

What is an Intranet?

The internal communication ecosystem that boosts your entire company's productivity.

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During a typical workday, how many apps do you and your team use to communicate, manage schedules, and organize and share files?

If you're not using intranet software, that number is probably pretty high.

Maybe you use Dropbox for file sharing, Google Calendar for event and meeting planning, Slack for chat, Asana for task management and SharePoint for cultivating the company culture. You probably use even more tools than that for project management, email, employee engagement, troubleshooting and content creation.

This leaves you with 10 tabs open on your browser on any given day – and few of those tools actually talk to each other. STOP the madness! You don't need 10 different apps for all of that.

An intranet will help you centralize everything.

If you want to get technical:

an *Intranet* is a private, secured online network where employees can create content, communicate, collaborate, manage tasks and events, and develop the company culture.

It's your company home-base, team touchpoint, central repository, multi-functional communication tool and more. Like an internal communications ecosystem, an intranet is so much more than the sum of its parts.

Read on to discover what an intranet is, and how each feature works in connection to the others to create one powerful, versatile platform.

Communication hub:

End email overwhelm.

First, an intranet is a communication hub for everyone in your company.

It helps your company communication in three ways:

- 1. Leadership to employee (i.e. top-down communications)
- 2. Employee to leadership (i.e. employee feedback)
- 3. Employee to employee (i.e. team conversation)

What does this mean for you?

Let's break it down.

An intranet declutters your email and voicemail while ensuring you're not missing important conversations.

Have you ever forgotten to cc someone on an important email? Have you missed an update because an email got lost in your inbox, or a message was accidentally deleted from your voicemail? Or have you been caught in a "reply-all" email flood?

You can probably say "yes" to most, if not all, of those questions. *An intranet eliminates this problem*.

You can make announcements, share ideas and coordinate on projects without clogging up your team's inbox and losing track of threads.

An intranet gives you many ways to communicate, and simplifies both real-time and asynchronous communication. You can chat privately with a teammate, have a group conversation, make organizational announcements, and post blogs and articles *all within the same platform*.

In fact, removing email from the work environment would free between 7% and 8% of workers' time for more productive tasks, according to this McKinsey study¹.

Check out these startling internal communications stats²:

- The average open rate of all internal communications emails sent -- including newsletters, bulletins and events – is 48%
- The average click-through rate of those communications is only 23%.

It's clear that a high percentage of company communications go *completely unopened*. If you actually want your email recipients to read your communications, email is not your best bet.

An intranet makes it easy to gather employee feedback.

Employee feedback is the cornerstone of employee engagement. It's the most effective way to gauge employee satisfaction, identify employee development gaps and uncover problems before they lead to employee turnover.

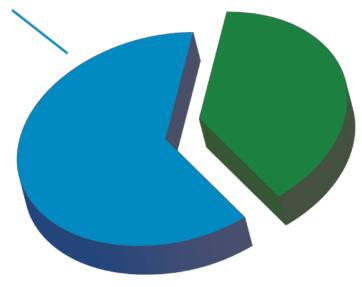
Many companies are using <u>employee engagement surveys</u> to gather this feedback. That's great! What's not so great is that the results sit in a third-party tool, and are often siloed in different departments.

Gathering employee feedback using an intranet with built-in survey tools solves this problem. The results remain within your in-house network, and you can easily share it with other teams and cross-reference the data with other records.

Plus, you have the added benefit of gathering feedback using a tool your employees are already spending time in every day – increasing the odds that they will actually respond to your questions.

Enabling communication in the workplace can have a huge impact on employee satisfaction, too.

62% of employees dislike their job due to **COMMUNICATION ISSUES**



^{*}humanresources.about.com, April 2, 2014

The top three causes of negativity at work are all communication-related, according to a poll from About.com:

- Lack of direction from management: 38%
- Poor communication overall: 14%
- Constant change that's not well-communicated: 12%

Collaboration facilitator:

Hang up on the telephone game.

When you were a kid, you probably played the Telephone Game with your friends. The first player would whisper something in the next player's ear, and that person would whisper what they heard into the next player's ear – and so on. The last kid in line would state out loud what they heard whispered in their ear. More often than not, it was hilariously different than the original message.

