EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW BUT WERE AFRAID TO ASK:
THE DIGITAL WORKPLACE

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WHAT IS A DIGITAL WORKPLACE?

The term Digital Workplace was first coined long ago in a book called The Digital Workplace: Designing Groupware Platforms by Charles Grantham and Larry Nichols in 1993. Back then, digital was an imaginary future for most of us, where email – let alone mobile phones or the world wide web – was confined to a small coterie of academics and government-backed researchers.

Today however, things couldn’t be more different. Digital connectivity is like electricity; it’s an integral part of how most businesses and organisations operate. Suffer a lack of connectivity, then pretty much everything a company does – including communicating to its customers – will quickly grind to halt.

Thus the argument behind the Digital Workplace trend is that businesses would do well to bring together all of their internal and external digital operations into a single coherent strategy. Joining up functions, sharing data, processes and communications between functions and business units that are spread around different locations, will hopefully improve how everything operates, and also positively affect customer engagement and experience. The same is true for staff: by using better designed digital tools, networked devices and platforms, the hope is that they can operate more productively and efficiently too.

A Digital Workplace strategy is the process of unifying how your business operates and communicates through a common digital platform of tools and services. This will improve staff engagement, operational efficiency, product delivery and your customers’ expectations.

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

WHAT WILL THIS GUIDE ANSWER?

- Why the Digital Workplace trend is so important
- How it will affect your business
- Why your intranet is more essential than ever

WHO SHOULD READ THIS GUIDE?

If you already have an intranet but want to ensure you’re using it to its full potential, or are planning to re-design it, this guide will help you plan your project in line with modern digital working best practices – ensuring you get the most out of it.

Suitable for Internal Communications, HR, IT and Executive teams.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Alongside his work at BrightStarr, Martyn writes and speaks about design, technology, innovation and business change for publications including The Independent, Big Issue magazine, Spiked, the Guardian, Blueprint and Netimperative. Martyn regularly organises, speaks and chairs debates across Europe including at the Design Council, London College of Fashion, colleges and universities across the UK and the Battle of Ideas festival.
SOUNDS LIKE HAVING A DIGITAL WORKSPACE STRATEGY IS A NO-BRAINER?

On paper at least (excuse the pun), having a strategy that links together everything in concert is certainly a good idea. However, while digital connectivity is a necessity in today’s world, there is much more to it than simply switching everything on.

With myriad digital tools, platforms, mobile-driven devices, data-standards, to choose from, the first problem is knowing where to start and what to prioritise. Just how far are you prepared to go in order to change how your internal processes, structures, and culture operates? All in order to deal with the internal pressures alongside the external needs of the market – including ever changing demands from your customers and shareholders?

Customers and staff alike do want higher levels of service, connectivity and sophistication in how their data is organised, shared and used. Combined with a world where companies must expertly manage their external reputations – especially online through websites, social media – means that there is much pressure and responsibility to try to make everything work in unison, without contradicting, for example, what marketing does in comparison to customer services.

For global companies, and those with complex infrastructure, processes and tools, this can be as difficult as trying to change the course of a large ship: it takes time, patience and can be overtaken by far smaller, more agile competitors. Although they too can struggle. Being smaller in size, they could suffer problems due to being less stable, leaving them at risk of failing to keep hold of their customer base in rough waters.

FOUR KEY DRIVERS OF THE DIGITAL WORKPLACE TREND

1. CLOUD-BASED TECHNOLOGY
   
   Large-scale digital transformation projects have become possible largely because of the cheapening cost of technology and the shift away from fixed cost infrastructure due to cloud-based alternatives. Lengthy, capital-intensive technology investments, that are less suited to (and unable to keep up with) rapidly changing markets will be less common.

2. MOBILE ACCESS
   
   Employees want digital technology that is familiar to them in their lives outside of work. Having the choice today is possible: between how to work and access tools, content, communications, on the move from anywhere, using whichever device (including their own) that will compliment their work.

3. CUSTOMER-DRIVEN REORGANISATION
   
   Driven by marketing, branding, and customer-facing functions, many businesses realise that customers expect better joined-up services, or they will go elsewhere. How those internal functions are organised, helping to intelligently share customer data between one another, will increasingly shape the quality of the customer relationship.

