The Intranet Is Dead? Long Live the Intranet!

by Nancy Gimbol, Director of Marketing
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Consider what would happen if you woke one morning to find that your firm's intranet had disappeared. Chaos would ensue, right? Unfortunately, our firm's intranet had been on life support for so long, that when we finally pulled the plug and it flatlined — for an entire year — no one noticed. Really.

We discovered that no one used the intranet because the content was old and inaccurate; the content was out of date because the platform was antiquated, which made updates difficult. Our employees gradually devised other methods to gather information, which meant an increase in the number of requests to the administrative team for certain forms, documents or other very basic needs.

This kind of inefficiency had to stop. But in order to revive the intranet, we knew we needed to start over completely. We needed it to be user-friendly, from both the front and back ends, and we knew we would have to involve our entire administrative team, including members from administration, human resources, library, operations, marketing, accounting and technology.

DEMONSTRATING NEED

In any organization, easily communicating what's necessary can be a daunting task. No matter the information — policies and procedures, how-to documents, blogs, photo galleries of the latest firm outing, etc. — life is easier when you are able to offer one repository for all firm-specific information. Enter the intranet, a centralized repository where firm employees can keep current on all things firm-related.

For us, the first order of business was to convince our attorneys that this investment was worthwhile. After all, we had already gone a year without it, right?

In order to demonstrate our need for the system, we asked each administrative function to come up with a wish list of items they would like to see offered on a firm intranet. We combined these departmental lists to make one master list, which included nearly 100 items. Next, we identified the items that would benefit the attorneys most (helping us to make our sale) and we plucked these 20 items out and used them in our sales pitch to the attorneys.

Once our needs assessment was complete, we evaluated each item individually to determine whether it should be included and how it might fit into the structure of the intranet. We slowly and methodically developed a structural outline in order to figure out how much information we had, as well as the most appropriate way to display this information. Right before our eyes, we were rebuilding the intranet.

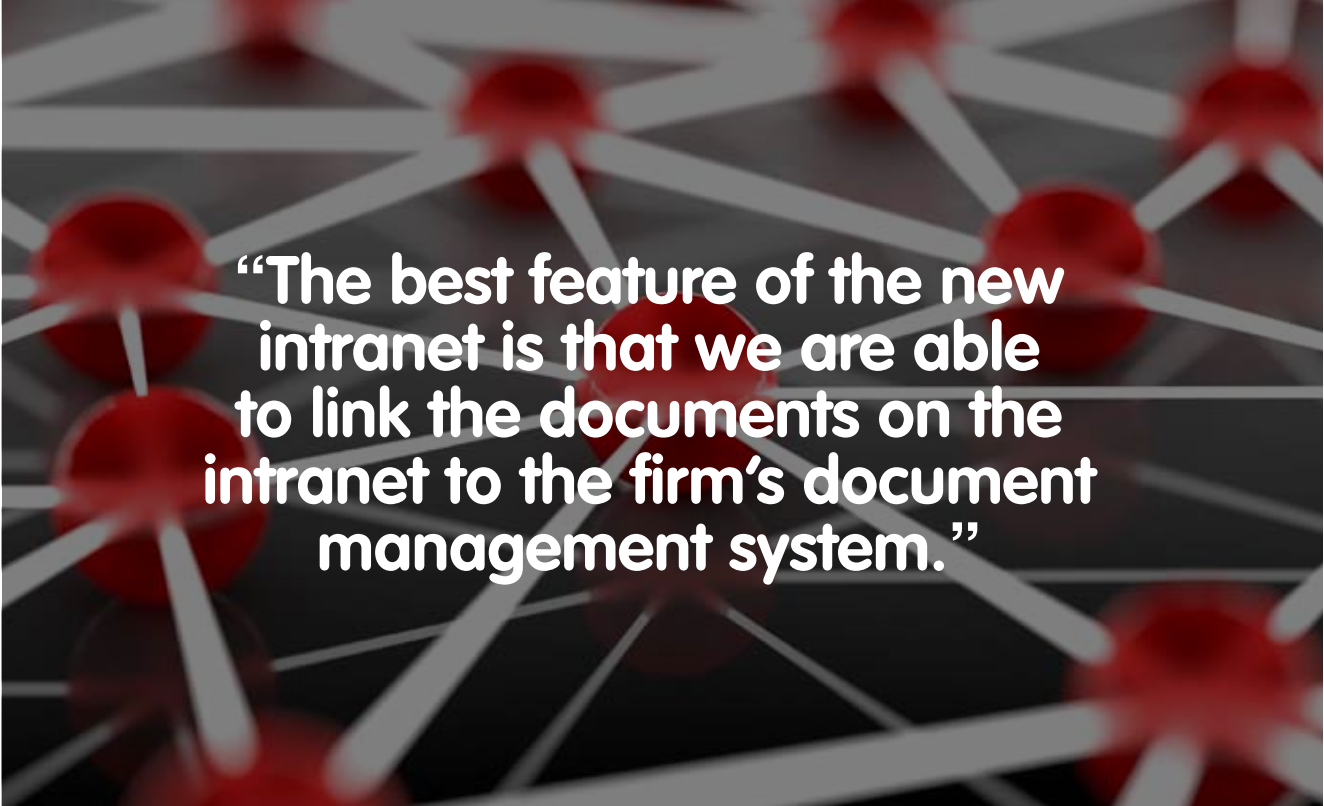## "This would become our one-stop, go-to resource for all firm-related information."