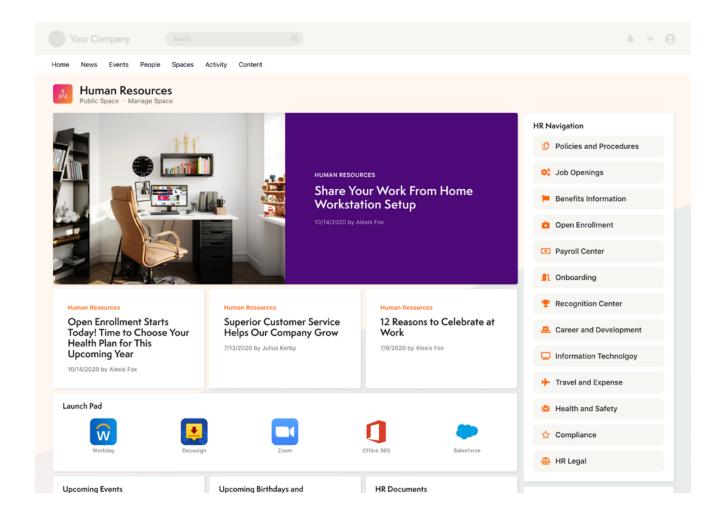
That's a fun game when you're a kid. But in business, miscommunication can derail entire projects.

When multiple people are collaborating on something – whether it's a client project or ordering a cake for an upcoming employee birthday celebration – it's critical that you have one centralized location to gather content and communicate with one another.

An intranet makes it easy for your team to work together and get things done.

Most intranet platforms allow you to create some kind of team page or project page. Axero approaches this a little different with <u>spaces</u>.

An Axero space is a hub where you can collaborate and share content with others. It can be public or invite-only, and you can even nest it within another space to streamline organization.



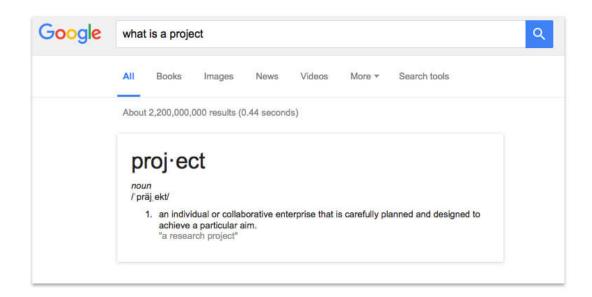
You can create a space for anything you like, including:

- Projects
- Departments and teams
- Customer extranets
- Knowledge bases
- · Onboarding and employee training
- Marketing campaigns
- User groups
- Product/service launches

With an intranet, you can organize your communications, tasks and content any way you like to make collaboration *child's play*.

An intranet simplifies task management and project management.

First, let's define "project." Google's definition is "an individual or collaborative enterprise that is carefully planned and designed to achieve a particular aim."



So a project could be something you're doing for a client or customer, sure – but it could also be organizing a team event, spurring a volunteer effort or making an organizational change. If you have an end goal in mind and a plan to get there, you have a project.

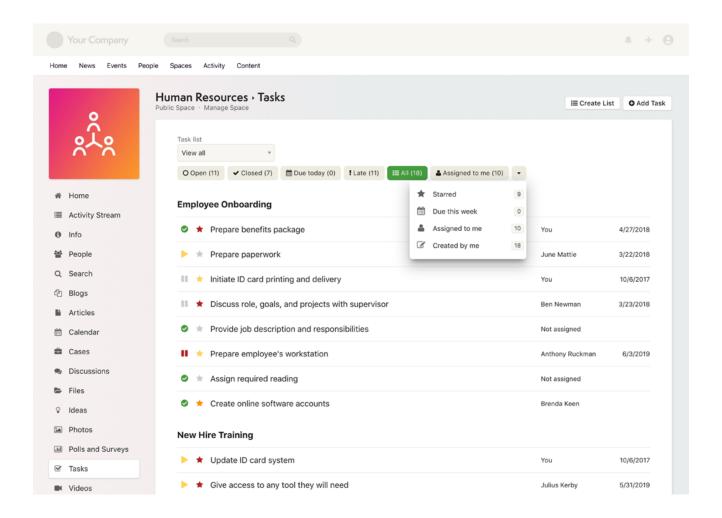
Every project needs management on some level. And every project boils down to a list of tasks.

