How to Build an Intranet That Boosts Productivity

Liferay

Table of Contents

Introduction

Enterprises are facing seismic shifts in the way work is being done. Combat these changes by empowering your workforce to be engaged and productive, no matter where they are, with modern digital workplace solutions.

In this e-book, we'll cover:

- The role modern intranets can play in a digital workplace strategy
- Questions to make your intranet a tool employees want to use
- Guidelines to make the interview process more effective
- Five case studies of intranets that boosted productivity for their companies

What is a Digital Workplace?

A digital workplace is the digital transformation of work processes and systems, driven by the need to improve employee engagement to reduce turnover and maintain a competitive workforce. It's a larger strategy that ties together workspaces, apps, processes, and culture for an integrative employee-first digital solution.

Portal platforms, collaboration suites, and intranet point solutions have evolved to better meet the needs of the digital workplace, but a full solution generally requires an integrated set of systems to truly meet the needs of a modern workforce.

Many organizations may have digital tools in place; however, these tools are outdated, disjointed, and have not been built with an underlying digital workplace strategy in mind.

A Modern Intranet
for the Digital Workplace

Although many organizations may already have an intranet or a digital employee tool in place, many of these do not provide the intuitive experiences needed to support a modern and remote workforce. Corporate leaders must evaluate their current solutions to assess what steps are needed in order to provide employees with a tool that can lift productivity and modernize today's workplace.

Let's start by assessing what an effective modern intranet should look like.
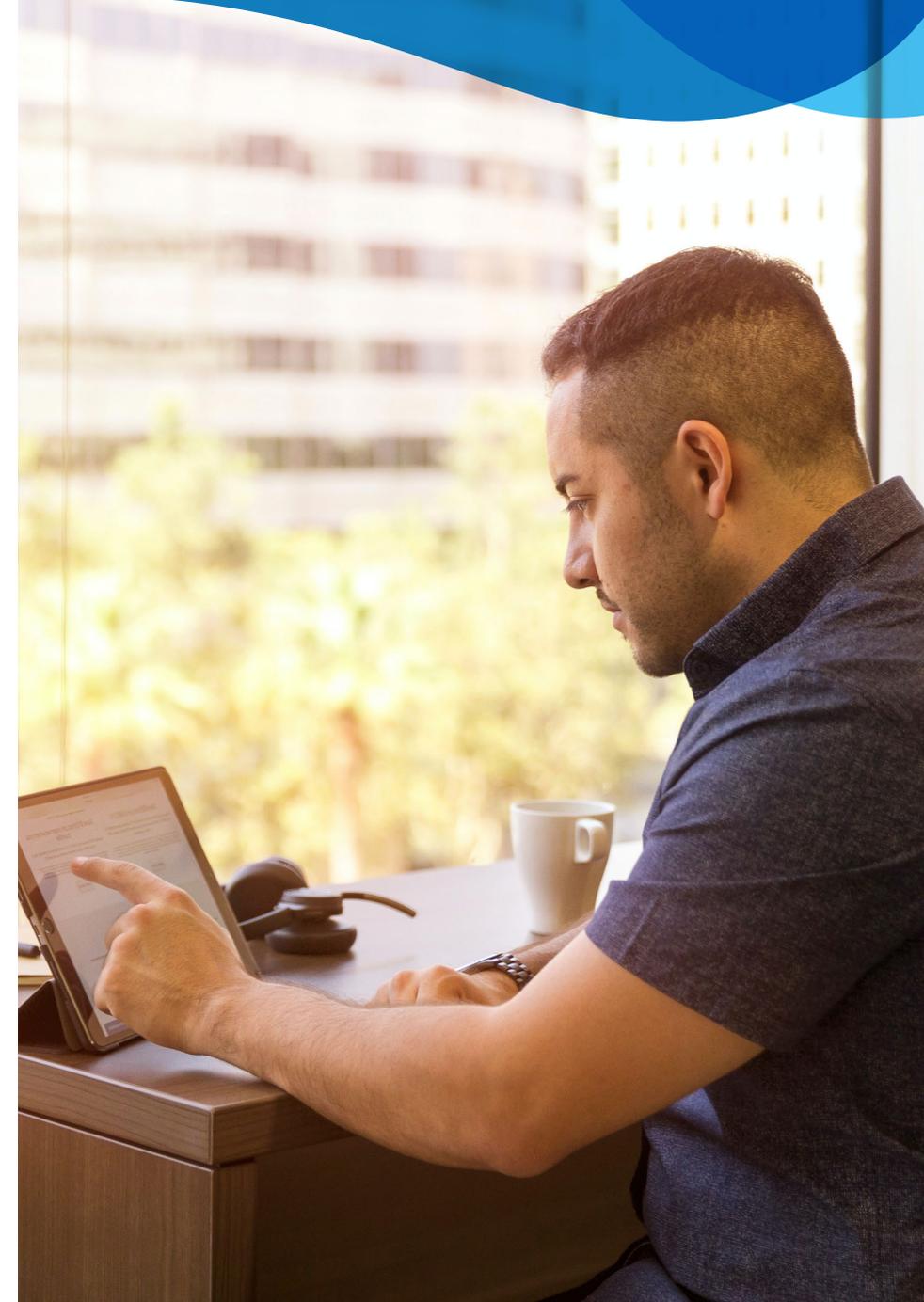
An Effective Intranet Starts With Intentional Design

