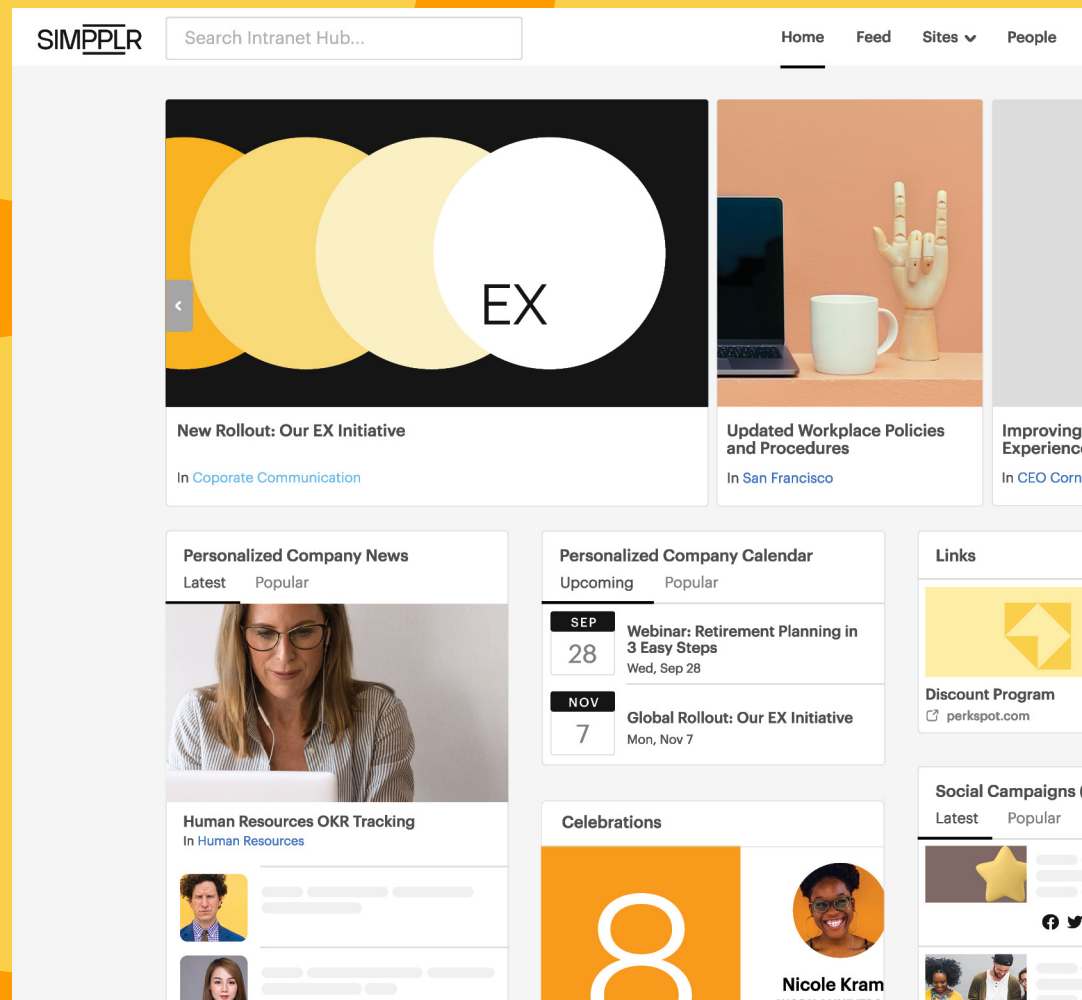


Intranet Buyer's Guide 2023

Eight steps to buying intranet software



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Eight steps to buying intranet software

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Introduction

Intranet software must reach every employee; bridging departments, locations, and business units. There are eight critical areas to address during the intranet vendor selection process to make this goal a reality.

This report addresses those areas and offers additional resources to help you solidify your business case, bring your internal stakeholders together, and evaluate the current intranet technology market.

You'll find two evaluation tools at the end of this eBook:

1

A vendor scorecard to help your team add structure to your evaluation

2

An intranet request for proposal (RFP) template that has everything you need to speed up that part of your process



If you have feedback on our approach, recognize areas we've missed, or have questions, please feel free to [contact us](#).