An intranet allows you to manage projects and tasks in the same platform. The platform you're using every day for so many other business activities.

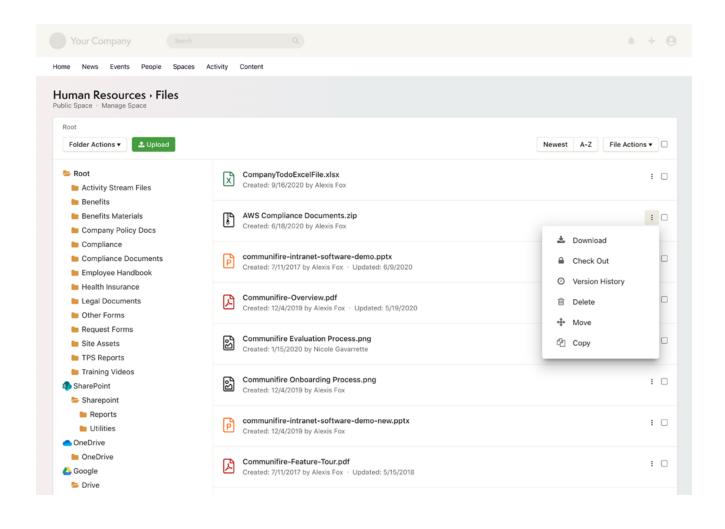
Even better, an intranet lets you *and your team* manage your project all the way to completion. You can track your progress in real time, resolve issues without a flurry

of emails, and follow related conversations to get deeper insight on challenges and resources.

Task management features make it easy to track your own tasks, assign tasks to others and check the completion of project-related tasks.



You can share files and data on projects and tasks all in the same place. No more linking to Dropbox for this, and sharing a Google Doc for that.



An intranet streamlines internal customer service.

Accounting, human resources, marketing, technical support – no matter the department, you can consolidate standard business processes and communicate solutions within an intranet. Here are a few to get you started:

- Post company policy documents
- Create a support forum, knowledge base or wiki

- Make company-wide or department-specific announcements
- · Enable real-time chat for quick problem solving
- Publish a how-to video

Because it is a private network, and you are able to create specific pages (or spaces) for specific needs, you can easily tailor information to your company, team or department. In Axero, you can mark a thread on a post as an answer to a question to make it part of your searchable reference material. This makes creating self-serve customer service tools incredibly easy.

All the communication and collaboration tools within an intranet make interactive help a snap. Chat, forums, public conversation threads and private messages are just a few ways your experts can assist others in your company.



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Yes, I'd Like to See a Demo

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Knowledge management and file sharing app:

Ditch the digging for documents.

How many locations do you have to search through to find a file right now? Your hard drive, Dropbox, Box, Google Drive, OneDrive, the company website ... probably even more locations than that.

What if a file is in more than one of those locations? Which one is the right file? Which one is the most recent?

It's enough to make your head spin. Intranet to the rescue ...

An intranet enables you to organize and centralize documents and files.

File management, knowledge management and versioning are just some of the ways you can use an intranet to your advantage. Whether you upload a file directly to the intranet, or you add a link to a file kept elsewhere, you can keep it up-to-date so the next time someone looks for it, they have the right version in hand.

- Create a document repository, such as an HR page for onboarding documents.
- Add a file to a project so your team has quick access to it.
- Send files via chat an intranet like Axero will keep that conversation archived for you to reference later.

Organize your documents and files any way you like. If you can't remember where you put something, simply use the search bar to find it.

Axero has additional file history and versioning capabilities, too. You can see when a file was last updated – or roll it back to an earlier version.

An intranet improves productivity.

Sharing, finding and storing files and documents *lightning fast* saves you time – of course. But it also saves you frustration and stress. Sometimes it can even make the difference between a project succeeding or failing.

Imagine you're coming to the end of a client project. Your team is ready to hand over the deliverable. When you manage your project using a space in Axero, you can be sure you're grabbing the right document to send to the client.

