

Small team, smarter intranet

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Thanks so much for having me. My name's Sian. I am the Internal Communications Manager at Essential Energy, and I'm going to talk about some learnings and improvements that we've made to our intranet, which is called EssentialNet. Here's just kind of an overview slide about us, but I think for me, the key takeaway from this slide is about how dispersed our organisation is, like in geographical terms, also in terms of age, and then in terms of technology as well. So we really do have to be mobile first with all of our solutions and just make things as easy as possible because our people don't have a lot of time.

We are also an exceptionally very small team. So there's only three of us doing internal comms and only one person in my team, Michelle, who's on the call as well, is solely focused on the intranet. So we really have a lot of work to do with not a lot of people and not a lot of budget. So basically our vision for our intranet is that it's a healthy single source of truth filled with relevant up-to-date content, good metadata that has good hygiene, it's easy to use and well-governed. We're not there yet, we're getting there, but a lot of what we use to help us make decisions around this is our SWOOP Analytics dashboard.

So in particular, we pay attention to the top content. So what pages are people clicking on? What news is resonating? What are the hotspots on our intranet, the pieces of content that are really popular? What people are trying to find but can't, and this is a really important piece for us that we look at regularly so we can kind of evolve the intranet and make tweaks. We also look at our content health signals such as our health score, and we look at the behaviour panels. So we have a lot of glances in our intranet, which means we don't have their attention for very long.

So every second on there really has to count. So now I'll just go through some of the improvements that we've made. Excuse me. Sorry. For each, I'll talk about what the problem was that we were trying to solve, how we solved it, and what the result has been. So the first problem that we had, which might be common to people who have SharePoint intranets, is that our search function actually pulled up content from the entire SharePoint ecosystem. So it wasn't just limited to what was on the scoped sites that make up our intranet.

So that was one of our biggest complaints. Like I'm trying to find something that's on the intranet, and I'm also getting stuff from drives that I have access to that I don't really need. We had tried a couple of times to refine our search, but because our intranet architecture was quite, so it was spread out over nine hubs, we actually couldn't implement scoped search. So we shifted our intranet architecture. We changed to a single hub and spoke model, and then we were able to sort of re-scope search to focus only on content that truly lives on a central net.

And this has led to a reduction in complaints, importantly, but also we have less need to rely on kind of IT intervention. So what we used to have them do was say, okay, if someone types in this keyword, can you kind of artificially pin this page as a result? And it was a way that we kind of worked around

some legacy architecture and also the search issue. So that's been a huge improvement, didn't cost anything to do, did need a bit of rejigging, but has been really successful and had good results.

Next to that, and at the same time, we also refreshed our structure and our navigation importantly. So here's a hot tip, never structure your intranet around your organisation or your corporate structure, because it inevitably moves on through restructures, through team changes, shifts, et cetera. And it's much harder to move an intranet that's been set up that way. So at the top, you can see how our intranet navigation used to run. So there was, you really had to basically know what you were looking for to be able to find it.

There was a lot of assumed knowledge, like does that team sit under health and safety? Is it part of ops? Is it in assets or is it in engineering? And people really couldn't find things, they relied on bookmarks. And between that and the bad search experience, we had a lot of helpful feedback about our intranet. So what we did was put together a really killer business case for a little bit of budget to work with an external agency who sat down and did a lot of qualitative and quantitative research with a broad cross section of our staff.

We also used SWOOP to look at what the most popular content was, because we knew we had to make that accessible right away in the new navigation. And we also really tried to break this idea that because the team that looks after this sits in this team, it shouldn't go where someone might intuitively look for it. So you can see in that kind of second snippet, what we changed it to. So we reduced it from nine to six. And it also, it makes things a lot easier. We once again, get fewer complaints. We also changed it so that it goes three levels deep.

So really, people can find a lot of stuff very quickly without any need to know how our business is structured. They just go to intuitively where they would look for that piece of content and they can find it. The next one. So we had an area that was kind of on fire for us, which was our news. So a lot of projects are happening at any one time within our business. And we'll often have people who are with the business for a short amount of time to communicate about a specific project. They might be tasked with communicating about it, but it's not necessarily a skillset that they have or an area where they feel comfortable.