Step 1: Clarify the challenges you're solving and build a business case

What challenges are you trying to solve? Prioritization is key. Here's why:

Bad news: Intranet ROI can be hard to quantify, and various teams focusing on competing priorities compound the problem.

Good news: Intranet communications improve a variety of business challenges.

Intranet initiatives stall because of these competing priorities, so it's hard to establish a sense of urgency. And delayed intranet projects never seem to get reprioritized, according to Simpplr Research.

Why does this happen? Companies often fail to realize how intranet initiatives will make a tangible difference, and there's a lack of clarity, which leads to poorly-articulated reasons around supporting the investment.

For example, many companies rely on vanity metrics (like usage stats), citing poor employee usage as an argument for change. Others rely on administrator observations about how outdated and time-consuming the current intranet is.

By themselves, neither reason rises to a level that inspires change, nor do they raise enough alarm bells to warrant a new line item in the budget. But building a successful business case for a modern intranet is entirely possible—and it starts by framing and agreeing to tangible business impacts.

How to build a successful business case

Here is your business case checklist:

- 1. [Read this guide:](#)** It details proven approaches and angles to consider as you prepare your business case.
- 2. Capture multiple business units requirements** to frame a multi-pronged justification for transitioning the company to a modern intranet.
- 3. Map the initiative to tangible business priorities**—something that's already top of mind, rather than trying to create new ones. Your biggest competitors are other priorities. If your intranet project gets pushed off, chances are good that it'll be delayed forever.
- 4. Establish a sense of urgency**
Show how continuing with the status quo is worse than doing nothing.
- 5. Solidify alignment across departments and leadership** and put together a small team of stakeholders to cosponsor the effort and move it forward company-wide.

Step 1

Since improved communication and knowledge sharing can benefit almost any initiative, there are many ways to justify an intranet's ROI. Here are some of the most common angles we see:



“Our intranet technology is outdated and needs to be modernized.”

“Our workforce is distributed. Employees aren’t equally engaged, and this is even more true since COVID-19.”

“We need a single source of truth.”

“Our recent merger amplified our need to create a common community.”

“The digital transformation happening at our company needs to enable employees.”

“We’re experiencing hypergrowth and lack systems and processes.”

“Millennial workers and members of Gen Z expect better technology, more transparency, and collaborative work environments.”

“Experience is the new brand, and the intranet impacts how we attract and retain talent.”

“We’d like to reduce internal support tickets.”

Learn the techniques you need to measure and present the ROI for making a business case for a modern intranet by downloading this [Simplr Research report](#)

Step 2:

Understand why many intranets fail, and how to mitigate the risks

According to Gartner¹, 90% of intranets have failed to meet their original objectives. And, according to Forrester, employees dislike the company intranets they have. In fact, the intranet has the dubious honor of being employees' least-favorite solution in the entire workplace.

Key drivers of intranet failure

From 2018 through 2020, Simplr Research conducted an exhaustive study about intranets that failed. The researchers behind [Why Intranets Fail](#) surveyed hundreds of practitioners and performed root-cause analyses on over 200 intranets to identify the most common failure points.

In some cases, the reasons for failure had nothing to do with the technology—the Achilles' Heel was operational. They include:

Process governance:

How does the entire organization align around the shared commitment and joint responsibility for the success of the intranet project?

Purpose and goal alignment:

Did the organization properly level-set and communicate expectations about why they needed an intranet? Did everyone understand the different ways an intranet adds value based on the department?

Executive engagement:

Did leadership participate after buy-in? Intranets must become the preferred method for leadership communication to the company to imbue a sense of urgency and cultural personality and make it the undisputed home for all critical, formal, and personalized communications.

The other reasons for failure are mainly functional. These include (in order):

Poor UI:

A difficult, uninviting user interface frustrates and disengages employees.

No content governance:

Lack of controls to refresh content and remove older or irrelevant items.

Lack of personalization:

Forces employees to wade through irrelevant content.

Multiple sources of truth:

Several departmental knowledge bases instead of only one.

Dependencies of technical resources:

Administrative backlogs and complexity causes perpetual bottlenecks to change content or fix errors.

Unhelpful search:

Ineffective search capabilities fail cause unnecessary stress and eventual abandonment.

