

White Paper

5 Key Intranet Portal Benefits for HR Executives

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INTRODUCTION

A manager with even the keenest eye for hiring doesn't solve all of the company's problems at that early stage. Experience in personnel management shows that it isn't enough simply to hire the best – it is no less important to create an environment conducive to productive work.

In a fable by Ivan Krylov, a swan, crayfish and pike are all highly capable individually, but completely unsuccessful when trying to pull a heavy load together, because they have completely incompatible ideas about which direction to pull. The French national team surely consisted of great players but never came together as a team, exiting the last World Cup rather ingloriously. A company consisting of unparalleled gurus would nevertheless go under if they used the post, not email, and insisted only on visiting clients, never calling. These examples show how important teamwork and effective communications are to any modern organization.

The job of creating a team from a diverse group of specialists is a cornerstone of modern business. From HR's point of view, this duty can be broken down into the following major parts:

- Build communications among staff, give them convenient communication tools
- Monitor the level of corporate culture, promote corporate patriotism and raise non-material motivation of staff
- Provide an easy orientation pathway for new people on the team, give them necessary training and education

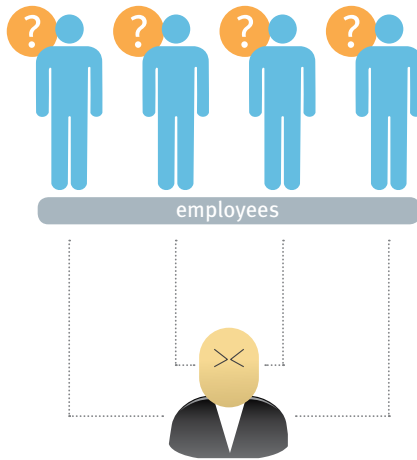
A corporate portal (intranet) is a unique tool that allows you to solve all three of the problems listed. In this white paper, we set out some basic HR scenarios leveraging an enterprise intranet and show what benefits are delivered.

INTRANET AS A VALUABLE TEAM MEMBER

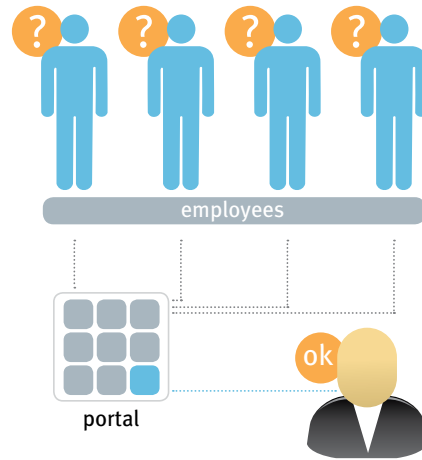
To begin with, the HR executive can really think of the intranet as an employee in his department. First, the intranet needs to be taught – familiarized with daily routines, information about employee duties, and, perhaps, how to automate some of them. This 'training period' quickly pays off, as it will no longer necessary to tell employees individually how to arrange their next holiday or to explain how a recent paycheck was calculated.

Empirically speaking, the intranet reduces staffing costs in the HR department via the reduction of time HR staff spends advising personnel concerning routine activities, allowing them to concentrate on solving higher value tasks, such as screening new hires or enhancing corporate culture.

without intranet



with intranet



In practice, the intranet portal allows you to automate all the typical scenarios of interaction between the HR department and employees. To arrange a business trip - fill in the ready-made form; to take a couple of days off – just sign the template of the pre-made declaration and it is sent automatically. Of course, sometimes staff will have to give individual attention to employee issues, but in most cases, enough information and interaction will be provided through the intranet – a fact that will delight HR, as well as other departments.