So we ended up with a lot of very long news that kind of didn't spell out to people why it was important that they understand what the news was, or like it didn't spell out the what's in it for me for our people. So we have co-pilot enabled at Essential Energy. We trained an agent and we gave it every piece of content that we were previously kind of throwing at our publishers and editors and expecting them to digest. And instead we made it the job of the AI agent to digest all of that. So our style guide, our corporate narrative, all of our news best practices.

So what's the ideal word length, everything like that, all of the advice that we have. And we've just got three simple prompts there that you can see. So we just get them to paste in their rough and ready notes. And what this does is spit back out a really good first draft. So obviously it needs human intervention, but it will make sure that there's a catchy headline that's only a few words. It will make sure that there's a crisp summary so that people can understand at a glance what the news is about.

It won't go longer than 250 words and it will really go hard on why this is important to our people. So that's made a huge change for us, a big improvement in our news. And at the same time, we also

introduced a news template. So this was another thing that was free to do. So we developed these templates and one of the biggest changes that we added was of course we knew from SWOOP that we got a shockingly small amount of people's time when they were looking at our news. So we kind of hard coded into the template the need for a summary and it is a true summary.

So it's not just an intro. It is supposed to be that if you read these 40 words or less, you completely understand what this news item is about and why it relates to you. And then you can read further, if you have more time or if it's a topic that you're interested in. It also helped us create a bit of a visual distinction between news and other content because we had nothing that visually defined news or differentiated it from our pages of content. It was hard for people to know at a glance previously if they were looking at news or a bit of content.

So this also helped with that. There's also compulsory fields around who to contact, how long it takes to read this news item and when it was published. So that's been a huge improvement for us. It's also saved our team a lot of time along with the AI news agents. So we really have to spend a lot less of our time helping people with news when that was previously a massive drain on our resources. We also have, so EssentialNet is made up of 63 sites. This is how we inherited it. And every day we try to shut down a few more sites, consolidate content.

But there was no approval for a flow on any of our pages or any of our sites. So people were free to build whatever they wanted in there. And obviously, people have different skillsets and sometimes the skillset of the people building these pages was not necessarily usability, user experience, making things concise. So it had really become like a Wild West with mega cities of content across various sites. There were poor quality content, information spread across many pages when it could have been one, et cetera.

So this was, once again, another free thing for us to set up. And it's just really good governance. So we use Power Automate to set an approvals flow on every single one of our sites. And between our little team, we set up a rotating roster of approvals. So every single time that someone updates content, adds news, publishes news, publishes a page, it goes straight to us. And then we decided among ourselves, what's the criteria which triggers a rejection? And we have that kind of visibility and that governance over everything.

And that also means that every piece of content on our intranet has been through at least two sets of eyes. And then Michelle has also, she runs a monthly meeting for all of our publishers. She'll keep track of what's been some of the common errors that we've seen come through the approvals flow. And she'll deliver a tailored set of training based around common rejections for that month so that we continuously improve that cohort as well. We also had an issue on EssentialNet that you could publish a news item and it lived rent-free forever on our intranet.

So it was never ever archived. So it caused a lot of confusion because it would pop up in search results. People wouldn't be sure, is that initiative still running? Is that safety advice still current? There was just kind of no way to sort out what was current and relevant to what was a legacy. So we set up an archive flow. So once news is older than 18 months, it gets swept into a little folder and then pushed completely off EssentialNet. So it's there and accessible to editors and publishers if we have to meet any, for instance, regulatory requirements or we have legal obligations to keep the content.

So it's still accessible, just not to our users. It doesn't pop up in search results. It doesn't kind of muddy the waters and it makes sure that our content and our news are just what is most recent. And our SWOOP dashboard came in very handy there as well because we could point to the fact that legacy news was being accessed and that it was confusing for our people. So we got IT support to kind of help set up that flow and push everything off the intranet that was legacy. We also used AI for what for us was a really novel use.