Slow implementations:

Traditional intranets can take over a year to implement, and that lead time is deadly. In that time, intranet initiatives can easily lose support and eventually get canceled.

Process Governance is arguably the most important component of successful intranet programs.

Simply having the world's best technology won't be enough. For more information and an intranet governance checklist, see Simplr Research's [Intranet Governance Planning Checklist](#).

Intranet governance refers to a set of policies or an administrative structure that enables decision-making and planning processes.

Since Simplr conducted the [Why Intranets Fail](#) study, we've prioritized product strategy around mitigating all these risks.

Using our strengths in UI, integrations, and search, we now have the industry's first Auto-Governance Engine to prevent content dumping and automatically weed out irrelevant items.

We've also further enhanced personalized content and experiences, and now deliver unique intranet experiences for companies with thousands of employees.

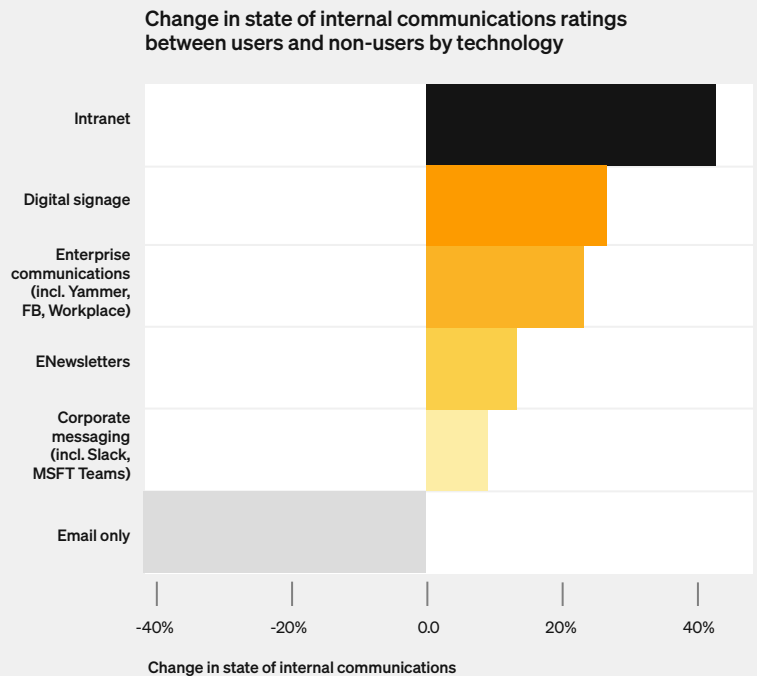
Typically, employees stop using their intranets when they face any of the problems detailed previously. When organizations see high abandonment levels, they need both a process and a technology overhaul. It's important to be proactive and take steps to mitigate any future risk of failure.

Process-related challenges require stakeholder alignment and a governance structure with a shared vision. Use the list in this chapter as a scorecard to help prioritize technology requirements for the functional related items.

Despite the challenges, intranets are still an essential technology vehicle for internal communicators. They're critical technologies to connect and align organizations, but adoption and usage are key.

This chart shows which technologies are strongly associated with internal communications (IC) program success:

Source: Simplr Research
State of Internal Communications 2020



Step 3:

Form a cross-functional evaluation team

Poor process governance is the number one reason intranets fail. It's also why new intranet initiatives never get off the ground. When IT replaces a technology without engaging the business units beforehand, it angers users and makes adoption challenging. This is true for intranets as well.

Need help? Download the *Intranet Governance Planning Checklist*

According to Simpplr Research, the top reasons employee intranets fail are attributed to unclear ownership, poor processes, and lack of governance.

In this checklist, you'll find:

- An intranet governance framework to cover all of your bases and ensure a successful employee intranet program
- A series of checklists that cover the fundamentals of intranet governance including the scope, process, responsibilities, and implementation
- A list of technical intranet software requirements that will help you properly manage your intranet

Governance Planning Checklist

[DOWNLOAD NOW](#)

Successful deployments include:

- An intranet governance framework that accounts for every variable, with input from stakeholders in every business unit.
- A series of checklists that covers scope, process, responsibilities, and implementation.
- A list of technical intranet software requirements to track spending and resources.