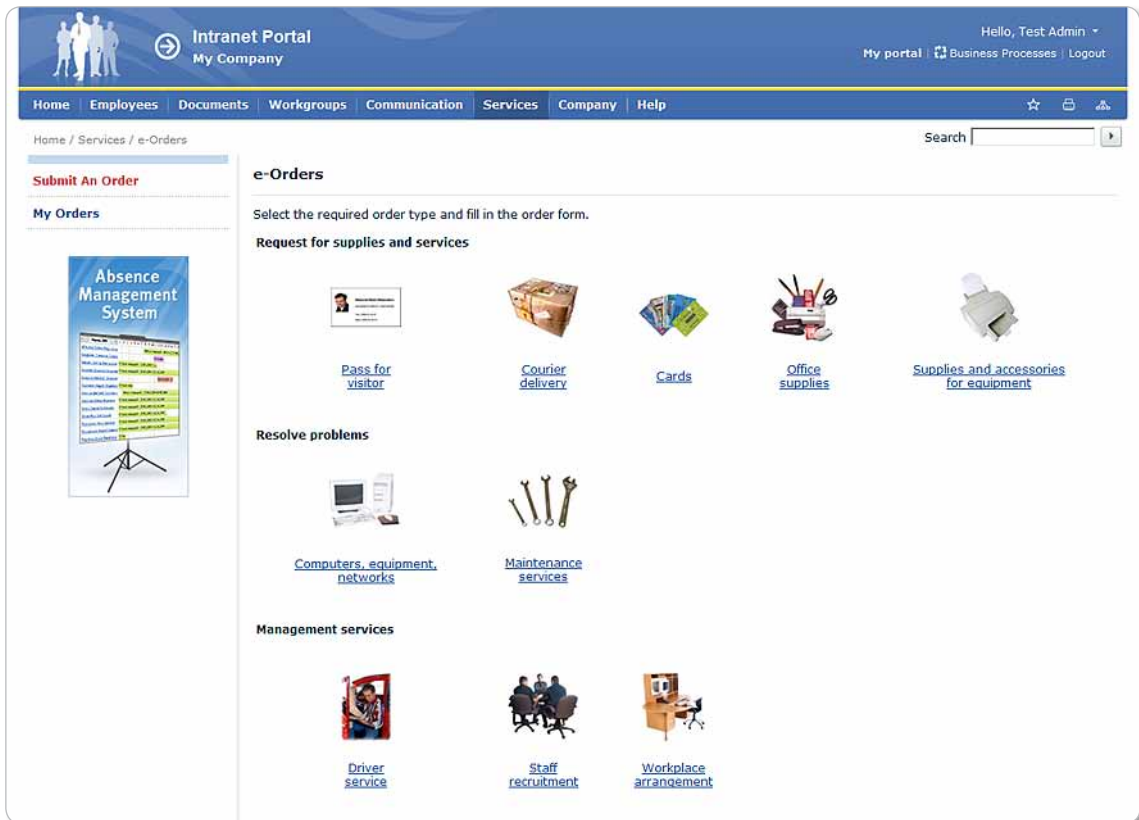


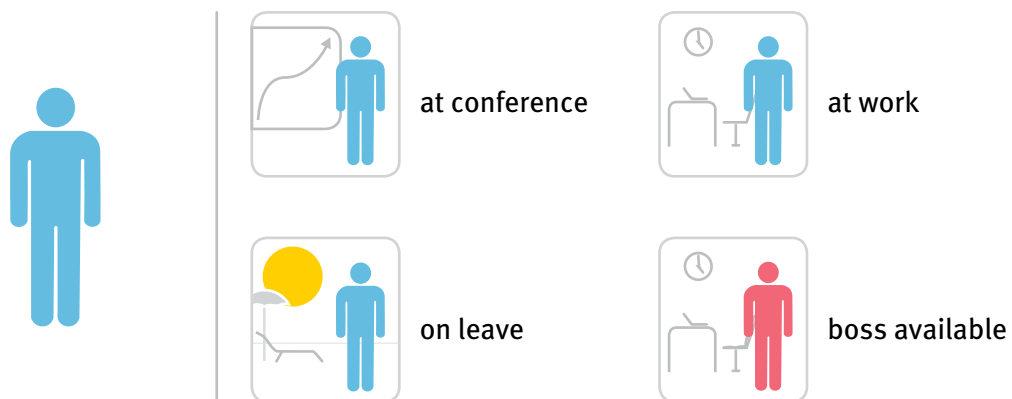
Figure 1: Standard service requests in Bitrix intranet Portal can be extended with customized forms

Bitrix Intranet Portal already contains tools for the automation of basic requests to the personnel department. In the simplest cases, it is enough to lay out instructions for the requests in the relevant section of the intranet. At the same time, the product supports more complex scenarios - the need for multi-level approval (for example - an application for taking a leave, Figure 1) or integration with external systems (paycheck calculation).

