



Intranet Solutions Guide

Best Practices & Vendor Solutions — A comprehensive buyer's guide to designing, building, and extending your organisation's digital workplace.

 BUYER'S GUIDE

2025 EDITION

The Foundation: Why Intranets Matter More Than Ever

The modern intranet has evolved from a static notice board into the central nervous system of the digital workplace. In this chapter, we explore why getting your intranet strategy right has never been more important — and what's at stake if you get it wrong.

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Foundation

Understanding the strategic role of intranets

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Vendor Landscape

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The Digital Workplace Anchor

According to Gartner, **70% of organisations will standardise on a modern intranet** as their core employee experience platform by 2026. This is a remarkable signal: the intranet is no longer simply a communication tool or a document repository. It has become the anchor of an organisation's entire digital workplace strategy — the single place employees go to find information, connect with colleagues, complete tasks, and feel part of the broader company culture. Organisations that invest wisely in their intranet infrastructure will enjoy stronger alignment, faster communication, and measurably higher employee engagement.



Beyond Features: The Real Business Impact

The Strategic Stakes

Choosing the right intranet platform is a **strategic internal communications decision**, not merely a software procurement exercise. The platform you select will shape how your organisation communicates, collaborates, and operates for years to come.

The Cost of Getting It Wrong

A poorly chosen intranet actively **damages internal communication** by fragmenting information, creating information silos, and generating operational drag. Employees become frustrated, adoption rates plummet, and the organisation loses the productivity gains it hoped to achieve. The consequences — lost time, disengaged staff, and costly replacements — far outweigh any initial savings from a hasty decision.

Connecting Your Workforce

A well-implemented intranet bridges geographical, departmental, and role-based divides — giving every employee, from the executive suite to the frontline, a shared digital home.



Designing for Success: Best Practices in Intranet Development

Great intranets don't happen by accident. They are the product of careful planning, inclusive stakeholder engagement, and rigorous evaluation against clear business requirements. This chapter outlines the proven practices that separate successful intranet projects from costly failures.

Defining Your Needs: The Crucial First Step

Start with Business Goals

Before evaluating a single vendor, invest time in mapping your organisation's communication challenges, workflow inefficiencies, and strategic objectives. Define what success looks like in measurable terms — whether that's improved employee satisfaction scores, reduced time searching for information, or faster onboarding completion rates.

Build a Cross-Functional Team

Assemble a steering group that includes representatives from IT, HR, Internal Communications, Operations, and frontline management. This ensures the platform serves the entire workforce — not just the loudest voices in the room. A cross-functional team also improves governance, accelerates adoption, and reduces the risk of costly mid-project pivots.

Document Before You Evaluate

Create a formal requirements document before approaching vendors. This prevents scope creep, ensures fair comparison, and gives your team a reference point throughout the procurement process. Requirements should distinguish between must-haves and nice-to-haves.

Key Evaluation Criteria for Modern Intranets



Usability

Intuitive design that employees will actually adopt and use daily without training overhead.



Workforce Reach

Ability to connect all employees including frontline, deskless, and remote workers.



Communication Tools

Robust features for news, announcements, targeted messaging, and two-way dialogue.



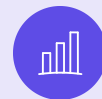
Integrations

Seamless connection with existing business systems such as HRIS, CRM, and productivity suites.



Search

Powerful, accurate, and enterprise-wide search that surfaces the right content instantly.



Analytics

Insights into adoption rates, content engagement, and employee behaviour to drive continuous improvement.



Security

Robust data protection, role-based access controls, and compliance with relevant regulations.



Vendor Reliability

Proven track record, responsive support, and a clear product roadmap for long-term confidence.

Build vs. Buy: A Strategic Decision

One of the most consequential early decisions is whether to build a custom intranet or procure an off-the-shelf solution. Both paths have genuine merit — the right answer depends on your organisation's scale, technical capability, and strategic priorities.

Build

Maximum customisation tailored to your exact workflows and brand. However, this path carries significant trade-offs: high labour costs, lengthy development timelines, ongoing maintenance burden, and risk of technical debt. Updates require internal resource allocation and can be slow to deploy. Best suited to large enterprises with dedicated development teams and genuinely unique requirements that no commercial product can address.