EXPLORING THE OPTIONS

Once we determined what we would include on the intranet, we needed to identify software options to help us execute the project, so we asked our peers for recommendations. With that information, we developed a short list of potential vendors with the necessary experience. In the end, we chose a system that fell within our budget and offered the largest number of bells and whistles from our wish list.

The technology department was able to customize the software to meet our firm's particular needs and wishes. Although the software we chose did not give us every feature we wanted, we did come close! Along the way, some sacrifices were made and we made changes to the structure according to the capabilities of the software.

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TAKING OWNERSHIP

To be successful, this project required ongoing commitment, primarily from technology and marketing, but also from every member of the administrative team.

This meant that the technology department had to commit the time and resources to working on the back end while the marketing department had to commit the time and resources necessary to assist technology and to gather additional content and material from other administrative team members.

Our technology department set the structure so that each administrative department is able to update their portion of the site. Not only does this encourage buy-in from all the departments, but it also spreads the responsibility for updates, so that the burden does not fall exclusively on any one department. Additionally, it encourages each administrative function to take ownership of their section of the intranet. It persuades them to constantly build on and refresh the data that already exists in a timely manner.

Each function within the administrative team was able to contribute content for posting. Before we knew it, content was going up: check request forms, publication circulation lists, benefits information, attorney headshots, instructions on how to use different technology software, and more.

EXECUTION AND LAUNCH

Once we had a respectable beta site up and running, we invited the administrative team, who had dreamed up this intranet, to preview it. Collectively, they provided instrumental feedback that we used to make additional changes. Within two months, we felt we had a site strong enough to go live.

In order to generate excitement within the firm for the launch of the intranet, administration hosted a competition to name the new site. At our firm, any competition goes over well. A small panel of judges reviewed the 15 submissions and determined the winner, who received significant acclaim.

The day before we launched the intranet, we hosted a lunch-and-learn to showcase the new capabilities. We also circulated an email announcement, communicating what employees would find on the new intranet. It was important for us to highlight that this would become our one-stop, go-to resource for all firm-related information.

On launch day, we sent users a welcome email to alert them that they now had access to the intranet, along with a link to the new site. In order to increase visibility, we strategically made each user's home page the intranet.

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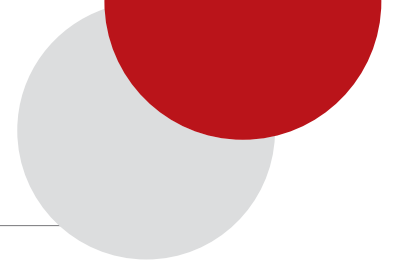
FEATURES AND BENEFITS

The new intranet includes some incredible and innovative features including:

- **A firm directory that lists employee contact information, which is easily sorted according to specific fields and is automatically updated as employees come and go**

- **A photo gallery of all our conference room spaces and their features, so users see how a room can be set up, as well as a reservation link**

- **A photo gallery of recent firm events**

- **A centralized firm calendar**

- **Access to medical, retirement, disability and other HR-related forms**

- **Direct access to the firm's Twitter account**

- **Training manuals and tutorials**

- **Blogs for marketing and technology**

- **Technology projects for the upcoming year**

- **Training course offerings, including a listing of the classes a user previously attended alongside the ability to enroll in new ones**

In our estimation, the best feature of the new intranet is that we are able to link the documents on the intranet to the firm's document management system. This allows administrative users to make changes just once, in the main document, and those changes are reflected throughout the intranet.

Prior to launching our new intranet, the administrative team was inundated with requests from staff and attorneys to find and send certain forms or documents. Additionally, they didn't like how difficult it was to find this information in a timely manner. Since the launch, we have noticed a decrease in the number of these types of requests. Now, users are finding the information they need faster and more efficiently because everything is centrally located, better organized and easier to find.

In addition to the user's perspective, additional administrative benefits include:

- **Placing certain documents on the intranet has reduced the amount of email attachments being sent, which helps minimize the bloating of a user's mailbox size.**

- **The administrative team can easily populate the site.**

- **There's a decrease in back-and-forth email communication; instead, the administrative team responds with a link to the requested information on the intranet.**

- **Content sharing between users has increased.**

A RESOURCE THAT LIVES ON

Our team has come a long way since we first conceived of a new intranet. Although we are still educating users about our intranet's many uses and benefits, it has become a tool that demonstrates value every day as it evolves over time to adapt to the needs of our firm. **ILTA**

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