INTRANET AS A TIME MACHINE

The work of the HR department is not only to serve the needs of employees, but also, where possible, to increase their productivity. It is important to teach the staff the basics of time management.

Let's illustrate the topic with a simple example. Imagine a hair salon with one stylist and two clients who walk in at the same time - a young man who has just joined the military (a 10-minute job) and women who wants a perm (2 hours). The work at hand will take 2 hours and 10 minutes in any case, from the point of view of the stylist. But for the clients, the order in which service is provided will determine whether someone has to wait 10 minutes or 2 hours.



Many similar scenarios occur in any organization. Hours can be spent waiting for an answer to an urgent message when in fact the recipient is in a meeting with an important client. It is therefore essential that staff be informed about each other's schedules, vacations, sick leave, etc. Bitrix Intranet Portal solves this problem and allows employees to plan their activities effectively, in sync with their colleagues.

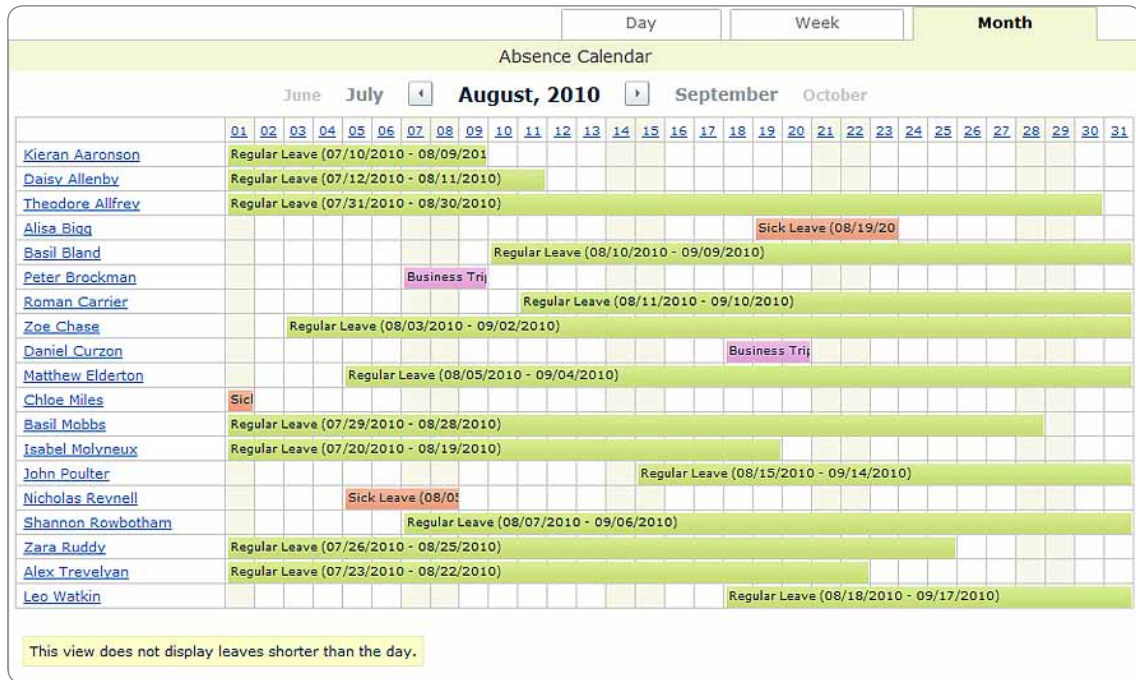


Figure 2: Absence chart of the corporate calendar in Bitrix Intranet Portal

Bitrix Intranet Portal has a set of ready functions for time management. Sharing and synchronization among the company’s primary calendar, individual and group calendars, and Microsoft Outlook allow employees to see the activity of their colleagues in real time and properly plan operations.

It is equally important that the portal not only gathers information, but also allows analysis. With a few clicks, HR managers will have an idea of how much time staff spends at their desks, in meetings, on business trips, etc. Ultimately, a better understanding of time usage allows more efficient business processes to be developed without forcing the company to make any significant financial investments.