Or imagine you just hired a new team member. Are the onboarding files on your hard drive current? You could email the HR team to find out – or, if you use an intranet, you can go straight to the HR page and pull the most recent and updated onboarding documents for your new employee.

Intranet software could reduce the time spent searching for information by 35%, freeing 6% of the workweek for other tasks, according to a study¹ from McKinsey Global Institute.

An intranet allows you to create a living internal knowledge base.

Create a knowledge base in your intranet to house frequently referenced files and documents such as:

- Company policy & procedures
- Benefits materials
- News articles and announcements
- Frequently asked questions

- Photos of employee activities (volunteering, corporate hang outs, picnics, etc.)
- Promotional or training videos
- Company handbook
- Newsletters
- Links to helpful tools and files

But don't stop there. Pay attention to questions being asked in forums, conversations happening within your team or department, and cases or tickets logged with support teams. Because all of this is happening within the same platform – your company intranet – it's easy to add new information to your knowledge base, or turn a conversation into FAQ material.

In Axero, there's a feature called *ideas*. This acts as an ideation tool or public suggestion box. Your team members can add ideas there, and others can weigh in and add their own thoughts – so you can get a feel for what items you should take action on.

Internal social networking platform:

Cease the silos.

Your HR team has important knowledge about employee satisfaction. Your accounting or financial team knows where your budget stands. Your marketing team has industry research that would make a huge impact on your sales efforts. On your own team, Bob knows a lot about the technology you use. Sally is an expert at making sales.

In a typical company, there are barriers between people and between departments. Those barriers arise from physical distance, distinct knowledge areas and organizational structure, among other things. These barriers create silos that separate employees from each other – and separate your company knowledge as well.

An intranet serves as an internal social networking platform that simplifies and improves communication and knowledge-sharing between employees, organizational levels, teams and departments.

Get your team talking to one another – and to other teams, too. Make it easy for employees to find each other, and for managers to learn more about their direct reports. With an intranet, you can break conversations and knowledge-sharing out of the silos that inevitably arise as your company grows.

An intranet creates channels for employees to communicate.

In an intranet, discussions, chats and private messages help employees communicate with one another without ever leaving their desks, picking up the phone or sending an email. It sparks conversation that otherwise might never happen – creating a truly collaborative environment for your employees.

Axero includes social networking features such as "like" buttons, five-star rating controls, and commenting capabilities, too. These features motivate people to engage with content and conversations.

Public discussion threads give your team members a voice and empower them to share their ideas and enable them to vote on others' ideas. They connect geographically dispersed teams to encourage teamwork.

But let's not leave out your company leadership! An intranet makes it easy to communicate organizational changes, publicize the company mission and values, and share plans and goals – without taking up your employees' inbox space.

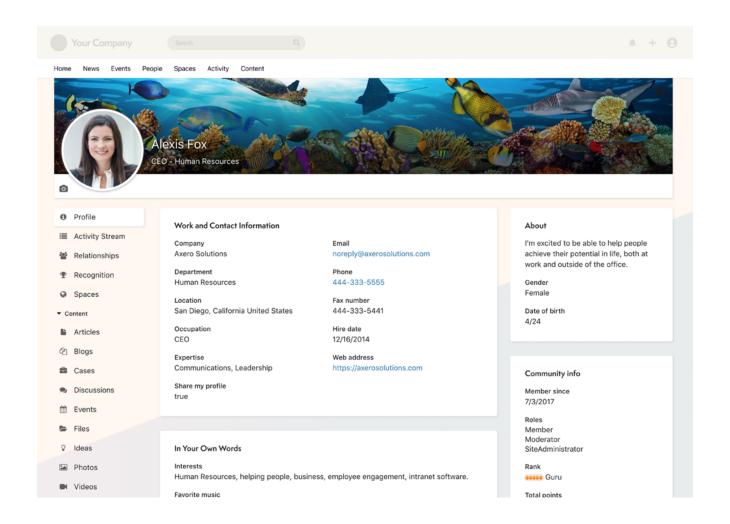
An intranet helps people find and learn about one another.

Many companies today have dispersed teams. Employees are in different office locations. Some may even work from home. It can be hard for people to really connect to one another – even though they may work together every day. Intranet software helps to bridge this gap.