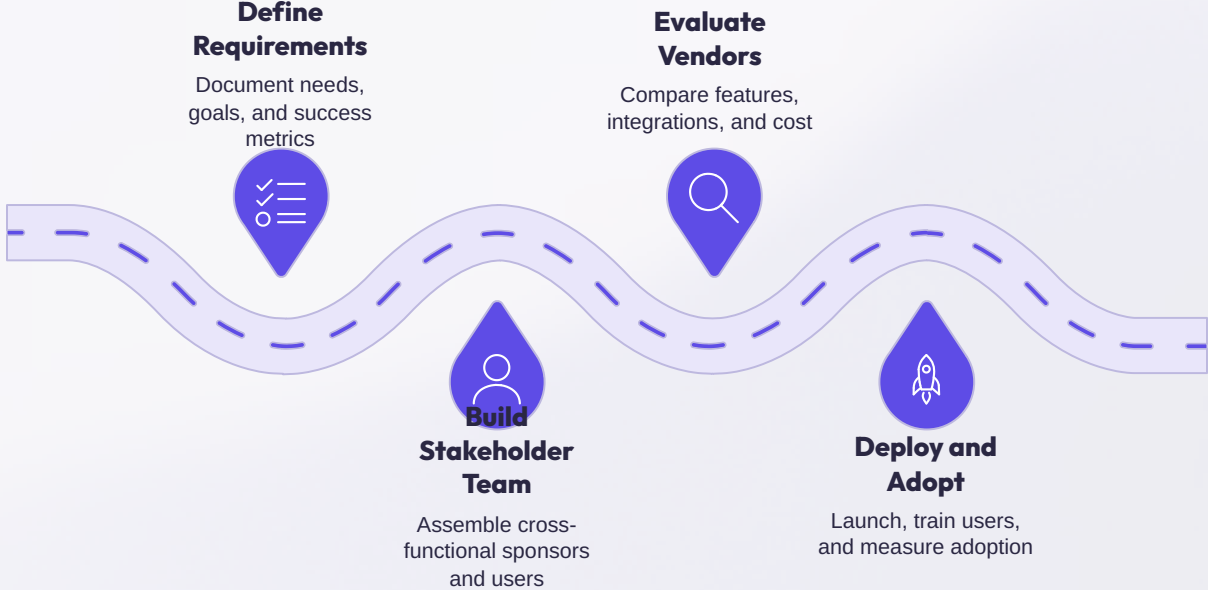
Buy (Out-of-the-Box)

Faster time to value with pre-built features, frequent vendor-managed upgrades, ongoing technical support, and a community of users sharing best practices. Costs are predictable on a per-seat basis. The vast majority of organisations find that a well-configured commercial platform meets their needs at a fraction of the cost and risk of a custom build.

Recommended for most organisations.



The Path to the Right Solution



A structured approach to intranet selection reduces project risk, improves stakeholder buy-in, and dramatically increases the likelihood of long-term adoption success.

Navigating the Vendor Landscape: Understanding Solution Categories

The intranet market is large, varied, and often confusing. Vendors use similar language to describe fundamentally different products. Before evaluating specific platforms, you must first understand the three distinct architectural categories — and determine which one aligns with your organisation's needs, existing technology investments, and long-term strategy.

Beyond the Feature Grid: Three Distinct Architectural Approaches

⚠️ Choosing the wrong intranet category is one of the most expensive mistakes an organisation can make. Category fit must be determined **before** evaluating specific vendors or features.

Enterprise intranet solutions are not a uniform category. Comparing platforms across categories on a feature-by-feature basis is misleading — it conflates products designed for fundamentally different deployment models, total cost structures, and organisational profiles. Understanding the three architectural categories is the essential first step in any serious evaluation process.

1

SaaS Packaged Platforms

Purpose-built, cloud-hosted intranet products

2

SharePoint-Based Solutions

Microsoft infrastructure with experience layers

3

Custom-Built Platforms

Open-framework builds for unique requirements



Category 1: SaaS Packaged Platforms

Purpose-built intranet products delivered as fully managed cloud services. Leading examples include **Simplr**, **Staffbase**, **Workvivo**, **LumApps**, and **Unily**. These platforms are designed from the ground up for the intranet use case, offering rich out-of-the-box functionality for communications, engagement, and employee experience.



Fully Managed Infrastructure

The vendor manages all updates, security patching, infrastructure scaling, and compliance — freeing your IT team from operational burden.



Predictable Per-Seat Pricing

Organisations pay a recurring per-employee fee, making budgeting straightforward. Total cost of ownership is typically lower than build or SharePoint paths.



Rapid Deployment

Most SaaS platforms can be deployed and configured within weeks rather than months, accelerating time to value for the business.

Category 2: SharePoint-Based Solutions

The Microsoft Ecosystem Play

SharePoint-based intranets leverage Microsoft 365 infrastructure, often layered with **Microsoft Viva** or third-party experience platforms such as Interact or Powell Software. Organisations already invested in the Microsoft 365 ecosystem frequently default to this path — sometimes without fully evaluating the alternatives.

What to Consider

The **real total cost** of a SharePoint-based intranet extends well beyond the M365 licence. Organisations must account for the experience layer (Viva or third-party), governance complexity, content migration, and the ongoing effort required to maintain and improve the environment. SharePoint's flexibility is a strength — but only for teams with sufficient internal expertise to realise it.