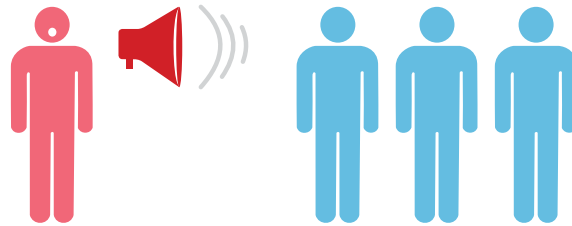
INTRANET AS A CONDUCTOR OF CORPORATE IDEAS

A company can be thought of as a small, independent state. It has its own symbols, boundaries, and authority, and it is governed by its management staff. Like any state, the company creates rules for its citizens (employees), thus forming its own corporate culture. In this context, the task of human resources is to raise company spirit among employees, making them true patriots.

The Intranet can perform very important roles in this capacity, even being the primary tool for building corporate culture. Practice has shown that if employees go to the portal at least once a day, you can be sure that the news on the front page will not be overlooked. Using the portal, it is easy to convey any information to all employees, even without an exact list of names and even if they themselves are never gathered in a single place.

Corporate culture can be advanced through the intranet in a number of ways. First, basic information about the company - its history, mission and major accomplishments can be posted and available to everyone. This provides a common framework for understanding the company and its evolution among staff. The portal is also the ideal media for periodic content: corporate news, analytical materials and press articles. A highly effective tool in this vein is a blog kept by company management, which reduces the distance between the top and staff, increasing the motivation and involvement of the latter.

Finally, placing photos and videos on the portal from the latest corporate parties, events or examples of amateur talent is a great team-builder. Viewing such material perhaps takes some amount of time, but the contribution to warmer internal relations is worth it.



At the same time, it would be a huge mistake to think of the intranet's role in building corporate culture only as an online bulletin board, because it not only conveys information from management but also provides feedback. Mechanisms such as surveys and polls, web forms, Q&A to top management or an anonymous 'drop box' for objective (or objectionable) feedback helps to track the mood of the team and assess the overall level of satisfaction. In guiding a large organization, these opportunities are particularly valuable because they allow full-throated communications with the entire spectrum of employees, bypassing the «food chain» of managers and middle management.