4. RISE OF THE APPS
   
   With so many business apps, tools and software available at very low cost, it means there is more chance of being able to make work more productive and efficient. There is a wider choice of tools and platforms, so that employees can work with tools they need, rather than of having to work with an unforgiving piece of technology.

The value comes either from giving the user access to all the systems they need in one place, which is in turn wrapped up in a consistent and good user experience, or by drawing on data from different and disparate systems and bringing them together in ways that add value.

STEVE BYNGHALL DIGITAL WORKPLACE GROUP*

*SEE MORE AT: http://digitalworkplacegroup.com/2015/04/30/6-digital-workplace-trends-intranet-innovation-awards/

DISCOVER MORE AT: WWW.BRIGHTSTARR.COM
BUT IT’S NOT ALL PLAIN SAILING

Let’s be clear: implementing a digital suite of tools, communications technologies, and enterprise social networks – while all a necessity – are by no means a panacea for a business that lacks a competitive edge.

In the UK, Europe and in America, one of the key underlying features of many companies over the past few years – coinciding with an era of significant investment in new technology – has been historically low rates of productivity. Sometimes known as the ‘productivity paradox’, in the UK for example, productivity levels have not matched levels seen since before the 2008 recession. The same is true for output and growth too. While digital investment is certainly a major contributor to how modern companies communicate, collaborate and remain profitable, there is no direct outward correlation that digital investment will guarantee an immediate, obvious effect on an organisation’s bottom line.

Technology, of itself, will never be the solution to all of your problems. As with any new investment, the key is to ensure that it reflects your overall business strategy, and will significantly add value to your business. Because, as we have seen, there is more choice about which digital tools to use, including those in the cloud such as Office 365, which are more manageable cost-wise to integrate with. With these new options, there is more chance of success.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

- What are the key business problems we’re trying to solve?
- How do we envisage technology will support my business strategy in the short to long-term?
- Who are our key users, and how will their needs affect my choice of technology?
- Are we using technology in the right way to keep my business agile?

There is a massive untapped opportunity out there to revise the value proposition for those numbers-driven businesses who will want to understand how all of this [social enterprise technology] enhances what they’ve invested in for the last decade. Until then, this massive bucket of executives will treat “social business” as another Mickey Mouse program until they see how it matters to revenue increase, cost reduction and risk mitigation.

SAMEER PATEL
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WHAT ABOUT MY INTRANET: IS IT REDUNDANT IN THE ERA OF THE DIGITAL WORKPLACE?

No. But given everything outlined here, you do need to think about your intranet in a different way. Far from being redundant, it will in fact be needed more than ever.

As we have seen, digital transformation is not an easy process. Like the weather, it is continually changing, unpredictable, and requires organisational agility that can quickly respond to changing circumstances.

Amidst all of that, your intranet should be your ally. It should be your key tangible, manageable facet of how you communicate change to all of your staff, and at the time, provide you with a stable platform from which to operate.

As a platform, your intranet will provide your people with a common structure familiar to everyone, while being tailored to each individual employees’ set of needs. That means making it a central pillar in your evolving Digital Workplace strategy.

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Core Intranet, Intranet Behaviour, Digital Workplace

*The productivity paradox (also the Solow computer paradox) is the peculiar observation made in business process analysis that, as more investment is made in information technology, worker productivity may go down instead of up." The IT Productivity Paradox, Ethan Drayfuss, Andrew Gadson, Tyler Riding, Arthur Wang

*The productivity of the UK workforce remains slightly lower than in 2007, marking an "unprecedented absence" of growth since World War Two, official figures show. Weak UK productivity unprecedented, ONS says, BBC News, 1 April 2015
WHAT SHOULD I DO NEXT AND THINK ABOUT?

Putting your Digital Workplace strategy in place is, unsurprisingly, not an easy task. One of the main reasons for this is due to there being so much choice of what tools to use, and what to prioritise. Alternatively, think of digital transformation over time, rather than as a race. That way, it will be much easier to manage.