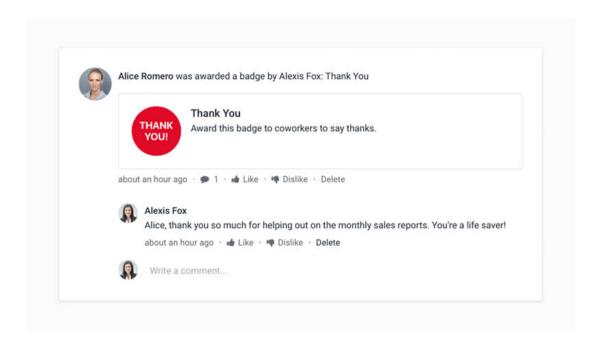
The employee directory within your intranet helps employees find one another, learn about one another and create a sense of community – even when they're in different locations.

- Quickly find team members for an event invitation list.
- Discover a team member's skills, work history and achievements so you know exactly who to contact to solve an issue or fill a role.
- Connect with other team members to create a community around a topic, project or idea.

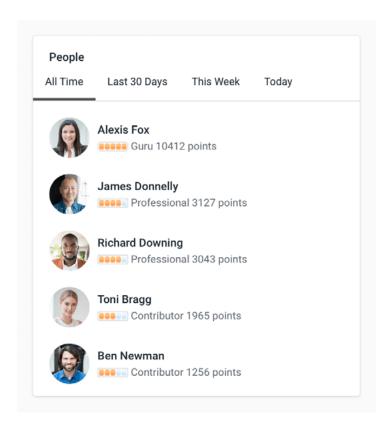
In Axero, you can use the search feature to find people across the company based on their name, team affiliation, contact information, relationships and even the content they've authored.



Axero gives you even more ways to connect and motivate your team members with *badges*. Badges are public (or private, if you choose) shout-outs that appear on a person's personal profile. Give your teammate a thank-you badge for a job well done. Send a star employee a trophy badge to mark a big achievement. Earn a badge when you master a new skill or gain a certification.



You can even assign point values to different badges so individuals can improve their rank with each new badge.



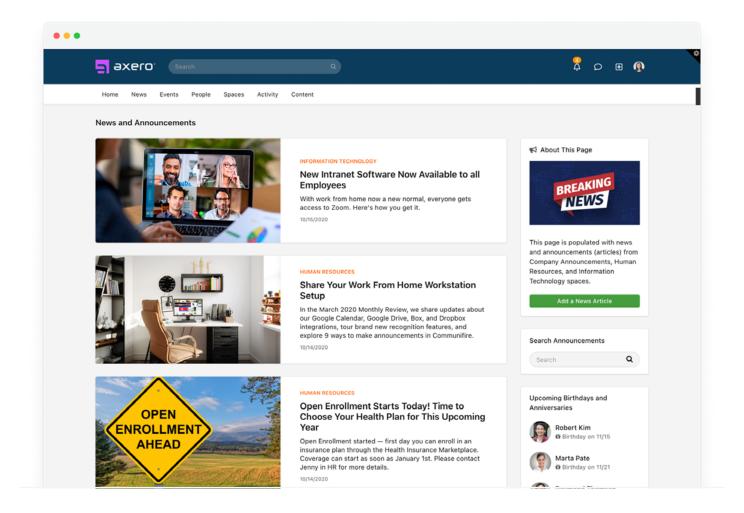
An intranet allows you to create, publish and share content across teams, departments and the entire company.

What do you do when you need to learn something? You probably go straight to Google, right?

Think of an intranet like your company Google search. Your employees and leaders can create and publish content such as blogs and articles, and share it publicly or with specific people. And everyone can find this company-specific content quickly and easily by just punching keywords into the search box.

Empower your leaders to share their knowledge, and turn your employees into leaders by empowering them to share their ideas. An intranet allows anyone to author content, share it, and let others comment on it, consume it and use it to do their job.

- Write blog posts about trends impacting your industry.
- Write how-to posts to teach others a new skill.
- Share a big team win, publicly.
- Build up excitement about a launch.
- Communicate a new strategy or process.
- Upload a fun picture or video to lighten the mood.