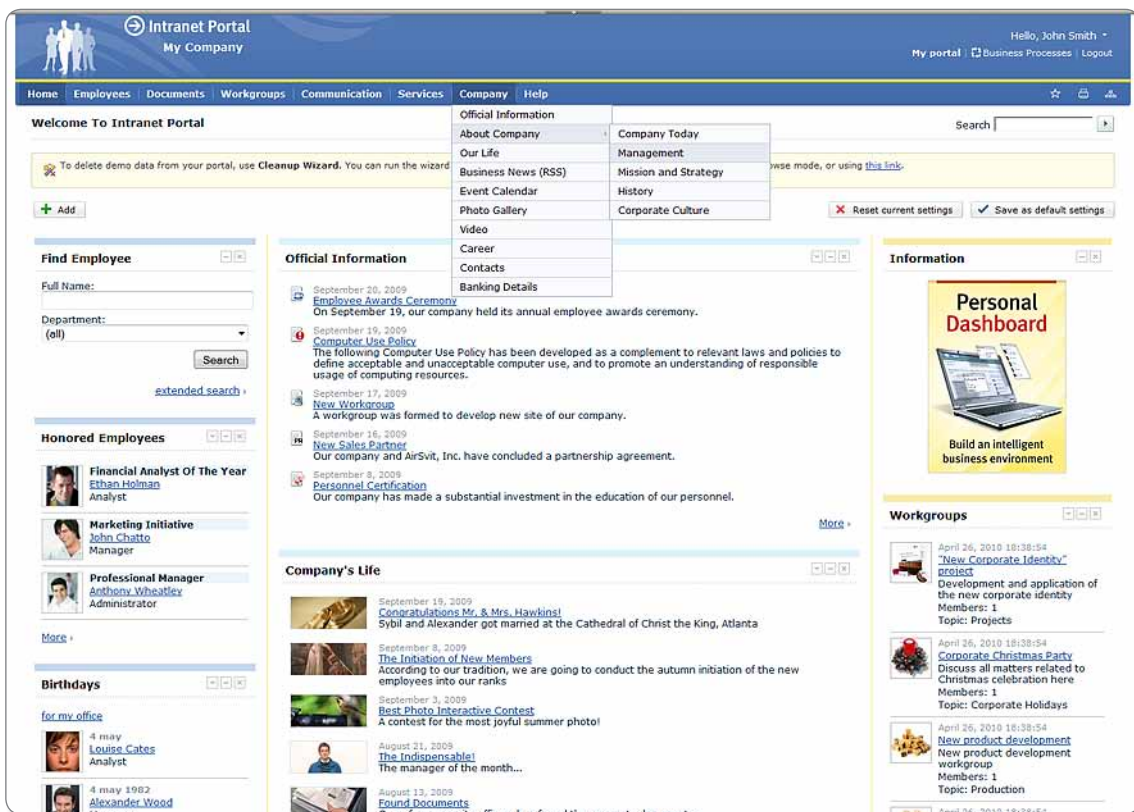


Figure 3: The main «Company» page in Bitrix Intranet Portal

Bitrix Intranet Portal has a special Company section in its default configuration (Figure 3), which contains all the general information that is published about the organization: official releases, news and photos, honored employees, etc. This section is the realm of HR, which is usually given full access to customize it in whatever way they see fit.

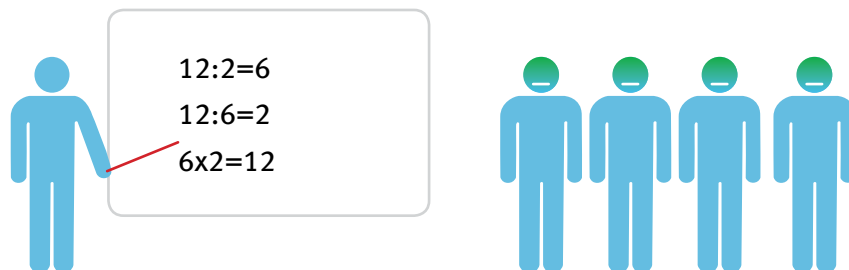
INTRANET AS A SCHOOL OF NEW SKILLS

In an era of rapid staff turnover, it is not only important to attract great employees, but also to bring them up to speed in operations as quickly as possible. As a rule, even an experienced employee requires a few months to reach the normal level of productivity. Given that 2 or 3 years is commonly the period that an employee stays in a given position, the cost of orientation and adaptation are quite significant.

When joining a company, new employees must first get acquainted with its structure, collect the contact information of colleagues, and get familiar with frequently used documents. At this time, distracting their neighbors in the office by asking them purely background questions about telephone numbers, details, location of files and supplies or the names of the right people is inevitable. Communication of this kind cannot be called effective, which is why the placement of all background information on the intranet is such a big time-saver.

For example, one of the primary functions of the intranet is keeping a company structure and directory of staff with full profiles and photos (integrated with the user control system). There is also a visual presentation of the company structure which shows the hierarchy of the company by division with department heads.

Taking this concept farther, special ‘instruction kits’ can be crafted within each of the departments of the company. This approach not only quickens the breaking in period for new employees, but is also invaluable to company veterans as a store of corporate knowledge. Ultimately, operations and communications among employees become smoother and more transparent to management.



Just the time and place to say the well-known ‘But wait, there’s more’. There’s no need to limit oneself to web pages and flat files when entire training modules with multimedia can be placed right into the portal. The e-Learning module facilitates this right out of the box, without any need for additional development or investment. HR executives can feed the system ready-made SCORM-compatible training courses. Video and audio materials can greatly enhance the effectiveness of any type of training, whether it is orientation or something much more complicated.

