

Tri-State Generation and Transmission Association Intranet Redesign Project

The primary goal of the Tri-State's Intranet Redesign Project was to completely redevelop the corporate intranet as part of an overall effort to improve cross-functional collaboration and increase knowledge management by providing a tool that allowed for more user control and improved usability. The new approach would provide better tools for working together, sharing information and improving employees' day-to-day work experiences.

Company Background

Tri-State G&T is a wholesale electric power supplier owned by the 44 electric cooperatives that it serves. Tri-State generates and transmits electricity to its member systems throughout a 200,000 square-mile service territory across Colorado, Nebraska, New Mexico and Wyoming.

Headquartered in Westminster, Colo., nearly 1,500 people are employed by Tri-State throughout its four-state service area.

Goals + Strategy

Tri-State's previous intranet was built on a platform that did not allow the site owner (Employee Communications Department) to make updates easily, thus requiring the team to rely on IT for even the smallest updates. Additionally, the content owners also had to rely on IT for even minor content updates and, as a result, much of the content was outdated. There were also no formal audit processes for content or formal ownership or active management of the department sites.

Also, the company had rolled out SharePoint 2007 years prior and had even begun building some department sites on the platform, but there was no formal governance, design standards or content-types in place. Not only was SharePoint not being used effectively, but having two types of department pages did not provide a consistent user experience.

Finally, a number of departments were not represented on the old intranet. The goal of the new intranet was not only to completely redesign the site on a new platform, but also to provide representation for all departments at the company. Tri-State had also acquired a company a few years prior to the project launch and had just built an ad-hoc page HTML page for the employees at that site, which was not meeting their needs or easy to use.

The following were additional goals + requirements:

- Improved method for displaying and distributing corporate news
- Update WordPress and create new branding to reflect and match intranet branding (WordPress is used for the online daily news service site, formerly called *e-Newsbreaker*)
- New system for sending out email/e-newsletter messages
- Automating of processes
- Providing personalized content on the home page that is pulled from enterprise applications
- Updated + modern design
- Active management by the site owner
- Replacing outdated content + improved content ownership and accountability through the assigning and publicizing of content coordinators (identified on each site)
- Improved content management and use of SharePoint platform
- Deployment of content types / categorization of content
- Deploy analytics and implement regular-reporting schedule

- Redesign + additional key performance indicators
- Involve employees at all locations in design and testing of site
- Addition of search
- Important information surfaced in many different locations (Employee Tools, About Tri-State, I Want To)
- Company-wide events calendar created from dept./LOB
- Increased personalization
- Improved directory that surfaces employee information in one location

Tactics

- A hand-picked project team led by an experienced project manager
- Creation of key stakeholder group that included representation from all major lines of business and departments
- A well-organized project site, detailed project plan and other project components (e.g., project communication plan)
 - Implementing a rule of transparency and reporting + escalating issues in a timely manner
- Daily stand-up meetings + meaningful weekly project meetings + status reports
- A year of research and benchmarking, which included traveling to similar companies who had recently completed similar projects
 - Using the information to create best practices and determine requirements
- A public project site that included project contacts and frequently-updated project information
- Involvement of employees in developing requirements
 - Survey, workshops (at all major locations), completion of change-readiness assessment
- A communication plan that included early-and-often communication methods and strategic messaging and early engagement of employees
 - Naming contest, rollout scavenger hunt, frequent updates to public project site and corporate news, creation of promotional videos
- Creation of ambassador group to engage employees at non-HQ sites
- Content coordinators for each department site to create accountability for content
- Users can populate content on to the home page
- Creation of formal processes and procedures
- Creation of a comprehensive rollout plan that included a two-month beta test and one week soft launch
- Creation of training plan and materials
- Installation of SharePoint 2013
- Design + build + UX testing + user-acceptance testing
- Beta period

The following messaging was featured on the public project website for employees:

Vision

A company's intranet is not just a piece of technology; not merely an IT project, nor is it just a communications vehicle or channel. The intranet is a business system that should represent and support all areas of the business. The intranet is one part technology and many parts people and process.

