

# Open Source: Intranets in the Enterprise

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Intranets can be hard to define, depending on who you ask. What is an intranet? What role does it play? What should it contain? Who uses it? Is it conducive to their day to day role?

At best, we find organisations describe their intranet akin to an old comfy armchair. Around longer than most employees, yet with nobody able to nail the value it adds. In addition, organisations lack the ability to accurately measure how many people use it, or for how long. With little for employees to get really excited about, they are built using dated technology, leaving people to wade through the treacle that can sometimes be a large organisations myriad of information, documents and guidance.

Then there are the worst case scenarios. Complicated installations that have over-engineered themselves into the 'no fly zone' in employee's minds. With requirements that were put forth by the powers that be, little or no input or consideration put into what teams and individuals actually require from an intranet, nor what the IT department need to do to integrate with other systems and keep it running on a daily basis – the development of such usually disappears into a 'big black hole', emerging eighteen months later with a manual and a whiff of 'you're welcome, now get to work'. Bewildered, marketing, human resources and communications teams, end users and techs alike roll up their sleeves, yet soon find themselves frustrated and demotivated, reverting to their individual ways of working.

## How has this come about? Let's take a look back...

### 1. Large Systems Integrators

Systems Integrators (SI's) have ruled the roost in recent decades. The concept that 'I won't get fired for hiring a well-known name; if it goes wrong it's their fault – I'm paying for their 'expertise'' is all too common. Often, this rationale underpins the decision making process, as opposed to an organisation's ability to meet requirements, value for money and 'best fit' for requirements from key perspectives. Strong and steadfast, delivery focussed solutions and suppliers are emerging, challenging dated processes and expectations and paving the way for innovation in the marketplace.

### 2. Fixed term contracts

An all too common characteristic of an SI is the fixed term contract. Akin to eliminating romance once you say 'I do', or having signed a 15 year multimillion pound/dollar contract, it's not unusual for these suppliers to stop trying to go the extra mile and keep clients satisfied through exceptional service, understanding their requirements and adapting if needed. Why put the effort in to surprise and delight clients when you know they're stuck with you, and it's an admin, HR, financial and legal nightmare to 'divorce' early? Slow response times, expensive, sometimes hidden layered charges and an idle pace it is, then.

### 3. Proprietary roll-outs

One of the fallouts of above, is the length of time it takes to see results or progress. Requirements are often over analysed, over architected and can lack perspective and an understanding of business and user needs. When they are ready to move into a development cycle, they often disappear for a length of time, emerging to a new team, new requirements and apathetic end-users who feel ill-considered.

## Where does this leave organisations?

Consequently, organisations face a myriad of problems resulting from outdated systems that lack any real business value, and are emerging from the haze and actively seeking to work their way out of.

- **Crushed innovation** – when large scale rollouts fail to perform or meet expectations, it stifles innovation and can result in organisations opting for the path of least resistance instead, often missing out on innovative solutions.
- **Loss of control** – it's well known that large proprietary systems are 'locked down' both in terms of time, and functionality. The huge IT costs associated with making simple changes expedite a lack of control, leading to frustration, low organisational expectations and reduced productivity.
- **Fear of change** – Why go through the hassle of implementing what seems like a quick fix when in reality it means arduous change request processes, unnecessary delays and red tape? 'Let's just leave it be and trudge through' is an all too common end point, frustratingly so.
- **Technical tie-ins** – When systems are integrated and a component needs to be replaced or updated, it is often that case that something relatively straightforward results in significant disruption and latent 'down time' as teams attempt to 'unpick' the messy architecture in order to facilitate the required change.
- **Costly change processes** – the 'mission critical' changes more often than not result in lengthy, disruptive, expensive change request processes that generally reinforce the inefficiencies of the process.
- **No social interaction** - Overly complex, rigid legacy systems generally mean that there is little or no social interaction or communication amongst users. In today's rapid paced social society, people are almost conditioned to interact with others – our energy levels are often subconsciously conditioned to do so.

In addition to insufficiently performing software, these large scale proprietary roll-outs reflect in the balance sheets. Often, there are expensive, hidden layered services attached to an installation, in addition to licence renewal fees, enhancements and "did you want to be able to configure something basic yourself – no, not possible? That will cost extra".