All content is searchable – no matter what format it's in. You can organize your content by group (or space), add tags to help people filter content by topic, or make content available only to certain people or teams.

When you post updates, upload new files or comment on content, people in your spaces will see a notification on their own activity stream (no annoying pop-ups – don't worry!). This makes it easy to share knowledge and keep everyone on the same page.

Employee engagement and development center:

Eliminate employee dissatisfaction.

You know that employee engagement is tied directly to your company's bottom line. When employees are engaged with their work, they're more productive and motivated. This leads to happier customers and less employee turnover – both of which strongly affect your numbers.

Hold onto your hat and get a load of these stats:

- 71% of employees of large companies are disengaged, according to a study³ from Dale Carnegie Training.
- Gallup Research⁴ found that number to be closer to 70%, and discovered that 18% of those disengaged employees are *actively* disengaged. In other words, potentially hurting the company they're working for.

Engaged employees are more loyal. They advocate for your product or service to customers. They actively build their knowledge and share ideas about how to improve processes.

Disengaged employees are unproductive. They negatively impact customer satisfaction. They monopolize their managers' time and sow seeds of discontent within their teams. *Actively* disengaged employees may actually seek to damage your company.

In fact, work units that scored in the top half on employee engagement nearly doubled their odds of success compared to work units scoring in the bottom half, according to a Gallup research study⁵.

Employee development opportunities can mitigate some of the problems caused by disengaged employees. By giving employees access to the tools and resources they need to improve their skills and grow in their roles, they are empowered to take control of their careers. This can also help them feel more of a connection with your company.

An intranet can help you improve employee engagement while developing your employees' skills and motivating them along their chosen career paths.

An intranet helps everyone align to the company's mission, vision and values.

Can every employee recite the mission, vision and values of your company?

Probably not.

Only 42% of employees know their organization's vision, mission and values, according to a TINYpulse survey⁶ of 40,000 employees around the world.

Yet ensuring that everyone knows this information is the first step to ensuring everyone is aligned to it and emotionally attached to it – and working toward goals that move your company forward. Employee engagement improves when you forge strong ties between your workforce and your mission, vision and values.

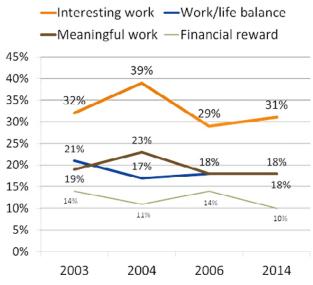
An intranet makes it easy to communicate and reinforce this information with everyone in a central location. You can share it in many formats, and segment and target your audience. You can also reinforce it in a multitude of ways, like including it in blogs, discussions, articles, photos, and videos, or even creating pages to promote your brand.

An intranet streamlines employee development.

Career development is a critical piece of employee engagement. When you help employees advance in their careers, it improves their satisfaction and lowers the chances that they will start looking for opportunities elsewhere.

Financial incentive isn't always the biggest motivating factor in employee satisfaction.

"I don't think there is anything wrong with staying in the same job if I can try new things or develop my skills," — a study⁷ from BlessingWhite Research found that 88% of employees agree with that statement. But only 28% of employees are confident that they will stay with their current employer when they make their next career move.



(Image source: BlessingWhite Research, Navigating Ambiguity – 2014 Career Research 7)

There is obviously a huge gap between the development resources employees need and what most employers are providing.

An intranet streamlines the process of providing and tracking employee development efforts, making it more likely that great employees will stick around:

- Centralize and organize your training documentation and best practices.
- Gather feedback to improve employee development programs.
- Make company culture accessible to everyone.
- Track the progress of individuals, and enable them track their own career evolution.

An intranet empowers your employees to connect, take action and grow their careers.

When you rely on email for internal communication, it's easy for people to feel disconnected. Important updates get lost in overstuffed inboxes. Opportunities get missed. It's almost impossible for people to build real relationships with one another. This leads to employees feeling left out, or worse, unimportant.

An intranet ensures that everyone has access to all the information they need – every update, every opportunity, every strategy shift. You can make information completely public, or tailor it to specific people.

It also gives your employees a voice. They can share their ideas publicly, have conversations with peers and leadership, and really engage in the workplace. Even shy employees will feel more empowered to speak their minds, because they can direct their comments to specific individuals or groups.