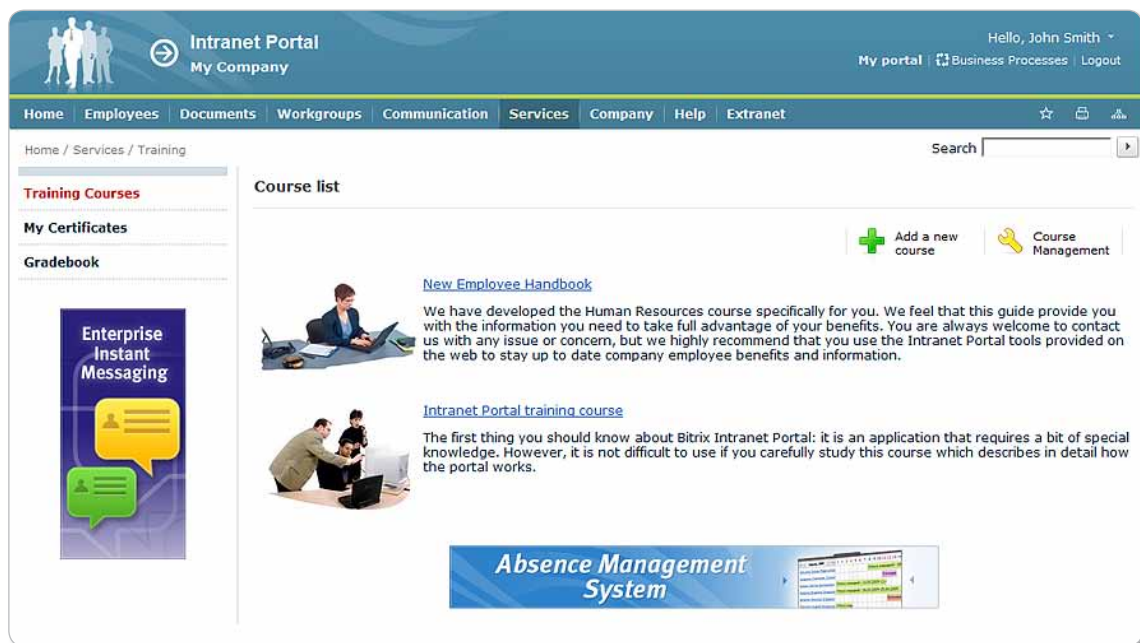


Figure 4: The e-Learning system in Bitrix Intranet Portal

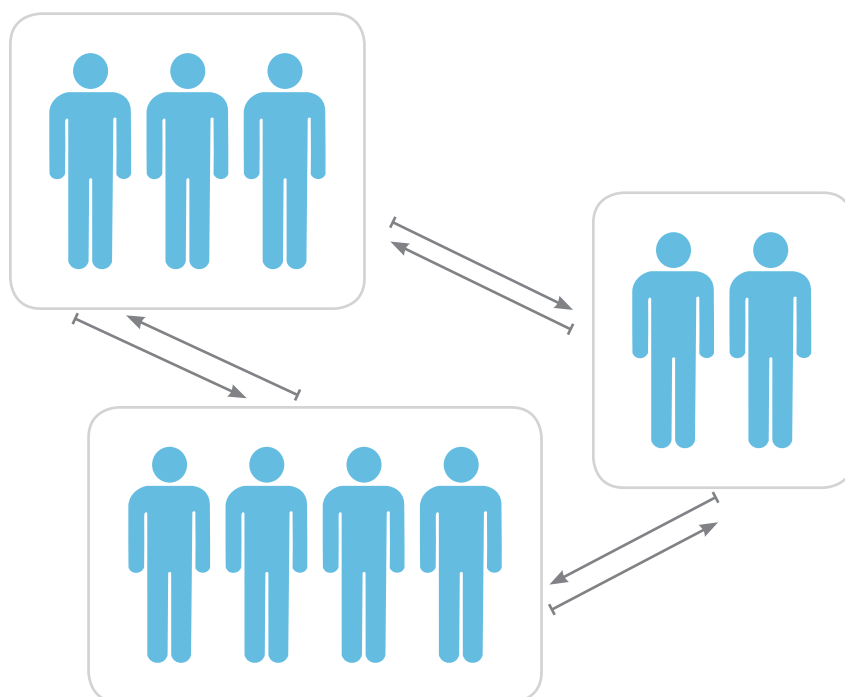
The powerful system for online education in Bitrix Intranet Portal allows training of employees, testing, and certification (Figure 4). The video conferencing feature is useful for more than training, as it facilitates virtual meetings among users who for one reason or another cannot gather together in a single place.

SCORM description in Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sharable_Content_Object_Reference_Model

INTRANET AS AN INTERNAL SOCIAL NETWORK

Social networking, which is considered to be one of the most significant innovations in Internet usage in recent years, has often been reckoned an enemy of the HR Department. This is understandable, as staff sitting on Facebook during working hours is generally undesirable. However, a simple and total banning of such sites would ignore the clear advantages which they can bring when used properly.