The purpose of the intranet redesign project is to fully develop a redesigned corporate knowledge management portal to replace the existing Tri-State intranet site. The new site will be in line with Tri-State's vision and business objectives and will integrate the information and processes that will enable knowledge management in the organization.

The existing site is no longer fitting the needs of the organization. The new site will include improvements in the following areas:

- Increased personalization/customization
- Decentralization of content
- Business strategy
- Communications
- Visibility of corporate initiatives/KPIs
- Improved KPIs/BI information
- Ease of use/organization of content
- Search
- Flexibility
- Employee engagement (interaction, collaboration, etc.)

Execution

The project team hired a consultant team to assist with the installation of SharePoint 2013, the design and build of the new intranet and the migration of content. Because the previous intranet had not been categorizing content appropriately, the migration piece would be particularly arduous. The team met with each department to provide an overall explanation of content types and organization and then helped them work through identifying and categorizing each piece of content – down to each document, calendar item and/or list item.

The project team experienced a number of challenges including, but not limited to, the following:

- New CTO and new CEO during site build required a change in direction for the project and a rebuild of many sites
 - The previous CTO had been very involved in the overall direction of the project
- Due to a number of factors, including the change in leadership, the project team decided to end early the relationship with the consulting team requiring internal resources to take on more of the work
- Internal resources had a limited knowledge of SharePoint 2013 and were learning and researching on the job
- Unavailability of training team due to resource restrictions
 - Project team took on creation of all training content
 - Created short, topical videos and documents
 - Site owner conducted all trainings
- Diverse population of users ranging from daily computer users to those who work in power plants. The employees are also scattered across four states at 37 locations.

Despite the challenges, the team pressed on and was able to complete the project, with appropriate adjustments made. And, while the team and employees are satisfied with new site, the true shining moment of the project was the deployment.

After a successful two-month beta testing period, in which 200 employees from various sites participated, the team held a one-week soft launch (branded the “The Grid Sneak Peek”) during which both the old intranet and The Grid were running simultaneously. This provided all employees an opportunity to familiarize themselves with the new site before full cutover. The soft launch also allowed employees to transfer their personal links from the old intranet to The Grid so the site would be ready for them on the full cutover date. The project team encouraged employees to use The Grid solely so they could identify any last-minute pain points that could be addressed prior to launch.

The project team also held a number of trainings during the week of soft launch, as well as on launch day (beginning at 6 a.m.) and had daily communication that included the following messaging:

- Get ready to connect on The Grid (two weeks prior to deployment)
- Take a sneak peek at The Grid today!

- Where can I find . . . on The Grid (comparison of old intranet to The Grid, including visuals)
- Make The Grid your own (personalization)
- The Grid is live (reminder that employees can begin using the new site)
- The Grid replaces current intranet on Monday
- Welcome to The Grid!
- Communicate to internal audiences on The Grid (feature on new ways to communicate on the home page)
- Thanks for your support of The Grid!
- Continue to learn about The Grid

All Communications included information on trainings as well as links to previous articles and topics. The project team also created an Introduction to the Grid page, which featured training videos and documents, as well as FAQs and an Ask The Grid Community. The deployment + communication plan includes a year of communication topics and Employee Communications is publishing bi-weekly tips and tricks and hosting a monthly “Lunch & Learn with The Grid.”

Another success factor related to the deployment was The Grid Gurus. This was an ambassador program that included representatives from the major Tri-State facilities. The group had their own section of the public project site to communicate with one another and the project team, as well as submit ideas, and provide feedback (including their own defect list). The real value of The Grid Gurus came during launch week as the placement of these ambassadors allowed them to provide training and information that matched the employees at their sites. The gurus were recognized (often and publicly) and rewarded for their contribution to the project and they continue to be active, one month after the launch of The Grid.

To the team’s surprise (and pleasure), the launch of The Grid was nearly seamless and is now being referred to as the benchmark for all future website and application deployments.

Evaluation

A lessons-learned session was held during which the team and key stakeholders identified what worked well and what did not work well, as well as mitigation actions taken and future preventative measures. The site owners are also gathering analytics and are using the results to determine how employees are using the new site. The site owners will continue to gather information and take appropriate actions based on the analytics.