The primary purpose of an intranet is to align everyone in the company around the same shared vision, regardless of department or geographical divide.

Bringing in the right people early in the process can help ensure this level of alignment happens. A cross-departmental team should include stakeholders from IC, IT, HR, security, and legal/compliance. Consult with regular content creators, external communications, sales, and other users, because the UI will impact them too.



As we mentioned earlier, the top reasons employee intranets fail are unclear ownership, poor processes, and lack of governance. *Why Intranets Fail* research also identified sloppy intranet deployment as a common denominator among failed intranets.

Remember to get executive sponsors

Find leaders who understand the importance of communications, culture, and engagement. Show them how a modern intranet will enhance employee engagement and alignment around strategic initiatives, while requiring less time from them to create and amplify messages.

Step 4: critical decision: Old versus new

[Forrester Research](#) recently described the intranet technology space in three sections:

Packaged applications

Purpose-built, out-of-box intranets.

Customizable frameworks

Platform approaches using a legacy Microsoft® SharePoint™ model. IT has a framework toolkit, but still needs to build the “intranet.”

Productivity suite extensions

Building front-end UI on top of existing infrastructure (like, SharePoint, Google Drive™, or Salesforce).

Before contacting vendors, determine which approach is best for your organization. And despite what you may hear, you should choose only one model. Like the classic build-versus-buy trade-off, you'll need to weigh customization options versus time-to-value and best-in-class capabilities.

Customizable frameworks, or platform-based intranets have most of the failures. They require significant customization, and financial and time investment—so much time, in fact, that they're often outdated once finally deployed. And they're platform-dependent as well.

Simpplr recommends a purpose-built approach that's technology-agnostic, like an intranet solution that works with a variety technology partners (including Google Workspace or Microsoft 365™) without being tied to just one.



In the midst of evaluating a build vs. buy intranet solution, we realized that building a custom solution may solve a very specific organizational process but would require a lot more effort and resources.

Chris Lewis,
IT Application Manager,
Crowdstrike

Step 4

When you dive deeper, here are the tradeoffs:

Traditional intranet	Modern intranet	Why it matters
Includes internal builds, SharePoint, and new platform tools for other ecosystems (Google, Salesforce, etc.)		
IT-built (or configured) Configurable platform, platform approach built by IT.	Purpose-built (out-of-the-box) Purpose-built workflows to drive engagement and prevent failure	This forces a build vs. buy type decision Fundamentally, the amount and type of customization you believe you need forces this tradeoff.
Poor UX Text-heavy, complex, and folder schemas frustrate employees and slow business agility.	Purposeful UX Easy to use and easy to administer. Built-in collaborative approach to employee communications.	This is a top reason for intranet failure Products need to be intuitive upon initial use—users have a low tolerance for complexity.
Deployed in years According to Nielsen Norman, the average intranet takes 1.2 years to deploy! Not only does this consume resources, but the risk of failure also increases with every passing day.	Fast deployment Immediate deployment, content creation in minutes.	High risk for failure Maintaining momentum is difficult. Leaders change, priorities shift, and momentum can be lost. 1.2 years is not acceptable. More time equals more risk of failure.
Portal approach Lacks mobile-friendly delivery approaches that target employee work habits.	Multi-channel delivery Flexible delivery approaches to drive consumption (e.g., mobile, notifications, Slack, Teams, push notifications, native newsletters, etc.)	You have to meet employees where they are Traditional portals are not useful if you don't have hooks to drive engagement.
Irrelevant information Employees are forced to navigate all content. Targeting relies on traditional metadata, manual hardcoding, and filters.	Personalized experience Personalization goes beyond filters and metadata. Personalization framework creates 1,000 targeted experiences for 1,000 employees.	Employees hate noise and clutter Irrelevant information hurts the experience, sucks employee time, and hurts future adoption.