A corporate social network softens the formal boundaries between employees, making staff more cohesive and motivated. In fact, what the network effectively does is add a new level – a new playing field – on which issues of personnel management can be dealt with, from standard operations to launching corporation-wide initiatives.



Note that in addition to uniting employees, a social network brings direct benefits to a company's development. Tools such as forums and internal discussions combine the knowledge and insight from all parts of the company. Employees who do not know each other or do not interact in the normal course of operations have the opportunity to exchange experiences and identify areas to improve efficiency. This distinctly organic approach brings more minds to problem-solving efforts, so that complex problems can be broken down more quickly and smoothly to their basic elements and then resolved.

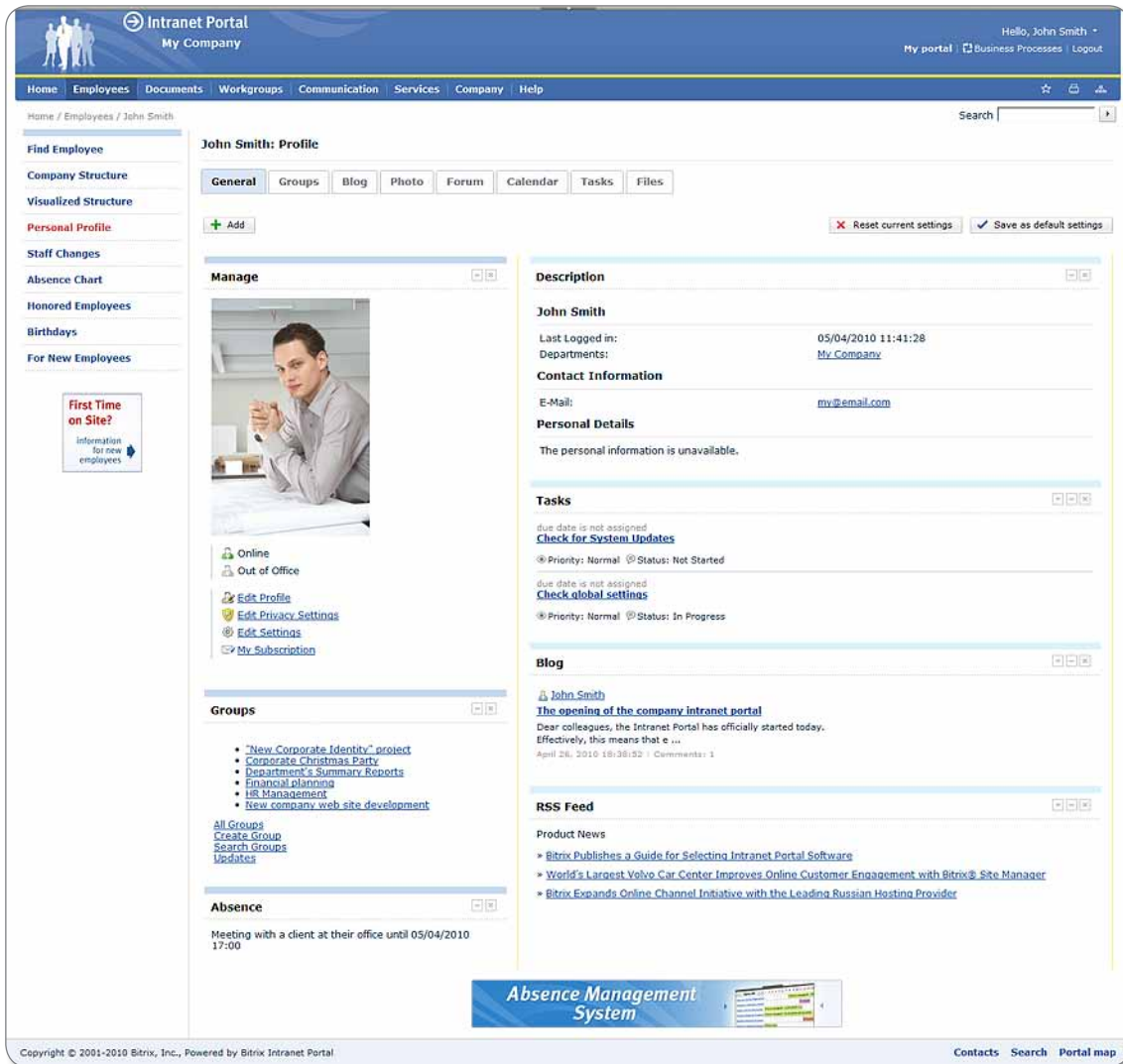


Figure 5: Rich User Profiles in Bitrix Intranet Portal

Bitrix Intranet Portal supports the basic social functions, which are based on rich user profile pages (Figure 5) with personalized content, friend networks, instant messaging tools, discussion forums and personal blogs. One of the key features of the product is an extranet module which expands the social space to external organizations - partners and customers, without compromising security. This tool is effective for delivering a higher level of service to clients and eases communications, making working with your company simpler and more attractive.

INTRANET BENEFITS FOR HR: SUMMARY

As a conclusion to the list of advantages which an intranet brings to HR, this summary table shows the basic scenarios described in the previous sections of this document. Even a casual observer will notice that the intranet presents the HR department with a large number of useful instruments which are hard to ignore in the modern business environment.

Intranet as a...	How to make it happen	What that gets you
... member of HR department	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publishing directory information • Automation of HR services • Integration of HR system into the portal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Optimize interactions between HR and employees
... time machine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the Event Calendar and integrate with Outlook • Require employees to report their plans • Gather information about work trends of employees, analyze summary data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better time management among employees. • Increased transparency of the company for HR managers. • More relevant suggestions for improving efficiency
... conductor of corporate ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a company image and profile in the intranet, publish company mission and history • Update company news; create a blog of the CEO or other upper management • Inform employees about informal events, publish commendations and exceptional performances, mention birthdays and weddings • Create feedback forms, conduct surveys and brain-storming sessions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance corporate culture • Increase employee motivation • Reduce distance between employees and management • Feedback from all levels of the company