Healthy intranets are an incredible asset for enterprises. A well-designed intranet can boost productivity, streamline field employee communication, optimize business operations, and ultimately improve customer experiences.

The key to an effective modern intranet is intentional design based on in-depth user research. A vanilla, out-of-the-box tool that isn't tuned to your team's unique needs can end up slowing down your employees. In-depth research allows you to focus on the most valuable features for your users.

Every company works differently. The questions in this guide will help you build an intranet that satisfies *your* employees' needs, boosting productivity from day one.

What is User Research?

User research is the study of how real people use a product. Feedback techniques like interviews and testing can help you plan an informed design.

User research allows you to identify challenges upfront. On average, programmers abandon up to 15% of IT projects due to a lack of adequate research. If the project isn't abandoned, they then spend at least 50% of their time redoing work. Interviewing users early on ensures that you're creating something people will want to use.

For your intranet, the goal of user research is to **discover who your users are** and **how they get their work done.** In this e-book, we'll focus on questions you can ask to uncover pain points and priorities for each user. Armed with this information, you will be able to target real, specific obstacles to productivity from the beginning.

Project leaders should allow plenty of time for in-person interviews with users. The following guidelines will help users feel comfortable and open to sharing honestly about the obstacles in their daily tasks.
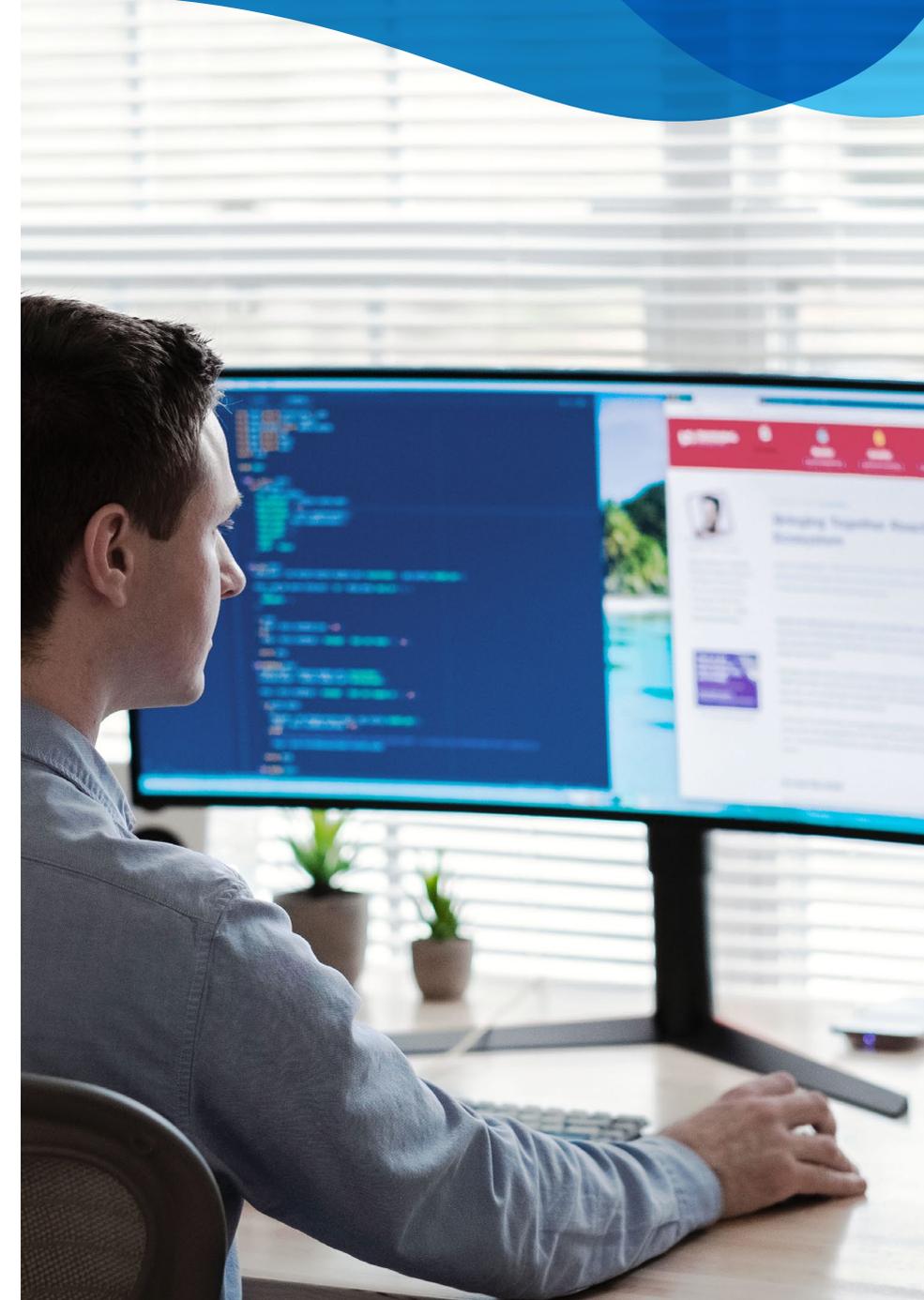
Guidelines for Interviewing Users

- Get people talking with open-ended questions.
- Prioritize one-on-one sessions to help people feel comfortable.
- Ask people to show you their processes so you can see issues first-hand.
- Ask for specific stories and situations to understand context.
- Focus on broad features when figuring out your user's needs, and save custom solutions for later phases.

General Audience: Who are your users?

Clarify who your users are and the basic requirements of their jobs.

1 Tell me a little background on your job.

2 What department are you in? What is your role there?