Step 4

When you dive deeper, here are the tradeoffs: (continued)

Traditional intranet	Modern intranet	Why it matters
Content dumping grounds Classic CMS approaches lack controls to prevent your intranet from becoming a junk drawer.	Auto-governance Simpplr created the industry's first Auto-Governance Engine, which uses technology to automatically keep intranet content fresh, and eliminates duplication.	Trust gets lost once users find outdated information Lack of stringent content governance and processes lead to content dumping grounds, a top reason for intranet failure.
Technical debt Every customization needs to be redone. This requires training and heavy resources when upgrading, patching, and maintaining.	True SaaS approach Limiting customization ensures you can incorporate the latest innovations, UI, and security enhancements.	Inhibits continuous innovation Highly customized approaches suck up resources and make the intranet challenging to keep current with newest features. Eventually, it becomes obsolete.
IT-dependent The combination of platform tool scope-creep, customizations, and lack of internal designers typically create a complex, hard-to-use configuration.	Point-and-click administration The system is as easy to use as a blog. No training is required and it's built for business users to administer.	Communications becomes difficult Often, technical complexity creates a dependency on technical resources. This ultimately creates tradeoffs and backlogs so businesses can't update news and knowledge at the speed of business. Also, things like product integrations break over time, so it's important to mitigate that risk.
Implicit maintenance costs This model implies operating expenses aligned with the platform. Additional resources are needed for the initial deployment and for ongoing maintenance.	Transparent subscription pricing The system provides transparent pricing without hidden SOWs or operating costs.	Total cost of ownership is usually hidden Typically, headcount and services engagements cost more than software subscriptions.

Step 4

Unfortunately, there's a lot of confusion in the marketplace.

Some intranet providers deliver a next-generation SharePoint solution for different ecosystems. For example, multiple vendors are vying to be the "SharePoint for Google." Salesforce Communities provide a toolbox for customization on Salesforce.

Many providers claim they offer purpose-built solutions, but what they really have is a service-intensive business model. Their initial pricing model may seem attractive, but lengthy service engagements and configurations can add significantly to the cost.

Some vendors offer what Forrester calls "productivity suite extensions." These vendors may build a custom UI that provides a front end for an existing SharePoint infrastructure, but anything built on a customized foundation will still have the tradeoffs around additional costs and lengthy service engagements.

Forrester and Gartner both actively monitor the intranet technology space.

Here are a few additional resources:

FORRESTER®

Forrester Wave™: Intranet Platforms, Q1 2022

DOWNLOAD NOW

FORRESTER®

Forrester: Your Intranet Is Dead: Reboot Communication And Collaboration With Employees At The Center

DOWNLOAD NOW

Gartner

Gartner: Market Guide for Intranet Packaged Solutions March 2022

DOWNLOAD NOW

Gartner

Gartner: Traditional Intranets Are Dead —Modern Intranets Are Alive and Well

DOWNLOAD NOW

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Step 5: Follow the purpose-built checklist

Assuming you've decided on a purpose-built intranet, use the following checklist to be certain you know what you're getting:

- ✓ Without showing your preference, ask the vendor the category in which they belong. If they say more than one, be skeptical.
- ✓ Seek customer and industry analyst references on a vendor's ability to meet your needs.
- ✓ Pay close attention to a vendor's commitment to deployment time. If they can't go live in a couple of months, they likely require heavy customization.
- ✓ Be skeptical during demos. Mentally take note of everything you see, and immediately request to get your hands on a trial environment. Be concerned if the trial doesn't have the demo's functionality or if the vendor requires a long time to get you a trial.
- ✓ Take the trial seriously with acceptance criteria, user feedback, and user testing. Survey participants about their experience, log where they need training or support, and calculate the time to create content.
- ✓ Ask your shortlisted vendors for a product roadmap presentation. Look for a track record of innovation, a strategic vision, and how they prioritize enhancements. Roadmap reviews will also tell you which vendors are playing catch-up.

Want your trial to be great?

Involve both content creators and users during the trial period.



Organize a one-hour session for content creators to enable them to add content to the system. Then, send users on a survey-based scavenger hunt to test the system's usability. Finally, survey both groups on ease of use and product enjoyment. This data will help you prioritize a modern intranet investment.

Step 6: Look for the features that matter

Intranets come with thousands of features. This section highlights the capabilities that matter most to program success—and why.

Important: Evaluate more than just the provider's features. Learn more about their financial strength, long-term viability, and vision for the future. Your intranet is a long-term investment, after all, and you want to ensure you select a vendor that'll partner with you for the duration.