... school for new hires	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrate employee accounts in the intranet, maintain a contact base • Provide standard documents, materials, and how-to's in the portal • Create online training courses; create certification levels directly in the intranet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce orientation time for new employees • Reduce expenses on training and orientation
... corporate social network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote the social potential of the intranet among employees • Use forums and blogs as alternative communication channels • Encourage employees to help each other, stimulate an exchange of knowledge and experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Closer ties among employees, more cohesion in small and large teams • Exchange of corporate knowledge and experience

However, despite the multi-functionality and vast potential of the intranet, it is not a magic wand, which can be brought about highly efficient employee interactions in the company overnight. For best results, each facet of the intranet should be properly ‘installed’ into the routine of the company. At first, that means that the HR manager is tasked with preparing the system for typical work scenarios and then promote the use of the intranet among workers, proving its usefulness and maintaining relevant content.

In large organizations, we recommend that carrying out these steps be the work of a designated employee who has experience with ‘internal’ relations. Beyond creating content, the task of this employee would include interaction with company top management and middle managers, promotion of the intranet throughout the company, and the unending task of updating and increasing the scope of the intranet’s adoption. It is no less important to track the life of the intranet – to ensure its proper and full use and to reward users who utilize it and stimulate their coworkers to take advantage of it as the resource that it is.

It should not be overlooked that building an ‘HR-brand’ in the company and accomplishing full employee engagement is a complex process, requiring significant inputs from management. Left to itself, the intranet will not raise the level of satisfaction among personnel beyond certain technical capabilities like convenient file sharing – it must be used in conjunction with other means of forming a social, informational, cultural and physical environment that motivates employees and achieves high-level engagement.

We hope that the scenarios described in this document and its recommendations allow companies to enhance the usefulness of intranet portals in relation to HR management and to avoid common mistakes, which often occur at the various stages of project implementation.

ABOUT BITRIX

Bitrix is a privately-owned company developing an advanced business communications platform to bridge SMBs with their customers (Internet), partners (Extranet) and employees (Intranet). Founded in 1998 and headquartered in Alexandria, VA, Bitrix now incorporates 80+ staff, 35,000+ customers and 4,000+ partners worldwide. The customer list includes Hyundai, Volkswagen, Panasonic, Gazprom, Xerox, PricewaterhouseCoopers, DPD, VTB, Samsung and Cosmopolitan. Localized into 13 languages, the company's products are distinguished for their pioneering technology, unique security features, extreme performance capacity and unmatched ease-of-use.

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