- ① Best suited to organisations with strong Microsoft 365 adoption, dedicated IT resource, and governance maturity.

Category 3: Purpose-Built Custom Platforms

Some organisations have requirements so specific — in terms of integration complexity, regulatory compliance, or user experience — that no commercial product adequately addresses them. In these cases, a custom-built intranet on an open framework such as **Drupal** may be the right strategic choice.

Full Architectural Control

Every element of the platform — information architecture, data flows, integrations, and UX — is designed to your exact specification.

No Per-Seat Fees

Higher upfront build cost, but no ongoing per-user licensing. Economically attractive at very large scale (50,000+ employees).

Organisational Fit

Ideal for large, complex enterprises with dedicated development teams, unique workflows, and long-term commitment to the platform.

⊗ Custom builds carry the highest risk of cost overrun, timeline slippage, and long-term maintenance burden. Proceed only with clear justification.

Choosing the Right Architecture



SAAS PACKAGED PLATFORMS:

Fast deployment, vendor-managed, per-seat cost. BEST FOR MOST ORGANISATIONS.



SHAREPOINT-BASED SOLUTIONS:

Microsoft ecosystem, flexible, requires IT expertise, complex, complex governance.



CUSTOM-BUILT PLATFORMS:

Maximum control, high upfront cost, no per-seat fees. LARGE ENTERPRISES ONLY.

Use this framework to align your organisation's profile — size, technical capability, Microsoft investment, and budget — with the category most likely to deliver long-term value before engaging any specific vendor.

Extending Your Intranet: App Plugins & Enhanced Functionality

A modern intranet is not a closed system — it is an extensible platform. The most successful intranet deployments combine a strong core platform with a carefully selected ecosystem of specialist plugins that address specific workforce needs in areas such as employee engagement, HR automation, and knowledge management.

The Power of Plugins: Supercharging Your Intranet

Out-of-the-box intranet platforms provide an excellent foundation, but no single vendor can be best-in-class across every functional domain. **App plugins and integrations** allow organisations to extend their intranet with specialist tools, ensuring employees have access to the right capabilities — without switching between disparate systems. The result is a unified digital workplace experience that drives engagement, reduces friction, and automates routine processes.

→ **Employee Engagement**

Recognition, surveys, social features, and community tools that build culture and connection.

→ **HR Automation**

Onboarding workflows, policy management, leave requests, and performance tools.

→ **Knowledge Management**

Wikis, expert directories, AI-powered search, and content governance tools.

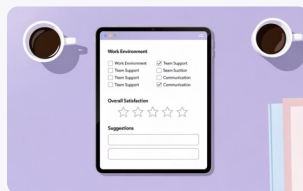
Employee Engagement Plugins

Employee engagement is the most impactful area for intranet plugin investment. These tools transform the intranet from a passive information repository into an active, social environment where employees feel recognised, heard, and connected.



Recognition & Rewards

Peer-to-peer recognition platforms (e.g., Reward Gateway, Kudos, Bonusly) allow employees to celebrate each other's contributions publicly, driving a culture of appreciation and belonging. Recognition moments are surfaced directly within the intranet feed, maximising visibility.



Surveys & Feedback

Pulse survey tools (e.g., Officevibe, Culture Amp, Qualtrics) enable regular check-ins on employee sentiment, idea generation, and satisfaction. Embedded within the intranet, participation rates are significantly higher than standalone survey emails.



Social & Community Features

Forums, interest groups, activity feeds, and social walls foster informal connections and community. These features are particularly valuable for distributed and hybrid teams who lack natural in-person interaction.

HR Automation Plugins

Integrating HR automation tools into your intranet reduces administrative burden, improves the employee lifecycle experience, and frees HR teams to focus on strategic priorities rather than repetitive transactional tasks.

1

Onboarding Workflows

Streamlined digital onboarding journeys for new hires — including task lists, welcome messages, policy acknowledgements, and introductions to team members — all accessible from day one within the intranet.

2

Policy & Document Management

A centralised, version-controlled, and fully searchable repository for HR policies, employee handbooks, and compliance documentation. Ensures employees always access the most current information.

3

Leave Management

Self-service portals for submitting, tracking, and approving time-off requests — integrated with payroll and HRIS systems to eliminate duplicate data entry and approval bottlenecks.

4

Performance Management

Tools for goal setting, continuous feedback, 360-degree reviews, and appraisal workflows — embedded within the intranet so that performance conversations happen in context, not in isolation.

Unlock Your Intranet's Potential

The most effective intranet ecosystems combine a strong core platform with a curated selection of specialist plugins — creating a unified digital workplace that employees genuinely want to use every day.

3x

Higher Engagement

Intranets with embedded recognition tools see up to 3x higher employee engagement scores.