Capability	Why it matters
User experience (UX)	Poor user experience is the number one reason intranets fail. Good intranet experience is intuitive, requires no training, and evokes positive sentiment toward your brand. You'll see notable UX differences, depending on the vendor, so it's critical to survey users, content creators, and administrators during a trial environment about their experiences and opinions.
Distributed point-and-click administration	Technical dependencies create risks and delays. Intranet technology should allow non-technical users to administer the platform and create content comfortably. Ease of use is key to having the whole organization actively contributing content from various departments and office locations.
Dynamic menu structures and flexible taxonomy	Hardcoded taxonomy and menu tree customization is a holdover request from legacy intranet approaches. We advise against it. UX research shows that users almost always defer to search and rarely use detailed click paths. Also, your organization will change over time, and anything hardcoded will have to be refactored. This is a technical dependency that, left untended, can cause breaks, dead ends, and unusable search. Best practices dictate a dynamic and flexible structure that you can reorganize in one or two clicks rather than one or two months.

(continued)

Capability	Why it matters
Personalization	Tailoring content to users based on their roles, locations, interests, behaviors, and other attributes offers every employee curated information that's relevant to them and enables users to opt in to content and follow their colleagues. This personalization should be built with sophisticated AI that segments audiences and identifies patterns that drive engagement behind the scenes so that every piece of content doesn't require hardcoded metadata.
Governance capabilities	Intranets often become a junk drawer with outdated, useless content. AI-driven auto-governance is essential because it acts as a "virtual Roomba," recognizing content that's no longer used or is out of date, as well as deleting links to content that may not exist.
Search	Employees expect results to be on par with Google, but intranet technology has long lagged behind. Every vendor touts AI and backend sophistication, but you should vet these claims. And beware of over-dependencies on metadata and manual tagging to make your search work. You want the technology to do the heavy lifting, not you.
Analytics	You can't improve what you can't measure. Purpose-built intranets come with native analytics, but vendors that depend on third-party analytics can't track interactions consistently. The best solutions offer both descriptive analytics about what's working or about how users engage with content and prescriptive analytics along with content and—recommendations, benchmarks, and best practices.
Rich media experience	Simplr Research found that the most successful internal communications programs notably feature much more video and rich media content than anything else. This makes sense, as videos draw the most employee engagement and help your readership adoption skyrocket. When considering vendors, make sure you check out their video capabilities, including the types of rich media they support, whether it integrates well with your company's video hosting platform, and how prevalent media is throughout the intranet platform. Be sure to also account for search and discoverability with video: Does the platform automatically transcribe and index video content?

(continued)

Capability	Why it matters
Multi-channel push and pull communications	Intranets should not be destination portals. They must be integrated into the fabric of employees' work lives, bringing critical news and information where they are, with features designed to drive users back to more intranet content. This multi-channel approach can be supported both through native channels like integrated employee newsletter tools and mobile apps with push notification, as well as with pre-built integrations, like, Zoom™, Slack®, or Microsoft Teams™.
Employee directory capabilities	Employees go to their intranets searching for answers. When there are no relevant knowledge documents, they can find the best solutions by consulting with experts across the organization. Modern intranets offer integrated employee directory capabilities that are functionally similar to LinkedIn, making experts easy to find.
Extensibility	Most industry experts agree that a purpose-built intranet will likely perform better than a traditional platform approach, but you might want to have some integrations with workflows and prebuilt software. Evaluate how the vendor can accommodate this flexibility and whether it's architected in a manner that won't require long-standing support.
Mobile apps	Mobile apps are a popular way to expand reach across your organization, gain mindshare, and push out critical, must-read updates. Some mobile-only communication app vendors are trying to enter the intranet market, but most lack integrations and desktop capabilities. Pay close attention to branding options, security, tablet options, and feature discrepancies between desktop and mobile.
Integrations	Integrations enrich the intranet experience, saving employees time, and bringing your digital workplace together. Vendors claim they have an integration, but in reality, it's just single sign-on. It's necessary to ask the questions that'll determine the future of the technical aspects of the intranet: How are the integrations set up and administered? Does it require any coding or custom work? If so, these integrations will inevitably break and require maintenance. Prioritize the integrations that matter most—like content and search integrations with cloud content management. These types of integrations are most critical for customers and show the highest variance among vendors. Go deep into their prebuilt capabilities to understand what "integration" truly means.