## How social platforms have changed everything

We see and experience first-hand, how rapidly the world is changing. Twenty years ago, there were fewer than 3 million people with Internet access; now there are nearly 2.5 billion. The world is getting more integrated, which in turn globalises the workplace. While some organisations are 'on top' of internal communication, collaboration and mobile technology, with some even implementing BYOD and remote working in a bid to attract and retain talent – this is in reality simply an extension of evolving technology, and necessary to keep pace and productivity, but isn't necessarily a game changer.

The Facebook effect means that almost everything is socialised, in both personal and professional lives, with people often communicate with 'friends' online more than in real life. These connections build trust, including often a sense of empathy, enhancing individual, therefore organisational expectations with regard to the simplicity and dissemination of information – including ease of access are changing and increasingly demanding. Simplicity and ease of access to information is no longer viewed as a luxury, but a mere necessity. Corporate communications and engagement need to reflect to adapt and keep pace.

## The maturing of Open Source & the growth of SaaS

- **Open Source**

Open Source software, Open Data and Open Standards have blown the doors wide open with regard to transparency, accountability and reputation. Open Source software is free to use, and differs to proprietary software in that it's developed and maintained by a passionate global community who take pride (& payment) in the form of kudos and credibility versus vast corporate profits who churn out a release and charge a hefty 'licence renewal fee' for minor updates.

- **Software as a Service**

Gartner defines SaaS as "software that is owned, delivered and managed remotely by one or more providers. The provider delivers software based on one set of common code and data definitions that is consumed in a one-to-many model by all contracted customers at any time on a pay-for-use basis or as a subscription based on use metrics."

In effect, SaaS applications are convenient, fully managed and fully hosted software solutions, maintained by the supplier, as opposed to hosted on client premises. SaaS apps run in the secure cloud.

## The benefits to SaaS applications are immense:

### **Lower cost to organisation**

Lower costs can sincerely make all the difference when an organisation decides whether or not to implement a new system. With a SaaS offering, you only pay for what you need or use – and don't have to incur the overheads associated with hardware to host your new applications. Instead of allocating the time and internal resources to install the software, the SaaS supplier gets everything up and running – leaving the organisation to simply 'get on with the job'. The time to a working solution can drop from months or years in the traditional model to weeks, days or hours with the SaaS model.

### **See and feel benefits in a shorter timescale**

With SaaS model, the software application is already installed and configured. Users can provision the server for the cloud and quickly have the application ready for use. This cuts the time to benefit and allows for quick demonstrations and prototyping.

### **Pay as you go**

From a commercial standpoint, the benefits of SaaS applications are two-fold. Firstly, SaaS provides the benefit of predictable costs both for the subscription and to some extent, the administration. As organisations scale, this model provides a clear picture of what your costs will be. This allows for much more accurate budgeting, especially as compared to the costs of internal IT to manage upgrades and address issues for a self-hosted instance

### **The SaaS vendor is responsible for upgrades, uptime and security**

SaaS applications are fully managed and fully hosted by a supplier that has focussed their service offering on keeping the application healthy and updated. Let them. Let somebody else take sole responsibility for maintaining the software, applying patches and updates, ensuring you obtain service levels agreed within the Service Level Agreement, and of course, keeping information and data secure.

In 2014, an author at [IT World Canada](#) quotes the 2009 report "The ROI of Software-As-A-Service," where Forrester noted that: "SaaS solutions typically offer seamless, automatic, frequent upgrades as part of the ongoing subscription charge. Because these upgrades happen more frequently and therefore incrementally than on-premises solutions, they typically have significantly reduced testing and end user acceptance and training costs."

### **Higher adoption rates**

As SaaS software is accessible via familiar web browsers, SaaS applications generally have lower learning curves and higher adoption rates. This is significant when you consider the high cost of on-premises software development and implementation, vs. the low cost of entry for SaaS.

### **Remote working**

As the software is hosted in the cloud and accessible over the internet, security permitting, users can access it via mobile devices wherever they are connected.

## **The Future of the Enterprise Intranet**

Increasingly we see a world where CEOs and executives want to drive organisational change and engagement through improved internal communications. Today they are able to take advantage of secure, Open Source technologies and social trends to help them achieve this in a targeted, personalised and secure manner.

Contact us today if you'd like to understand about how Invotra can provide help and advice to ease your organisation into Open Source. For more details go to [www.invotra.com](http://www.invotra.com)