An intranet also enables employees to take action in their roles and in their careers:

- Take ownership of projects, tasks and initiatives.
- · Share innovative ideas.
- Respond to opportunities.
- Keep track of their goal progress.
- Suggest process improvements.
- Seek further training and education.
- Find out what other teams are doing and scope out possible career moves.

Leadership and communication strategist Steve Roesler outlined 10 questions⁸ that help you to engage employees in the workplace – all of which are easy for you to ask and answer using an intranet solution:

Ten questions designed to engage

- 1. How can I help you right now?
- 2. What else do you need from me for this project?
- 3. To whom can I introduce you to help make this happen?
- 4. When can we get together to discuss our progress?
- 5. What can we do to make this just a little bit better?
- 6. How am I doing based on our agreement for this?
- 7. Who else can we include?
- 8. What other information can I provide?
- 9. How can I best support the others in the group?
- 10. What else would be helpful to discuss?



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Scheduling tool:

Beat the back and forth.

Scheduling and keeping track of meetings, important dates and events is part of everyday life in the workplace.

How many tools are you using to manage all of that right now?

If you answered "more than one," you're wasting time and losing productivity.

An intranet makes meeting planning easy and encourages employee participation.

Emailing your team to ask them what time would work for everyone for the next meeting is inefficient at best. It results in a lot of unnecessary back-and-forth – and sometimes people accidentally get left out of the loop altogether.

Schedule smarter using the shared calendars in your company intranet. Get a quick view of your entire team's availability and schedule your meeting for a time that works for everyone – without the email back-and-forth, and without switching tools.

In Axero, you can even encourage team-meeting attendance through gamification. Reward attendance and participation by assigning points. Publish the leaderboard on your team's homepage and offer incentives for people who reach a certain number of points.

Not everyone needs to attend every meeting you schedule. About 37% of employee time is spent in meetings⁹ – and unproductive meetings cost companies more than \$37 billion annually¹⁰. Using the people finder in Axero, you can view people's public profiles and gauge if they need to be at your meeting at all.

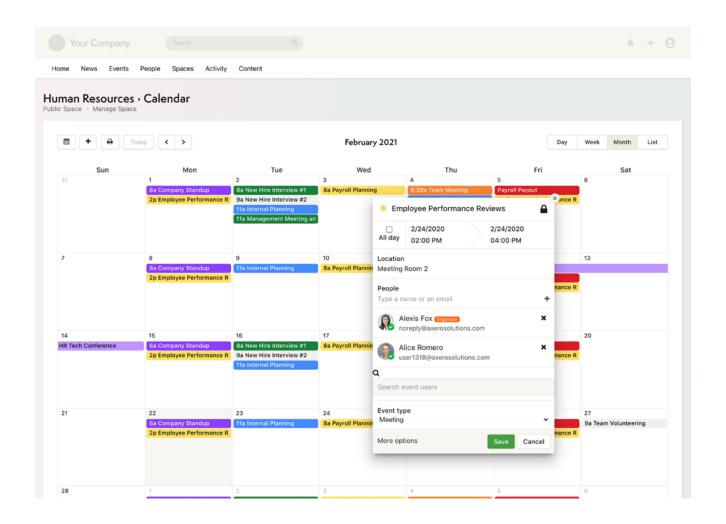
Need a rule-of-thumb for meeting sizes? Jeff Bezos follows the Two Pizza Rule¹¹. If it takes more than two pizzas to feed everyone in the room, there are too many people in the meeting.

An intranet helps you create irresistible events.

Like with meeting scheduling, you can use your intranet to view calendars and pick the best event time for everyone. When you're putting on a big event, however, people need more information than just the date and time.

- Add a detailed description of the event.
- Upload photos and videos to build anticipation and post more after the event to capture the memories.
- Provide directions or a link to a map.
- Share recommendations for places to eat, shop or play tourist.

Make your event public or share it with specific people. In Axero, you can even add tags so anyone can find your public event by using the search box or event filters.



"Do I need an Intranet?"

Yes, and here's why.

