STRATEGIC BRIEFING:

AN UN-RADICAL VISION FOR INTRANETS IN 2014 - BACK TO THE BASICS, DIALING BACK THE HYPE

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KEY CONCEPTS

Moving into 2014, there is general agreement as to the various functions that a modern intranet must serve as well as the value it provides, and it is clear that organizations will continue to make investments in this area to further integrate it into the enterprise's digital landscape.

It's also clear that a number of initiatives involving trending technologies (e.g. social, mobile, cloud, etc.) are already mid-flight and/or evolving on a measured basis; and trends/best-practices in each of these areas have been written about ad-nauseum for years now - with only some of the promise lived up to - making 2014 a year for buckling down with great execution and a focus on user experience (and managed organizational uptake) more than anything.

For those enterprises suffering from misalignment between business needs and ongoing initiatives, or for those struggling to catch up with competitors in terms of serving the needs of their information workers, 2014 will also be an important year to revisit digital strategies across the board as well.

Either way, 2014 is a good year to get back to the basics - great strategy, great execution, and great user experience!

2014 - The Year of Great Strategy, Execution and User Experience

It's the time of year for dramatic headlines and radical prognostications in the digital world, including that related to our focus - enterprise intranets and portals. Our radical prediction for 2014? Given the level of ongoing investment and market/technical change, organizations may need to revisit their digital strategies and architectures to some degree, but overall, the focus this year should be on continued project execution, end-user experience management, organizational uptake and value capture.

That's not to say that well-known digital trends (e.g. mobile, social, cloud, etc.) won't have an impact - they always will - there's just plenty of value to be realized from things you've known about (and invested in) for quite some time that we believe organizations should be focusing on.

For example, communication and collaboration practices are rapidly evolving with the integration of social platform features into corporate portals (and collaboration sites), but this has been happening for some time, and organizations need to focus on customer needs and great execution based on (now) well-established best practices in those areas. Similarly, mobile access to enterprise content, social features, and application data/workflow has been a hot topic for years now, but most organizations are just now getting these initiatives off the ground, taking a mostly measured, "do it right" approach in this area.

Bottom line - there's a strong argument for staying the course and continuing to execute against established priorities, while making sure to have at least part of the team thinking about the holistic architecture and longer term digital strategies.

If this "getting back to basics" is too un-radical for you, at least it's practical! Here, we'll expand on a few of these concepts to get you headed in the right direction for 2014, with more to come in the months ahead!

Intranets and Portals - Good to Great

At its heart, a good intranet/portal remains a well-integrated system, providing for multiple tiers of content publishing/sharing at different organizational levels, communication from and amongst those tiers, and access to deeper level collaboration and application functionality at the process level.

This traditional vision can obviously manifest itself in many ways in different organizations (and in different parts of organizations), with "modern" intranets incorporating a number of the following additional elements, to name a few:

PROPERTIES OF MODERN INTRANETS	Continued focus on usability, overall user experience and utility	Renewed focus on a unified home page/landing page	Pervasive, integrated (vs. destination) social features, ability to discuss/rate content and access/interact with people
Rich, dynamic, refreshed published content (with a renewed focus on curated content authoring)	Federated search, content filtering and suggestions	Mobile device access, offline access and outside-network availability	Integrated collaboration, community, knowledge management, portal and records management
Selective partner and customer access	Security, partitioning, and IP protection	Personalization and customization	Persona and scenario-based change management, training and communications
Robust information architecture and management	Intranet, extranet, internet platform sharing	Analytics, measurement, reporting and impact assessment	Shared service-orientation and progressive operations/governance

Of course, none of these are easy, and each organization is at varying stages of maturity with each, but the ability to think about all these holistically (and strategically) should be a priority for every organization in 2014.

The 2014 Journey - Things to Watch For

Mobile. In 2014, mobile will continue to come out of its shell, with organizations finally figuring out the right mobile strategies aligned with business needs across different mobile personas, device types and intranet applications.

Smartphones. Continuing the mix-up in the smartphone space from 2013, in which Samsung overtook Apple as the market leader, Blackberry dropped off the map and Microsoft acquired Nokia (closure pending), expect more commotion in 2014 with the possible emergence of Microsoft as more of a player with enterprise customers.