So we have a lot of content being published frequently on our intranet by a lot of people across all of those sites. So those 63 sites I mentioned earlier, they're all sites that can be published from. And we had the problem that news was rolling through on our homepage really quickly, sometimes not even spending a day on there. And we had, as probably a lot of you have, our homepage set up with the Hero web part. So we had just kind of five images and five links. What we decided to do was trim that down and use editorial cards instead of the Hero web part.

At any one time, we're only showing three top news and we can also give a little bit of context and framing to that news instead of just a picture and a headline. So we used this where we built the editorial guide after literally a full day conversation with Copilot, talking to it about our challenges, goals, company strategy, key projects, values, et cetera. We popped all that knowledge into an agent and now we say, hey, here's the headline and here's the summary. Where should we surface this content?

Is it tier one? Does everyone need to know it? Is it tier two? Is it just sort of nice to know? And is it tier three? Maybe that's something that's relevant just to a particular project or a particular team. And that really helps remove our biases because of course we all have topics that are really dear to us or stakeholders that we have strong relationships with. This helps us kind of, we make the final decision but it really does give us some solid grounding for those decisions. And it's not just for EssentialNet, it's also for our Viva Connections dashboard, our Roundup newsletter that we send out once a week.

So anywhere where we have to make decisions, tough decisions about what content gets priority, we use this AI agent. So there's some of the things that we've done on like the sniff of an oily rag with very few people are really like skeleton staff to make some huge improvements to our intranet. Of course, everything didn't go smoothly right away. So for the approval flow, it did elevate the content quality across the intranet and really helped improve that. But as our stakeholders got used to it and as we ourselves as a team of three got used to it, it did slow things down.

What I might just wave through somebody else in the team might say, no, no, hang on, I think we need to pull that up and make some adjustments to it. So we've kind of worked among ourselves to get a pattern and a rhythm to what goes through and what doesn't, and we don't let perfect be the enemy of good, but we have still managed to raise the quality and also have oversight of what's being built on our intranet. The news template, this was a little bit hard at first because what our publishers would often do is just go to an old news item and then copy it.

So it was very hard to get them in the beginning to get used to using the news template. We supported that rollout by making it, so it's pinned as the first thing. So if you go create a new news item, the first thing that comes up is the news template. And we also rolled out a folder of assets to every single site on EssentialNet that had common logos, icons, and imagery. So we really supported the uptake of that. And the template itself kind of prompts for all the bits and pieces that you need for

a good news item.

So it's got instructions within it. The new navigation removed a lot of reliance on kind of assumed knowledge, but we've got a lot of people who've been with Essential Energy for a long time and they'd gotten used to things being in a certain place. So there was a little bit of confusion when some of that changed, oh, I beg your pardon. But we, and we did actually over-communicate, I would say, the new navigation, but still there's always teething issues. The globalised search worked really well, but it, and when I say globalised, so actually re-scoped probably is a better way to phrase that.

It also highlighted the fact that now that they were only surfacing content on EssentialNet, it was bringing up a lot of subpar content on EssentialNet. So that's kind of where our next focus area is. But it's definitely reduced the number of complaints that we've gotten, and it works much more smoothly for our people. And the AI writing guide, it's made things so much smoother and easier for us and also for our stakeholders. But it did, in the beginning, hallucinate. It wrote essays, it missed nuance, it went off the rails a couple of times, but every time we just kind of went under the hood, tweaked the instructions to make them a little bit tighter.

And over time, it's really become kind of a go-to tool. It's never going to be perfect. It's a co-pilot, not autopilot, as we always say, but it has really helped our people not be staring at a blank page or have to spend a lot of time thinking how they could write something. So they were our learnings, and we can see that our health score is elevating, we can see that engagement is increasing. We still do have a long way to go and we've got a lot of what's next, but I'll just stop there and answer any questions because I think I'm getting pretty close to time.

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