

To begin, this white paper will define an intranet and its purpose. Next, considering issues of participation and usage of intranets by employees. This is followed by delving into UX design and the methodology's process. The white paper ends on how the methodology will improve intranet systems, and the business benefits of a user-centered approach.

INTRANET

A corporate intranet is a private network available only to employees for the purpose of communicating internally. The uses of an intranet are as simple or as complex as a company's needs or budget. The following are some reasons a company might deploy an intranet system:

- Easily share information
- Knowledge management
- Improve collaboration and feedback
- Create engaging content
- Build a transparent culture

(Thillainayagam, 2018).

The purpose of the content can be further broken down into:

- Content (e.g. policy documents)
- Communication (e.g. corporate news)
- Activity (e.g. expense form)
- Collaboration (e.g. project wiki)
- Culture (e.g. noon-hour jogging club)

(Robertson, n.d).

A communications team within a company is usually tasked with creating or uploading the required information. This is done via methods such as:

- Web publishing
- Blog posts
- Email
- Chat
- Wikis
- Social

(Intranet).

INTRANET PARTICIPATION

While all large companies operate an intranet system, there are issues of employee participation. Some of the reasons an intranet system is not regularly utilized include:

- Employees don't know it's there (and they don't know or understand its value)
- Information is outdated
- Poor search and navigation
- Lack of executive ownership
- Generic or poor training
- Lack of timeline for launches and updates

(Catapult Systems).

WHAT IS UX?

Many of the participation problems can be address by designing intranets with a user-centered design approach. In the design of interactive websites, and mobile and tablet apps, the methodology used to create systems with a human-centered approach is called user experience design, commonly known as UX design.

UX design is a process that encompasses an array of disciplines, including:

- Interaction Design
- Information Architecture
- Visual Design
- Usability
- Human-Computer Interaction

(Lanoue, 2015).

The entire UX design process addresses:

- Branding
- Design
- Usability
- Function

(UX Design).

KEY STAGES IN THE UX DESIGN PROCESS

SCOPE AND RESEARCH

During this stage of the process, the scope of the project is defined, and research is carried out. Using a strategy blueprint (**Figure 1**) can help keep the project focused and concise (Vizard, 2017). To understand who the audience is user analysis research is conducted. Building personas helps with planning navigation and content research.

IDEATE AND TEST

Once a user's needs have been defined in the Scope and Research stage, it is time to generate ideas and put them to the test. Information Architecture (IA), site maps, sketches, wireframes, and prototypes are developed during

this time in the UX design process. Formal or informal testing of the ideas on users are helpful at this stage, too. Choosing what content to supply and methods to navigate it is established (Vizard, 2017).

BUILD, LAUNCH, MEASURE

During the build stage a communications team creates or identifies digital assets. This could be PDF documents, video, images, graphics. The design intent developed during the first two stages must be reflected upon while building as it is the roadmap used to keep the project concise.

Once the plan is live and being used by employees via the intranet system, the final process is to measure usage of the content. Look for metrics that measure participation or engagement, or any number of business goal set out in the scope and research phase (Vizard, 2017).

Strategy Blueprint



Figure 1 Illustration from Kalbach, Jim. *Strategy Blueprint. Experiencing Information. October 12, 2015.* experiencinginformation.com/2015/10/12/strategy-blueprint/

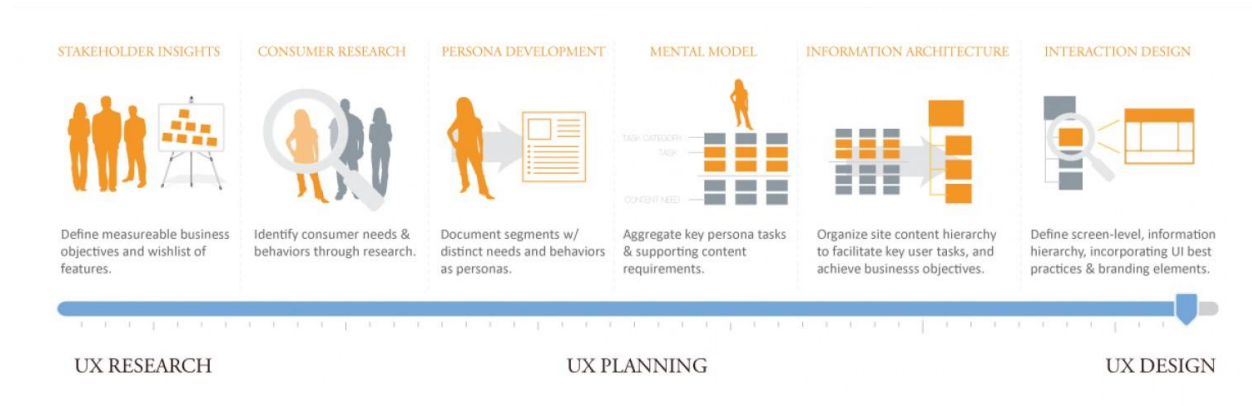
IMPROVING THE INTRANET EXPERIENCE WITH UX

The goal of UX design is to make digital interactions easier for people. To give people what they need, when they need it, in a pleasurable, seamless environment.

Internal communications systems such as an intranet are essential in communicating a variety of information and fulfilling business objectives. Implementing UX design methodologies before an intranet plan or redesign is embarked upon helps mitigate problems of participation. It also allows in the planning stages to work out the business and communication priorities and keep them at the centre of the design.

THE UX DESIGN PROCESS

User Experience Design is a process of understanding the needs of a business, and intuitively addressing the needs of the consumers of that business, through an application's information architecture and interaction design.



EMPATHYLAB

Figure 2 Illustration from Lupo, Jonathan. "The UX Design Process." *Visually*. May 24, 2018. visual.ly/community/infographic/technology/ux-design-process

CONCLUSION

From increased worker productivity to the management of a company's knowledge, a well designed and operated intranet system is essential to meeting operational and business goals. Evidence shows that potential value lies in "enhanced communications, knowledge sharing, and collaboration within and across enterprises." (Bughin, Chui, Dobbs, Manyika, Sands, Sarrazin, Westergren, 2012).

Utilizing UX design methodology is a proven method to increase ease of use in digital interactive environments. Formulaic designed intranets that make wild assumptions about its users and what they need is not a smart way to make strategic decisions. Understanding complexity and how to integrate that into planning is the smart way.

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