3 What traditional (analog) tools do you use to get work done?

4 What digital tools or devices do you use to get work done?

5 Where do any of your tools fall short? What doesn't it do that you need it to do?

COACH INC.

kate spade | COACH | STUART WEITZMAN

COACH CASE STUDY

Digitally Empowering Employees

Fashion-retailer Coach discovered this exact experience with its employees, so the company designed its intranet to be mobile-enabled for those who don't spend their day at a desk. Some of the most important communications the company sends out relate to merchandising or store promotions, and it's vital that these get through to employees that run their storefronts. A mobile-friendly intranet ensures that there is no delay in the information, and that employees get what they need to keep their stores running.

GENERAL AUDIENCE SCENARIO

I am a retail store manager that is in charge of merchandising and store operations. While we have a store computer that we can use to visit the intranet and see company news, I usually don't have time to check it during a busy work day. If the information is timely, such as a new promotion or an update to the merchandising guidelines, I won't get the information for a few days. I need a way to be notified the moment there is relevant news, without having to interrupt my work day.

Liferay

Daily Routine: What are your users' common tasks?

Uncover the daily goals and tasks that can be streamlined.

1 What are the most enjoyable parts of your job?

2 Describe a typical workday. What do you do when you first get into the office? What do you do next?

3 Walk me through how you do one of these first tasks.

4 How long does this task typically take?

5 Where would you start?

6 What would you do next?

7 What activities take up most of your time?

8 What activities are most important to your success?

CNC centre national
du cinéma et de
l'image animée

Designing More Efficient Search

Most intranets don't have good search features, even if they have large repositories of content. CNC, France's national center for cinematography and animation, recognized this and added a fast, advanced search engine so that employees could instantly find the content they needed. It was one of many improvements to their aging intranet, and a critical one due to the wide variety of its document base.

