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Getting a job can be a tough task, especially if you're looking for a high-paying job. It is available on tons of tools that can help you find it. Learn more about them in this section. Diane Watkins has a lot to teach about her specialty, which sells car and pet insurance. As a senior marketing specialist for State Farm Insurance in the Philadelphia suburbs, Watkins helps agents make the most of their sales territories. Last spring, she gave 10 of the best advice in writing - and published them to a debate committee at a nationwide farm. The next thing that happened, every sales manager's dream came true: within days, a dozen agents on the home website added their tips. For example, a state farm rep in Flushing, New York, explained how to get referrals in the Asian community. Other agents have discussed ways to get only customers to consider buying other types of state farm insurance. By early June, more than 40 agents from across the United States had joined the debate, and hundreds had read the posts. Frighteningly, State Farm did not use any tricks and did not offer any rewards to get its agents chatting. He simply created the title Best Practices, posted Watkins' first comments - and then let his agents take over. Everyone wants to help with something similar, says Owen Townsend, a technology specialist at The State Farm headquarters in Bloomington, Illinois. People like to see their names in the press. When you contribute to something similar, you rise to the status of an expert. Such online brainstorming is perhaps the most important success story of the digital economy this year. If there is one area in which internet technology actually delivers more than people expected – rather than missing lavish praise – it is in improving communications and cooperation within the company. Take a look at the intranet of the most advanced companies and you'll see an extraordinary number of ways to use this technology to become smarter, faster, and more efficient. In May, for example, IBM convened 52,600 of its employees online for what it called WorldJam. With the company's intranet, IBMers has changed ideas everywhere about everything from how to keep employees busy from working faster without shrendering quality. This technology is not only exploited by IBM-like giants; smaller companies do so. In organizations of almost every size, well-run intranets are transforming chained tasks and allowing them to achieve routine tasks faster, better and cheaper. Internal websites also make it easier for workers than ever to download do-minute businesses and industrial news. And they're opening up new ways for business associates in remote locations to reproduce together. So how to build a great intranet? Quickly with smart business users and fast-growing intranet builders. Here are seven key elements they've identified. Of all the ways to invest in technology, he has rarely beaten a quick comeback by putting employee records online. Do you need to file a cost report? You give me a performance review? Add a new baby to your health plan? If you use paper forms to do any of this, then you've got things that have been done in an uncathing way that has barely evolved since the 1920s.. Go to the Internet and you will find that all kinds of paper processing drudgery will disappear. If we cover up random expenses like that, no one's going to end up on the cover of Time magazine. However, this is a key first step towards integrating a robust intranet into the basic way of working the company. Before a company can devour the benefits of intranet-based collaboration technology, it needs to make sure that most employees are committed to online work – and that its budget bosses are willing to bank intranet initiatives at a time when most of the technology expenditure is squeezed. Otherwise, the bigger dream will never happen. In a widely cited 1997 study, American Express found that in a typical company where paper still dominated, the average cost of handling a single account cost $36 or more. According to the same study, switching to a fully automated approach could reduce that cost to as much as $8 per account. Paying for employees, given the time savings, can be just as surprising. Online systems can pick up charge card billing data and automatically fill out a large cost form, so your browser already knows that you were 14th in Chicago and that you stayed at the Drake Hotel. You can't type that in yourself. From American Express, employees can fill out highly automated forms in 15 minutes at a time — compared to the 55 minutes it takes to complete each form in the old style. An example is J.P. Morgan Chase & Co., which exports an intranet-based cost system to its U.S. employees. The financial services company achieved some efficiency a few years ago by switching from paper to a computer system based on the client server architecture. But Tom Nolan, project manager for fixed assets and services, says the company can cover costs by an additional 20% to 30%. Managers will be able to electronically approve cost reports – instead of having to sign them the old-fashioned way. The audit can also be carried out electronically, saving time and money. What's more, the new system should be much easier to use for the company's 103,000 employees. It was a struggle to get two-thirds of our employees on to the client-server system, says Nolan. With an intranet, there is no reason not to be at 90% use or higher. Compatibility of the software neha bit problem, on on Forum for Best PracticesStep back for a moment and ask