Now you understand what an intranet is. You also understand how an intranet like Axero can help with internal communication, collaboration, knowledge management, file sharing, content creation, employee engagement and scheduling. It really is an all-in-one solution – a hub – for your team, organization and company.

For managers:

- Connect, empower and engage your team.
- Communicate with everyone or just one person.
- Spread your company's mission, vision and values, as well as plans and goals.
- Find out what's on your employees' minds.
- Share documents and files.

For employees:

- Connect with one another, managers and executive leadership.
- Stay abreast of what's happening within the team or across the company.
- · Find opportunities for growth and development.
- Share thoughts and ideas.
- Find and organize documents and files without having to use multiple tools.

Every growing organization can benefit from an intranet. If you're still in doubt, ask yourself these 10 questions:

- 1. Would it save you a lot of time and frustration if you could consolidate all the tools and apps you use into *one* platform?
- 2. Do you still use email for all of your internal communication?
- 3. Do your employees struggle to remember your mission, vision and values?
- 4. Do you wonder if every employee has easy access to relevant career and development opportunities?
- 5. Do you often struggle to find the documents and files you need?
- 6. Do you find it's difficult to know what's on your employees' minds at any given time?
- 7. Do messages from your teammates and colleagues sometimes get buried in your overstuffed inbox, making it difficult for them to share thoughts and ideas with you?
- 8. Does your top-level leadership have no way to communicate to every team and employee without sending out a mass email?
- 9. Is your company culture sometimes inaccessible to employees who work from home or at non-central office locations?
- 10. Would you, your team and your company benefit from more engaged employees?

If you answered "yes" to most of those questions, you need an intranet.

5 surprising ways to use an intranet.

Intranets can do a lot of really amazing things for organizations and institutions.

They improve communication and collaboration. They make knowledge management and file sharing a snap. They help people manage their calendars, schedule meetings and organize events. They also increase employee engagement.

But the greatest thing about an intranet?

Its flexibility.

So think outside the box when it comes to how you use your intranet.

Get creative with it.

Have fun with it.

Use it in ways that make work-life better for you and your entire team.

Here are five ideas to spark your imagination.

1. Create an employee celebration space

There's a lot to celebrate in the workplace. Birthdays, milestones and big life events are worth more than just a "congratulations" email, don't you think?

Create a space within your team intranet where everyone can join in the well-wishes, compliments and congrats. Encourage everyone to post personal messages and pics celebrating the employee on their special day.

2. Connect executive leadership to individual contributors

The disconnect between executive-level leadership and individual contributors is often cited as a cause of employee dissatisfaction. An intranet can help bridge that gap by improving communication between leadership and staff.

Encourage your CEO (or other executive-level leader) to post a weekly or monthly message to employees. This is a great way to rally the troops, reinforce the mission, vision and values of the company, and really *connect* people at every level.

3. Create a team or company "store" space

Axero allows you to assign point values to different activities, such as meeting attendance, discussion participation and initiating improvement projects. Motivate employees to accumulate those points by creating a "store" where they can exchange points for merchandise.

Add things like company t-shirts, branded mugs, and restaurant gift certificates to the store, and assign a point value to each item.

4. Create a new-hire welcome space

It's hard to be the new guy. And it can be hard to welcome a new employee to the team when you know nothing about them. Give new-hires a warm welcome and help the team get to know their new teammate by creating a space dedicated to embracing new hires.

When someone new joins the team, give them a list of questions to answer in a message on the page so the whole team can get to know them. Make sure to add their picture to the page, too, so everyone can put a face to a name!

5. Create a team library

Reading business, motivational and how-to books is a great way for everyone to grow in their work and personal lives. Make it easy for everyone to get their hands on great books by creating a team library. A manager (a.k.a. the "librarian") can gather books they find helpful or motivational for employees, then share which books are available on the team library page. Team members can "check out" the books and rack up points for each book read.



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Why your company needs an intranet platform.

A guide to achieving greater freedom in the way you work.

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How to launch your intranet.

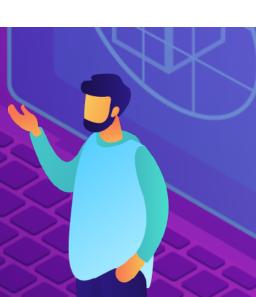
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