

Enterprise collaboration: Intranets and how intranets can boost productivity in SMBs

An organization operates with the help of people and other resources. During the course of its operation, an organization may require that various people working in the organization communicate with each other for the effective utilization of the resources. Thus, the process of communication is vital for an organization.

Traditionally, communication in an organization was an oral or written process. If a message had to be conveyed, it either came through the grapevine in an organization or was sent in a written form to the person concerned. With changing business needs, changing business environment and changing technology, the process of communication in an organization has also changed and emerged as a better and a more effective process. Today, computers have replaced the traditional methods of communication in an organization.

The change in communication process of an organization can be attributed in some way to the use of internet. Internet is today used by everyone. The use of internet for commercial applications has seen a tremendous growth over the last few years. The same technology that is used for the internet can be used effectively in a business organization. This network which is used in organizations is called intranet.

Intranet is a collection of computer networks within an organization. It offers an effective means for people to operate in an organization more efficiently. The low cost of the intranets has rapidly increased their popularity. The cost factor is the main reason why small and medium business organizations use them in their day to day operations. For SMBs, intranets can work as effective enterprise collaboration tools that facilitate people to work together in an organization. Intranets help in sharing data and knowledge within an organization in a cost effective manner.

Small and medium business enterprises generally have two options when they want to use intranets for communication within the organization. One is that the SMBs can subscribe to a hosted intranet service for a monthly fee. In this case, a third party hosts the intranet of the organization. The other option is to set up the intranet within the organization. For setting up an intranet, an organization requires the following:

- Web server including hardware and software
- Networked PCs
- Firewall
- Content management software
- Application software

SMBs can opt for any of the ways to use intranet within the organization. The decision depends upon the needs of the organization and the financial resources that the organization has.

Reasons why SMBs make use of intranets:

There are many reasons for which small and medium business organizations use intranets. These include:

- Intranets make use of technology standards that everyone is familiar with. So, using intranets becomes easy and does not require organizations to spend money on training.
- Intranets are less expensive as compared to other types of networks and other communication systems that can be used in an organization.
- Intranets are always available which makes it possible for the communication process to go on.
- Using the intranets helps the organizations get fast access to information.
- Intranets help organizations save reproduction costs of paper based information because the information can be accessed using computers.

Small and medium business organizations typically use the intranets for the following purposes apart from communication and information sharing.

- Getting project information
- Publishing employee newsletters
- Sharing product and service information
- Sharing policies and procedures
- To track employee performance
- For offering technology support
- Provide training to employees
- To know sales figures
- Giving product demos
- For competitive analysis
- For conferencing
- To share employee benefit information
- Accessing organizational data
- To get quick feedbacks

Each of the activities listed above can be accomplished within an organization in a very short time using an intranet. This helps the organization to save a lot of time and focus on other business priorities.

How intranets help to improve the productivity of SMBs?

The use of intranets helps the SMBs to work more efficiently. It is a known fact that small and medium business organizations have limited resources. These resources have to be utilized in an optimum manner so that the productivity of the business organization is improved. This is exactly what an intranet does for SMBs.

For effective organizational operations and for the success of SMBs, it is essential that the employees within the organization get access to the information when it is required. In general, the HR department within SMBs manages the information. To get information from HR department is both time consuming and unproductive. On the other hand, if this information is available in an organized manner on the intranet, it not only saves time of the employees but also improves their productivity and in turn helps the organization as well to work in an efficient manner.

When data and information is available on the intranet, it enables the employees to get information on their fingertips. This means that employees of the small and medium business organizations need to spend less time in searching for files and documents. This means that the employees can spend more time with the clients, solving problems and earning more profits for the organization. Also when employees get access to critical business information easily and in time, they tend to make fewer mistakes which further increases the efficiency with which they work.

Enterprise collaboration through intranets further enhances the information sharing process between the employees and management of the SMB. The availability of information on a central location enables the management to make the necessary policy changes quickly. This helps the organization to respond to changes in the business needs and environment easily and quickly. This helps the SMBs to work efficiently and survive in a competitive environment.

The information on the intranets is always updated in real time. This means that employees and management always have access to the latest information which they can use as and when required. This saves both time and money and helps SMBs to operate in an effective and efficient manner.

Intranets also enhance the productivity of the SMBs by improving intra office communication process. The use of intranets creates a virtual connection among the employees. Also employees and management feel more close and comfortable when they work together. Intranets not only build strong work relationships but also ensure that everyone can express their opinions. A friendly environment enables the employees to work more efficiently. This increases their productivity and also the productivity of the SMB.

The increase in productivity with the use of intranets in small and medium business organizations further results in more sales and increased ROI. This also implies increased customer satisfaction which is essential for the success of an SMB.

Small and medium business organizations that make use of intranets for enterprise collaboration must ensure that the intranets that they make use of are reliable, robust, efficient, intuitive and provide actual value to the users.