Social. As the promise of standalone enterprise social networks (ESNs) continues to falter (who has the time?), social will stay valid via pervasive incorporation into various content, communication, collaboration and application environments. Social moves out of the "hype" state and into a more reasoned part of the communication and collaboration portfolio. "People"/profile pages get richer and more pervasive. Organizations re-think their social strategies.

Real-time. User expectations about access to real-time data increase, putting demand on corresponding delivery systems.

SharePoint. SharePoint 13, in both its online, on-premises and hybrid forms will continue to evolve (especially in its O365 form) and dominate the intranet space, with continued market confusion over the destiny of the on-premises form and the integration with Yammer moving forward. Enterprises start figuring out the SP13 app model, building apps themselves, procuring through the marketplace, and establishing commercialization models. New app models/businesses emerge out of Azure.

Personalization and Aggregation. Past visions for personalization and aggregation will start to come into focus as information overload and end-user focus converge to create greater demand for these capabilities.

Analytics. Analytics will start playing more of a role in understanding internal usage patterns and adjusting information worker (IW)-focused capabilities accordingly.

Cloud. Cloud will continue to disrupt as a technical delivery alternative, with increased uptake but generally no different from 2013 (during which time the same thing was happening), except the momentum could be building whereby you'll see increased shifts to cloud providers (e.g. Office 365) for commodity workloads.

Search. Search continues to get better (integrated sources, better filtering, better previewing, etc.), and people get better at searching. Search evolves to more of a suggestion-engine and content-surfacing function..

2014 Strategy

Great strategic planning makes sure the right bets are made, the right level of funding is provided, and things are orchestrated in a rational manner across a portfolio of initiatives. This becomes even more important moving into 2014, as the landscape articulated above becomes more complex and the opportunities for value production greater.

For example, developing a holistic "Communication, Collaboration, Content and Social Computing Strategy" will allow you take a step back and develop a more holistic view of your current and future delivery portfolios across these areas as aligned with your business needs, current adoption levels, budgets, and technical trends.

As we've spoken about at multiple SharePoint Conferences, at the platform level, a "SharePoint Strategy" will help you define the things you need to put into place moving forward to get more value out of your investment in that platform (e.g. business alignment and enablement, further service and capability development, etc.).

Finally, none of this works if you don't have a good understanding of your user base and their user experience needs, which leading companies address via the development of a "UX Strategy".

2014 Execution

Great execution means that you put all the right pieces in place at the right time to make your initiative successful over what typically amounts to fairly long periods of time in the intranet/portal space.

This starts by developing the right strategy and relies on ample planning, architecture and design followed by development, rollout and progressive management, communication, business enablement and measurement.

These latter "business whitespace" concepts are introduced below and will be expanded on in various upcoming blogs and whitepapers from https://extremetray.wordpress.com. Let us know if these are of interest to you, and we'll prioritize accordingly!

Operating model. We define the "operating model" to include everything related to the delivery of intranet/portal capabilities to end-users. This includes the organizational functions, business engagement model, services provided, service management, service architecture, technical change management, governance and funding.

This is a critical thing to get right for the ongoing success of your portal/intranet initiative.

Change Management, Training and Communication. Also known as "CMT&C", this can be owned by multiple parties, including IT, the PMO, Comms/HR, and various business roles, depending on governance and organizational structures.

Depending on the nature of the effort, investment in this area can be critical to the adoption of your portal/intranet initiative.

Value Realization. Having a value measurement and reporting program in place is akin to having a "business plan" written for a business (or business unit). This involves defining the right set of metrics aligning to business priorities as well as the mechanisms to tie usage scenarios by different personas to an "Impact Space".

Ongoing measurement and reporting against this sort of scheme can also be critical to the success of your portal/intranet initiative moving into 2014.

See you in 2014!

2014 promises to be an exciting year for the evolution of (and value-generated from) corporate portals and intranets. What makes an intranet/portal go from "good to great" is fairly well known in theory but a challenge for most organizations to architect, fund and orchestrate.

Developing strategies incorporating these known goals with emerging trends moving into 2014 will ensure that you get more value from your investments in your intranet/portals this year and down the road.

Let us know how we can help!

For more information, please contact Todd Ray, Digital Productivity Strategist (toddray@alumni.stanford.edu)