

Intranets for Manufacturers

Intranets are websites for users inside an organization. An intranet collects all company-related information in one place; organizing it logically and making it easy to find. A well-functioning intranet is reliable, maintains secure information, and is user friendly.

Beyond being functional, an intranet can deliver business value through:

1. Streamlining the Sales Process
2. Promoting Communication and Collaboration among Employees
3. Providing Stellar Customer Service
4. Giving Access to Important Company Documents and Forms
5. Including a Tablet and Mobile-Optimized Presence

Together, these build the foundation of an intranet, supporting staff and delivering benefits to the organization as a whole. Each of these will be explored in the coming sections.

Intranets and Industrial Manufacturers

All good intranets have consistent and up-to-date information, offering employees a central repository for communications and company-related information. Intranets for manufacturers also include additional features specific to the needs of the industry. These could include anything from production-related items to sales documentation and customer service tools.

Manufacturing companies are continually growing, adding new units or offshore locations. An intranet may be the primary connection for these units to the parent company and headquarters. Consolidating all company information in an organized and easy-to-use intranet helps employees feel engaged and connected to the company.



Manufacturing Intranets and your Business Goals

When you design an intranet for your company, it should be aligned with your business goals. Establishing your objectives is the first step in any website design project. This is even more essential when designing an intranet for your company.

Knowing your sales process, your product development process, your human resources process and your mobile needs are essential to the development of your customized intranet. Here we discuss several ways in which your business goals and objectives can be met through a well-designed intranet.



Streamline the Sales Process

Most manufacturers have a very specific sales process. This process can be benefited from an intranet in a variety of ways. Intranets can track customer information, provide workflow for maintaining inventory levels, track sales leads and tie these to customer information, and provide access to estimating spreadsheets.

In addition to these features, intranets can help organize sales time. Many intranets include a calendar, which can be updated and accessed by the entire sales force. This helps each sales team member to coordinate their sales efforts with those of others in the company. Being able to schedule and coordinate sales meetings can cut down administrative time, leading to a more productive sales force.

Promote Communication and collaboration among employees

All intranets promote communication and collaboration among employees. Manufacturers have a global reach, making it difficult for product developers, distributors, field service and office locations to work together. Intranets provide a hub for communication and collaboration across the globe.



A common task in a manufacturer's intranet is to track new product development. Within the intranet, project managers, sales people, line staff or outside vendors can submit new product ideas. These documents can then be moved from one department to the next, being approved at each step along the way. This workflow makes it so everybody becomes involved in the new product development, and submitted ideas no longer disappear.

Many manufacturers also need to connect with their sales force throughout the country. One of the most heavily used features on an intranet is the People Finder. People Finders provide a listing of all employees, including their contact information. People Finders are searchable and sortable



through a customized set of filters. This makes it easy for employees of large companies to connect with other employees, saving employees valuable time.

Provide stellar customer service

Manufacturing companies often maintain longstanding customer and distributor/dealer relationships. These relationships can require a high level of customer service. In order to provide excellent customer service, employees need access to a large number of pricing sheets, technical documents, user manuals, brochures, sales videos, training documentation and videos, and much more.

Intranets provide a centralized repository for all these documents and videos. The key to a good intranet is how it can organize this information to provide a quick way to locate the documentation every employee may need. One example of how to organize this documentation is within a library, providing filtering technology. Filters provide an organization structure to the documentation. Documents can be organized by department, product, process or any other parameters that make sense for your manufacturing business. This organization and filtering technology make it easy for all employees to locate the specific documentation they need to perform their duties quickly and efficiently.

Give access to important company documents and forms

Manufacturers have many different types of employees, located in many factories, offices, and plants. All employees need access to important company-wide documents and forms, particularly human resources documentation. Intranets provide a central repository, accessible by any employees in any locations.

In addition to providing human resources documentation, intranets can provide a secure online environment to complete forms, including W4, I9, Benefit designations, and more. Human Resources departments can further benefit from an intranet by providing a way for communications from employees. This can include anything from a secure request for support, to a public forum for discussing HR related updates and changes.

The intranet becomes a forum for all company-wide documentation to be accessed, requested, processed and discussed. This not only increases communication among employees and corporate headquarters, but gives each employee a place where they can access the personal information they need to get the most out of their company.

Include a Tablet and Mobile-Optimized Presence

Mobile and tablet usage is greatly increasing; this is also true in the business and manufacturing world, as more and more businesses are trending toward a "bring your own device" policy. Creating an intranet that is mobile-optimized, tablet-friendly or even responsive can greatly benefit your sales force and other employees working at sites without access to desktop computers.



Conclusion

An intranet can be many things to manufacturing companies. It can be a complex, integrated and interactive hub for all company activity. But it can also be a simple repository for organization information. We recommend that you start off small, and let the intranet prove itself.

The intranet is there to help company's employees. The key to a successful intranet is the planning and design phase. By working closely with employees, the function and organization of the intranet can be established. Through the design the information can be organized logically, making it easy to find for all employees. This will ensure that the intranet is in alignment to all your business goals.

Read our Case Study:

Learn more about **Intranets for Manufacturers**

Building an Intranet for an Industrial Manufacturer

Can we help you? Northwoods has built intranets for manufacturers nationwide. Contact us for a conversation.

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855-877-3115

414-914-9100 | rick@northwoodsoft.com | northwoodsoft.com | ManufacturingWebsiteSolutions.com