Try counting the hours your employees spend hunting down documents without search — it adds up quickly. Reclaiming these wasted hours is an easy way to improve productivity with your intranet.

DAILY ROUTINE SCENARIO

The first thing I do every day is open up our document library and pull up the reports I need. The only way to find the right reports is to click through page by page, which takes a while since we have hundreds of reports in each category. It usually takes about 30 minutes to open every report in a new window, and from there I start the rest of my tasks.

Specific Roles: What do your users have to do?

Identify pain points specific to certain roles within the company.

1 What are you responsible for in your job?

2 How do you define success in your job?

3 What associations or networks do you belong to?

4 What skills are you required to do for your job?

5 How do you get information related to your role in the company?

Domino's

Empowering Independent Administrators

Many organizations have a small group of users that need to change their intranet pages without the help of IT. Domino's manages who can make changes to department sites with detailed user roles. Many of these administrators wouldn't call themselves tech people, but the content management system allows them to get work done without learning new digital skills. This improves productivity as well as relationships, because each department feels empowered to do its job well.

SPECIFIC ROLES SCENARIO

I'm the main site administrator for my department, and I have to add news and other content to our intranet page a few times a week. The only way to post the information is to send IT a document with my content, and wait until they have time to add it to the site. Sometimes the information is urgent, and it reflects poorly on me when I fail to notify everyone in time.

Liferay

Relationships:
Who do your users need to work with?

Learn how your users collaborate and communicate with one another.

1 Besides customers, who else do you interact with while doing your work?

3 How often do you collaborate with others? How do you collaborate?

2 Who do you report to? Who reports to you?

4 Out of the things you do during a typical day...

Are there any company-mandated tasks?

What processes have you developed on your own?

Have you learned to do your work better from peers?

Unifying Worldwide Communication

Having a virtual collaboration tool in your intranet removes the pain of coordinating global meetings. An international technology company decided to add collaboration features so its dozens of regions could contribute on their own time.

The collaboration tool allows innovation managers to develop, discuss and evaluate ideas that lead to new projects. After the company launched the tool, its team of innovators was able to have a new idea eligible for patent protection, shortening the project process to only two months.

RELATIONSHIPS SCENARIO

I am an innovation manager for a global company and need to communicate with other managers in different time zones every day. Trying to organize a phone call or online meeting with everyone is impossible. If someone isn't able to attend we wait for their feedback, which slows down new projects. The managers who know each other are good at emailing updates, but I need a way to include everyone, especially new employees.

Unique Pain Points:
What specific problems do your users have?

Uncover challenges unique to your organization that can be solved with customized solutions.

1   How is your workspace organized to help you accomplish your tasks and goals?

2   Show me how you use your workspace to accomplish your tasks and goals.

3   What are the most difficult/challenging/ annoying/frustrating aspects of your job?

4   After a typical work day, what (if anything) is still on your mind as it pertains to work? What issues keep you up at night?