Only put in place the right tools that conform to your ongoing business strategy, including those areas that require urgent attention first. Perhaps customer services is where you are most at risk, compared to finance or marketing. As your business plans evolve, grow your digital strategy around them.

As obvious as this might sound, it can be just as easy to make the mistake of being wishful about what all of your technology investment might bring, instead of being focused on the reality of having to slowly work out the benefits, step by step. Technology certainly does bring change, but expecting collaboration technology to transform how you communicate and raise productivity levels overnight is a major risk. As is often the case, it needs lots of intensive piloting, nurturing and change management, before its true value can be fully realised.

So, deciding on which tools to choose from – be they about communication, document collaboration or as a gateway to myriad business processes – should be done pragmatically. At the same time, having your intranet platform in place, will allow you to sensibly organise how everything is communicated. It will aide how you consolidate all of your essential tools (including those that you are in the process of piloting) in one manageable place.

The workplace strategy should set clear priorities and serve as a blueprint for the roles and relationships of each department (R&D, marketing, sales, customer support, manufacturing, HR and IT). It should also map out how various technologies will be exploited to raise engagement levels and support the transition to a digital business.

THE INTRANET AS A CENTRAL PLATFORM

A great starting point for your Digital Workplace strategy is to use your intranet as the central platform, from which all your external systems are linked. In this example, the organisation have determined which applications they want within easy access for their staff. However, users are also able to personalise ‘My Apps’, choosing which applications are most important to them in their working life.
IN CONCLUSION: KEEP YOUR DIGITAL WORKPLACE APPROACH SIMPLE

PLATFORMS, PLATFORMS, PLATFORMS
Consider your intranet as a platform that links everything together. Your intranet should not be left to wither away. Instead, understand its pivotal place in how your organisation accesses and links together essential tools and content in one place.

TARGET THE NEEDY
Help your staff by cutting out all of the extraneous noise that gets in the way of their work. Create a targeting plan and use your intranet to deliver it. Work out which tools, apps and services to target and personalise to the right employees who need them most. Having access to fewer but more essential (and the right) tools, will dramatically improve how work gets done.

LINK, RE-SKIN, OR INTEGRATE
The internet wasn’t built in a day – nor will your digital transformation happen overnight. Being pragmatic about your digital strategy is essential. Focus on those systems already in place while you figure out what else to buy in or integrate with. Access needn’t be complex: decide on whether to create apps, links to them, or even as a longer-term strategy, custom integration.

PILOT, LEARN, AND ITERATE
We know how the best laid plans always end up being different (and hopefully better). So while knowing what the big picture looks like, take your time in getting there. Employees will invariably find interesting and new uses for tools, content, and new ways to collaborate. Learn from their innovation, and feed this back into your Digital Workplace strategy. Having a coherent intranet will provide you with the best platform to learn from.

DEFINE WHO NEEDS WHAT
Create personas that define your employees’ needs. Agree what are the most common ways that employees want to work, collaborate and communicate with one another. That way, you can pinpoint the variety of tools and apps that will satisfy how they want to work, helping you prioritise and organise around core job functions.

TALK TO US ABOUT YOUR DIGITAL WORKPLACE STRATEGY.

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SUCCESSFUL RELATIONSHIPS
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HOW CAN WE HELP WITH YOUR DIGITAL WORKPLACE STRATEGY?

BrightStarr is the creative force behind Unily, the Intranet as a Service solution built on Office 365 that brings the high quality digital experiences of the consumer word to the employee intranet. Unily is cloud, mobile and social at heart, and can be deployed in just 4 weeks. Completely scalable, flexible and with a Digital Workplace attitude, Unily is the solution of choice for those organisations looking to seamlessly integrate their internal systems together for a truly connected workplace. Fully supported and complete with upgrades and updates all as part of the package, Unily is the future proof intranet solution to kick-start your Digital Workplace strategy.

ABOUT BRIGHTSTARR

BrightStarr is a multi-award winning digital consultancy, with a focus on intranets for the enterprise across all sectors. BrightStarr are known for their award-winning user experiences, with their intranets being the solution of choice for communication, HR and IT teams looking to step up their digital strategy.