yourself: Why has the public internet come away? Answer: Users have benefited from connecting with so many people, businesses and ideas at the same time. People like to share what they know, what they care about, what they're proud of. A large intranet can also capture some of this magic. Sevin Rosen Funds, a leading VC based in Dallas and Palo Alto, recently created an intranet that aims to share best practices and contact lists with 70 young companies in a wide range of high-tech industries. Take something as crucial as how to conduct a board meeting. A year ago, Sevin Rosen's partners noticed that they spent too much time discussing and ratifying plans for a stock option at their startups. As the partner Steve Domenik notes, the faster the board can deal with the formalities of the options-plan, the more time it needs to talk about how to build a business. Thanks to Sevin Rosen's intranet, even new directors in VC's portfolio companies are now coming to board meetings that are fully versed in the company's mind on the subject. Finally, says Domenik, let's get rid of this long-learning curve, where it took up to 10 board meetings before we really worked together effectively. Another part of The Side Sevin Rosen is hosting startups that want to get their executives on the speaking circuit so they can raise the profiles of their companies and maybe find new customers. Conferences are extensive, but there is the art of finding the right one at the right time – that is, lobbying for speech space in time. Sevin Rosen subscribes to the conference listing service and to the intranet to give detailed information to that service. These were joyous events for ComSpace Corp., a wireless systems startup in Coppell, Texas, and Sevin Rosen's portfolio company. Annette Gieseman, head of marketing at ComSpace, says she was directed by Sevin Rosen to a communications conference in Monterrey, Mexico, due in October. Mexico is a big potential market for ComSpace, so once heard of the conference, it immediately began lobbying organizers to include a speaking slot either for the CEO of their company or for a key ComSpace client. Without the intranet, he says, I would never have known about the occasion. Share Limelight One purpose of the intranet is to tell your employees what's going on in your business. But who should tell? It's easy - and tempting - to give your director an endless output on the homepage. The CEO creates a ready-made offer of intranet-flexible content: monthly memos, speeches to groups of investors and so on. And on big strategic issues, employees, of course, find the CEO to be the prime minister. But there is an argument for spreading such visibility around. If the new brand is a large let the product manager responsible explain what the team did right. If the three geographical regions match the project, people from each region should discuss how the battles on the ground have been written off. Such reports may not be of interest to every employee — but they may be crucial for, for example, 10% or 20% of your workforce. Front-line reports also make it much easier for young managers to feel that the site is important to what they do, says Kevin Salwen, president of Dash30, an Atlanta-based intranet development company. All news that corresponds to sure, most of the content on the intranet will focus on intracompannia news. But in an increasingly interconnected world, employees also need help navigating the daily torrent of news about the business scene in general. You can unsupere with retailers such as Dow Jones, Moreover.com, NewsEdge and Thomson Financial. They will be sorted by headlines from newspapers, magazines and wired services and sorted by industry, geographical region or keyword. Sign up, and your intranet can show stories that are relevant to your business — during laurel outflow. In its simplest form, automated news sorting comes based on one version for everyone. However, vendors will usually customize your news feed so that your research department may get a source that is full of articles on technical matters, while your sales force may get a diet that is rich in competitor updates. News filtering isn't perfect, at least not yet. Nick Denton, founder and CEO of Moreover.com, estimates that when employees rely on their intranet in only about 30% of cases, employees rely on their intranet for all purposes. A particular thorn problem involves the tendency for employees' interests to change over time as new business opportunities emerge and old ones peter out. Winning strategy in some big companies: Use automated news filters, but also call human editor services. In this way, digesting the news on your intranet will reflect the information in the sector about what is important to your business. Don't adapt to just one intranetU many companies have an almost unstoppable desire to centralize everything that works well, including internal websites. Defeating this insertia can be the hardest part of building a booming intranet. However, different functional or regional divisions often have needs that are best served by separate, quasi-independent cities. For example, the state farm has designated sections of its intranet for individual regions and made them available to its agents across the country. Now agents in Florida can follow the development of insurance law in their state's law, in California, however, they can plan a spring meeting in their state – in any case, without disturbing the Colleagues elsewhere in the United States.Of course, state agricultural officials do screen content to make sure that nothing awkward