5   What kinds of people do well in your position? Why?

6   Walk me through a process you have to do, and how it may or may not have changed while you've worked here.

7   If we came back in 10 years to have this conversation again, what would be different?

8   If you could build your ideal work experience, what would it be like?
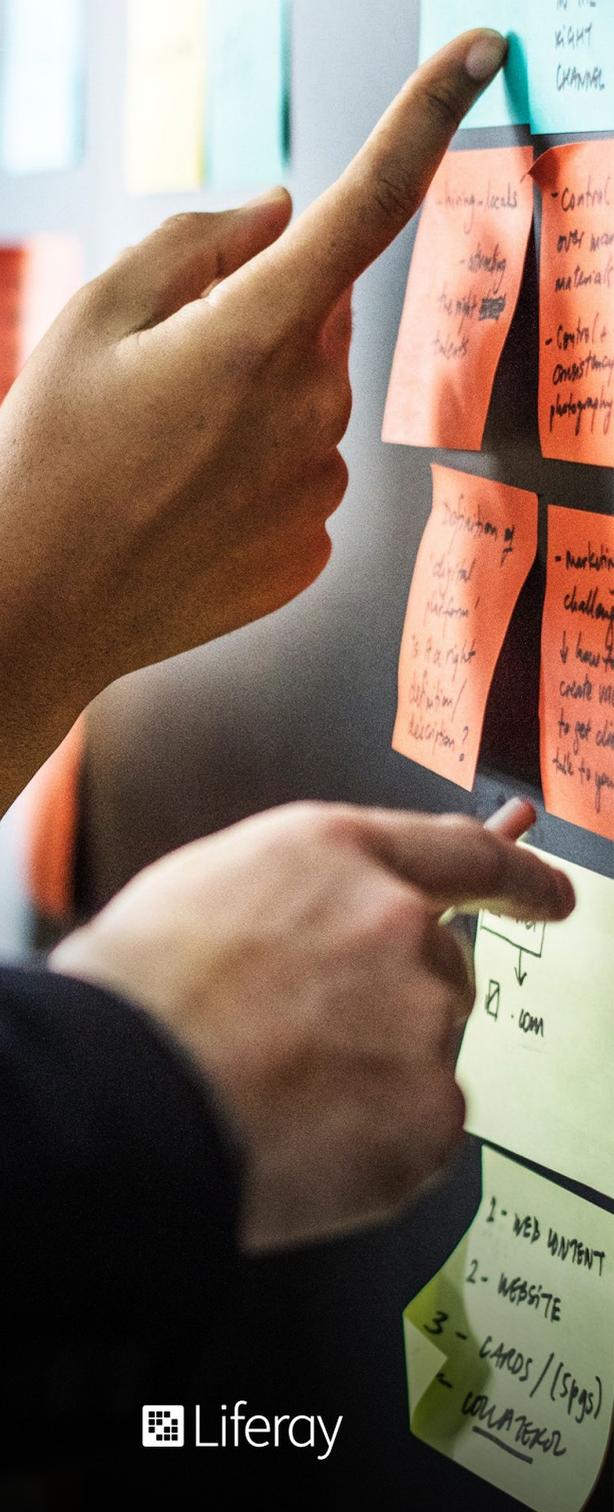
Surfacing Tacit Knowledge

The employees at IMRB International struggled to make their knowledge management system work the way the needed it to. One of the weaknesses of most knowledge management tools is that they only capture final products. For instance, you might have a company-wide document library of sales-approved PowerPoint decks, but does it allow you to view the edits and discussions that poured into each one?

To preserve this tacit knowledge and collaboration process for employees, IMRB International built an intranet that allowed employees to search through the stored ideas, thoughts and research inputs for each of its documents. This made both explicit and tacit knowledge visible to everyone, making it possible to reference these collaboration processes from past projects and resulting in less time lost searching for information.

UNIQUE PAIN POINTS SCENARIO

As a project manager, one of my main tasks is to gather requirements for new projects from any stakeholders. People often reference positive or negative features from previous projects, but the only way to dig up the thought process behind these features is to interview anyone who was involved in the design of that project and hope they remember the details. It's frustrating to know that I'm wasting time repeating discussions instead of working on the new project. I need a way to record the thoughts and ideas in each project, to use as a quick reference in the future.

Wrap Up

Give your users a chance to talk about anything the questions didn't address.

1   Did we miss anything?

2   Is there anything else you want to tell us?

3   Is there anything you want to ask us?

Conclusion

As companies conduct user research, they may find that users from different teams or roles have very different needs. Plan for future phases to refine the user experience, rather than attempting an all-in-one, big bang approach. These insights will provide the foundation needed to create a truly user-focused solution that will help employees, whether they enter a physical office or work from their homes, to be engaged and productive.

Moving Forward

For organizations that already have a intranet solution in place, use this guide to determine the tool's maturity. See if you'll need to make improvements or if your tool is already an effective employee-first digital workplace solution. Get the guide here.

Liferay Digital Experience Platform helps you create modern intranets that connect people and systems through a modern interface focused on getting work done. Learn how at liferay.com/solutions/intranets.

Liferay

Liferay makes software that helps companies create digital experiences on web, mobile and connected devices. Our platform is open source, which makes it more reliable, innovative and secure. We try to leave a positive mark on the world through business and technology. Hundreds of organizations in financial services, healthcare, government, insurance, retail, manufacturing and multiple other industries use Liferay. Visit us at liferay.com.