40%

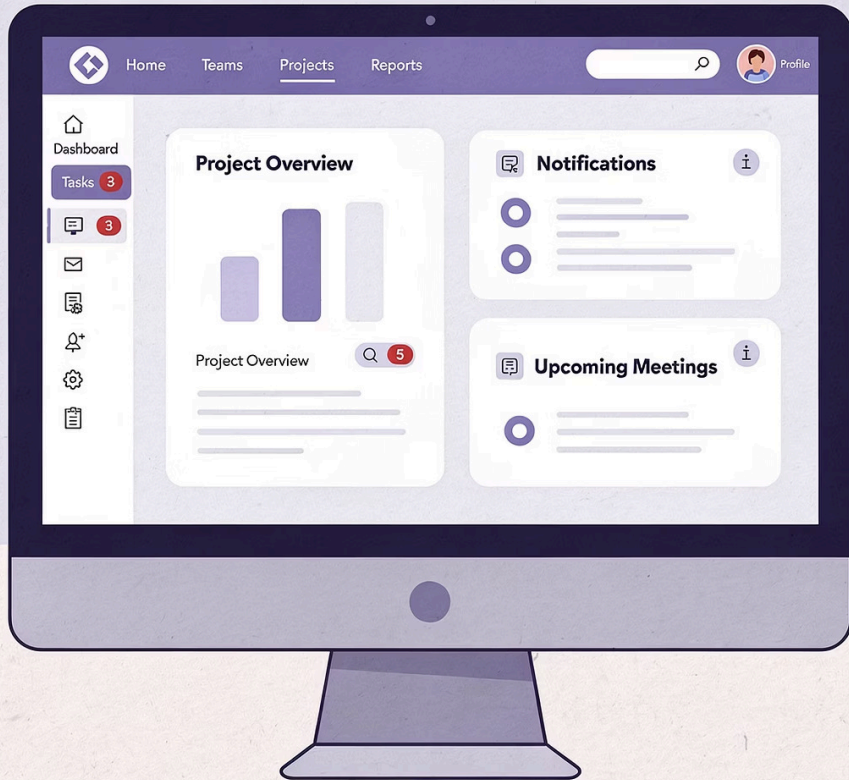
Faster Onboarding

Digital onboarding workflows reduce new hire time-to-productivity by up to 40%.

60%

Less HR Admin

Self-service HR plugins can reduce routine HR administration workload by up to 60%.



The Future of Intranets: AI & the Evolving Employee Experience

Artificial intelligence is reshaping what intranets can do — and how quickly they can do it. From intelligent search to hyper-personalised content and automated workflows, AI is elevating the intranet from a passive information store to a proactive digital assistant for every employee in your organisation.

AI-Powered Intranets: The Next Frontier

What AI Brings to the Intranet

Leading vendors are rapidly embedding AI capabilities across their platforms. Key developments include **semantic search** (understanding intent, not just keywords), **personalised content feeds** (surfacing relevant news and tasks based on role, location, and behaviour), **AI-generated content suggestions** for communicators, and **conversational interfaces** that allow employees to query the intranet in natural language.

Why It Matters for Your Evaluation

AI maturity is now a **key differentiator** between platforms in 2025 and beyond. When evaluating vendors, ask specifically about their AI roadmap, what is available today versus in development, and how AI features integrate with your existing Microsoft 365 or Google Workspace environment. Avoid vendors with vague AI promises — look for tangible, deployed features.

- 📘 Key AI features to evaluate: semantic search, personalised news feeds, smart notifications, AI-assisted content creation, and natural language Q&A.

A Platform for Sustained Adoption and ROI

Technology is only as valuable as its adoption rate. The most sophisticated intranet in the world delivers zero ROI if employees don't use it. Sustained adoption requires deliberate strategy from day one — not a big-bang launch followed by silence.



Make It Personal

Personalised content, role-based dashboards, and relevant notifications make the intranet feel like it was built for each individual — dramatically increasing daily active use.



Invest in Champions

Identify and empower intranet champions across departments and locations to drive grassroots adoption, gather feedback, and model best-practice usage behaviours.



Measure and Iterate

Use your intranet's analytics dashboard to track adoption, content performance, and search patterns. Treat the intranet as a live product — regularly reviewing and improving based on real employee behaviour data.



Your Intranet: The Heart of Your Digital Workplace

The organisations that thrive in the modern digital workplace will be those that invest in a connected, intelligent, and people-centric intranet experience. Start with strategy, choose your architecture wisely, extend with purpose-built plugins, and commit to adoption for the long term.

✓ Define Requirements First

Align on goals before evaluating vendors

🏗️ Match Category to Context

SaaS, SharePoint, or Custom — choose deliberately

🔌 Extend with Plugins

Engagement and HR tools amplify your core platform

🤖 Plan for AI

Prioritise vendors with mature, deployed AI features