(continued)

Capability	Why it matters
Employee advocacy (social media promotion)	An intranet is usually the only wall-to-wall software administered by corporate communications. Since these teams are often tasked with both external and internal communications, employee advocacy features offer the department a stacked-win. The workflows make it easy for organizations to package pre-approved social communications and then give every employee the ability to share these communications on social networks like Twitter and LinkedIn. Ultimately, the company extends its social brand reach.
Global capabilities	Organizations that span borders and time zones often have a heightened need for a strong intranet platform for centralized knowledge, shared context, and community-building. Look for capabilities like environment segmentation for different regions, and/or business units and automated translation that makes content available in every employee's native language.
Ongoing services and support	Pay close attention to service levels, what's included in the pricing, and how you'll manage support requests. You'll want access to resources that guide your program and provide additional oversight for what's working, but you don't want to be overly dependent on support, nor have to pay professional services fees whenever you need help.
Deployment time and implementation process	A complex implementation is a leading indicator of a complicated, unstable partnership. Work proactively toward understanding the implementation process, and ask for references from other clients. You should be able to deploy a truly purpose-built intranet within a few months, not years. According to Nielson Norman, the average custom intranet takes 1.2 years to implement, so keep that in mind. During your implementation, plan to spend most of the time on content, not on technical configuration or integrations. Coding shouldn't be required because if it's needed now, you'll need to do it again when you upgrade your software.

Learn more about features that matter

Simpplr Research white paper:
Intranet features that matter

[DOWNLOAD THE WHITEPAPER](#)



Step 7: Seek social proof

There are hundreds of vendors in the intranet software market with varying degrees of sophistication, modernness, and long term viability. The truth is many vendors will hide their capabilities behind service offerings, which will prove costly in the long run. Before you shortlist vendors, you'll want to do some research. To start, actively seek back channel references.

Additionally, seek validation from :

- Customer references
- User reviews
- Analyst reports

Third-party vendor capabilities assessments:

[Forrester Wave on Intranet Platforms, June 2022](#)

[Gartner Market Guide for Intranet Platforms, March 2022](#)

G2 User Reviews:
Currently the largest source of user reviews. Note: take some reviews with skepticism as not every review is necessarily legitimate.



Pro Tip

Later on, when you come close to finalizing your selection, you'll also likely want to speak to references. Company-provided references are helpful, but consider back-channeling to find the most objective feedback.

Step 8:

Define and score criteria

Decisions by committee are always difficult. That's why you should work toward streamlining your process. A leaner, more aligned team better positions you to prevent the initiative from stalling. All that's left now is defining your unique requirements based on the information in this guide, and scoring the criteria. Here are two resources you can use as a starting point in your decision making process.

Vendor scorecard

This will provide structure for your evaluation. Include other departments, common content creators, and even end users as part of this process.

[DOWNLOAD SCORECARD](#)

RFP template

This is a list of the most common requirements across hundreds of RFPs. With this editable template, capturing everything you need to speed up that part of your process will be a breeze.

[DOWNLOAD RFP TEMPLATE](#)

Got feedback?

Please share your feedback, by reaching out to us at hello@simpplr.com. Continuous improvement is important to us!



About Simpplr

Who we are

Simpplr is the leading AI-powered employee experience platform. Organizations use our forward-looking, adaptable products to deliver personalized experiences that inspire and engage their employees. Wherever people work, Simpplr enables them to flourish.

Trusted by more than 500+ leading brands, including Zoom, Snowflake, Moderna, Eurostar, and AAA, our customers are achieving measurable productivity gains, increased employee engagement, and accelerated business performance.

Simpplr is headquartered in Silicon Valley, CA with offices in the UK, Canada, and India, and is backed by Norwest Venture Partners, Salesforce Ventures, and Tola Capital. Learn more at simpplr.com

Benefits

- Designed for the way you work
- Ready to use in weeks, not months
- Built for business users
- Unified, engaging experience across mobile and the web
- Powerful integration
- Secure and scalable platform

Trusted By



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+1.877.750.8330