or distracted finds its way to the site. And they have standardized some basic navigational elements that help users stay focused as they jump from one state farm town to another. However, site managers carry a wide range of types, presentation styles, and even on-site missions. (Kelly Thul, head of intranets at The National Farm, says he's forced only one unbreakable rule on the gimmickry website: If you're using animation on a website, it has to stop at some point. People can't focus if something flashes to them.) Keep on Searchin'What good is filling the intranet with a lot of information if people can't find any of it? Like the public Internet, a good start-up home site depends on the effective use of search technology. But according to Robert Geib, a business development specialist at PeopleSoft, companies should focus on both improving technology and changing people's habits. Document creators need to understand how important it is to properly label their work - that is, to include invisible metatags that identify the main topics in the document. Geib and others from PeopleSoft, a company based in Pleasanton, California, have been thinking a lot about the matter. The company is not only developing intranet technologies – it also relies on such technology in its operation. Geib points to a recent white paper entitled Sales to government market, which PeopleSoft published to intranet companies. The document contains metadata that includes federal, education, and public sector keywords — words that match the way PeopleSoft organizes its sales force. If people in a group of federal accounts type the word federal in the search window, they will easily find a white paper and not have to press for the associated words. PeopleSoft also tries to address the shortcomings of current intranet technology: In most cases, a document that is posted to an intranet is available to anyone who turns it off in search. Next-generation intranet technology will have the ability to secure documents so that only the intended group of people can access them. For example, managers who enter employment guidelines or budget planning for 2002 can see documents that are limited to employees in sorts and files. By reducing security risks, this layered approach will allow companies to use the intranet as a tool in high-power decision-making. Make your Intranet UnstoppableTalk an intranet champions in big companies, and soon you'll hear a familiar, ignantno mourning. If only our employees had spent some time introducing our site, they complain. intranet is full of usable material. And people just squeal the home page, and they don't even get to know what else we have. The solution to this problem, of course, is that your intranet makes an undeniably essential part of each employee's working day. And there's no better place to start than the home page. When people sign up for a website, they need to see more than just the company logo and your CEO's message. Tell them immediately the news they can use, such as links to health deductibles information or pay for leave. For a factory site, it can be something as simple as a coffee shop menu or an update of parking lots that attracts employees. For a research-center site, up-to-the-minute competitive intelligence about larger rivals will often keep users returning after more. In any case, regardless of audiences, your homepage should offer some immediate value. At PeopleSoft, executives went a step further by putting a salary on the company's intranet – and only on the intranet. If you get rid of old-fashioned paper statements, the company can save thousands of dollars in printing and mail costs each pay period. But just as importantly, that simple decision was a very effective tool for driving intranet usage. People care about their wages, notes Robert Geib. And if they want to see what they pay, they have to come on our intranet. George Anders (ganders@fastcompany.com) is senior editor of fast company. Your intranet is for internal use, but that doesn't mean it has to be an internal service. For small and medium-sized businesses it can be an outsourcing path. Enter Intranets.com, a company in the suburbs of Boston that offers a reprimanded but service-based version of a corporate intranet. Intranets.com doesn't add up to how large multinationals use intranet technology. However, it provides some killer applications from the intranet world: basic calendars, corporate bulletin boards, tools for managers to update employees online instead of firing a nonstop volley of email explosions. For companies such as Premier Print Holdings, a Huntsville, Alabama outfit that employs 1,100, it's an attractive package - and affordable to start. Affordable, but not free. In Intranets.com, it canceled a free service that attracted a bit of attention - and as many as 750,000 active users - in favor of a payment version that costs about $5.95 per user per month. Like most free online services, the company's hope that it would generate meaningful advertising and trade revenues was mostly a mirage. If something is free, people don't take it seriously, says CEO Steve Crummey.Crummey expected about 90% of customers to leave when the service was no longer free. So far, about 100,000 users have chosen to remain as pay customers, crummey says. Therefore, the postal postal better business. I want to put my energy in the reach of business customers who are willing to pay for services, he says. Exiting the 'free' business model is the best thing we've done. I just wish we'd done it sooner. Visit Intranets.com (www.intranets.com) online. Web.