

# Developing a Valuable Tool for IT Staff: Increasing Efficiency and Communication with an Intranet

Ryan LeBreton  
Instructional Technologist  
Bucknell University  
Bertrand Library  
Lewisburg, PA 17837  
570-577-3122

lebreton@bucknell.edu

Lisa Veloz  
Technology Support Leader  
Bucknell University  
101 Computer Center  
Lewisburg, PA 17837  
570-577-1796

lveloz@bucknell.edu

## ABSTRACT

During the summer of 2002, Information Services & Resources (ISR) created a departmental web team with the goal of redesigning the ISR website. The team completed a successful (and SIGUCCS award winning) redesign, but in the process discovered a need for an organized website for the IT staff. At the same time our department's organizational development team was looking for a way to distribute their materials to staff over the web and build an online community. We decided to combine efforts and develop a valuable tool for our department by creating the ISR Intranet.

The Intranet was designed to:

- Create a single place for IT staff to access forms, tools and resources.
- Create an online community to foster communication and sharing among staff.
- Provide easy access to strategic planning, performance planning and organizational development materials.

Our paper will explore the different sections of the website, the technology employed in developing the site and its various components. We will also discuss staff reactions, lessons learned and our thoughts on the overall success of the site.

The intended audience for this paper includes IT leaders, IT departmental webmasters and others who are interested in developing an intranet.

## Categories and Subject Descriptors

H.5.3 Group and Organization Interfaces

## General Terms

Management, Documentation, Performance, Design.

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## Keywords

Intranet, Web development, Staff development, Web databases.

## 1. ABOUT BUCKNELL AND ISR

Bucknell University is a private liberal arts university with 3500 students and 1000 faculty/staff. Our department was formed in 1997 by combining two departments, the Library and the Computer Center. "Information Services and Resources (ISR) brings together the breadth and depth of extensive library resources and the power and flexibility of computer and telecommunication technologies with a robust campus-wide network and a delightful library facility. These resources are managed and enhanced by a collaborative staff dedicated to finding solutions that will meet the campus' needs." [1] ISR is comprised of approximately 90 staff members located in two buildings.

## 2. BACKGROUND

After completing the redesign of the ISR website a number of miscellaneous pages used by ISR staff were left unorganized. These pages ranged from support tools and online forms to website administrative modules. The web team decided we needed to develop a site that provided access to the pages.

About the same time our department's staff development group, the Organizational Development Team (ODT) approached us about a website that would allow them to distribute their materials to staff via the web and provide an online community for the staff.

We decided to combine efforts and develop a valuable tool for our department by creating the ISR Intranet.

The Intranet was designed to:

- Create a single place for the staff to access forms, tools and resources.
- Create an online community to foster communication and sharing among staff.
- Provide easy access to strategic planning, performance planning and organizational development materials.

## 3. THE DESIGN

The first thing visitors to the intranet will notice is a strong similarity to the design of the ISR home page. This design was chosen primarily to accommodate the ISR staff members who had

become accustomed to the form and function of the “external” site in the months between the introductions of the two sites, and secondarily because it was a satisfactory way to include a large number of links on a single page.

In getting started with the site we realized that the staff must be involved in the process. We began with a simple list of links. Over the next few months, the staff used the list and made suggestions for what should be included on the site.

In January 2003, the full site was designed and presented to the staff. We are continually improving the content of the site and working with the staff to ensure that the resources they need are available through the site.

## **4. SITE OVERVIEW**

The front page of the site includes photos of ISR staff in action as well as current ISR Staff News, Outages and Alerts and inspirational “thoughts for the moment”.

The site is divided into separate content areas as follows:

### **4.1 Living Our Values**

This section of the site focuses on our values and service model. Throughout 2003 ISR is having a yearlong celebration of our values. This section includes a link to our departmental values and service model. Each month’s celebrated value and related events are posted for the staff. Information about ISR’s “Living Our Values” Award and the past honorees can also be found in this area.

### **4.2 ISR Staff**

The ISR Staff section contains information about and for the staff. Sections of this area include the staff directory, an expertise database and staff news sharing section.

One of the goals of the site was to build an online community for ISR staff. Because of the sheer size of the staff and the multiple locations across campus we needed an area for the staff to learn more about each other. With such a large and varied staff it is difficult for everyone to know everyone else. The internal staff directory includes photographs of staff along with a separate expertise database. The expertise database allows for a staff member to quickly search for other staff with certain skills. The section also includes a news section where staff can post and share news with other staff. Some examples of news that has been posted included, baby birth announcements, new staff welcomes, monthly birthday and picnic reminders and more.

Another aspect on the site to assist in building the ISR community is that the Intranet includes some fun components. For example, there is a recipe sharing section and a staff matching game.

### **4.3 Organizational Development**

This area of the site focuses on staff development and the work of the Organizational Development Team. This area includes resources related to many of the development opportunities the team has made possible. Topics in this area include Appreciative Inquiry, Coaching, Collaborative Work Environment, Mentoring, Communication Skills, Meeting Skills and more. Each topic includes notes, activities and resources pertaining to the topic. Also information about the team is included.

### **4.4 Strategic Planning and Projects**

This section of the site is devoted to the department’s strategic planning initiative as well as departmental projects. Currently the area is not used for any project coordination/updates but will hopefully be put to good use in the future.

### **4.5 Performance Planning Process**

This area of the site includes information for staff about the Performance Planning Process (PPP). Staff and work group leaders can use the resources in this area to assist them in completing the process. The resources consist of the PPP guidelines along with a self-evaluation form, a goal setting worksheet and a final comments worksheet.

### **4.6 ISR Employee Recruitment and Orientation**

The employee recruitment and orientation section of the site includes resources for work group leaders, search teams and staff to use when recruiting and orienting new ISR staff. Included are such things as Staff Recruitment Guidelines, search team kickoff meeting checklist and resources for performing a search.

### **4.7 Communication**

This section of the site is used to assist staff in communicating both internally within ISR and externally with the Bucknell community. The resources in this area can be used to

- access Bucknell’s Voicemail on the Web system
- access Bucknell’s webmail site
- locate information about ISR and campus-wide listservs
- page one or more of their ISR colleagues
- look-up direct/unpublished phone numbers
- look-up ISR staffs’ instant messenger names
- access the Blackboard site used by our technology integration teams

### **4.8 Contributions**

Staff can use the web pages in this area to contribute information to one of the many departmental publications and areas of the website. Staff can choose to submit an article to either the paper or electronic newsletter, propose a front page headline for the main ISR website or post a system outage to the Outage and Alert Center. Staff can also submit and edit the FAQs found throughout the main ISR website.

### **4.9 ISR Staff Resources**

This section includes a wide variety of resources that are invaluable to ISR staff. Some examples of reference items included are online manuals for our service desks, ISR disaster recovery plan, and our emergency procedure document. Also included is an informational page about the two staff resource centers. The staff resource page also provides a searchable index to all of the staff development resources in the centers. Other miscellaneous inclusions in this area include the technology workshop instructors’ tools page and information on our advisory committees

## 4.10 Technology Support Tools

This area of the site is the main resource for the technology support groups of the organization. It includes a variety of pages to assist the technology support functions in the department. Online forms for adding computers and printers to the campus network are available as well as file restore forms. The Computer and Media Equipment Locator is also available in this area along with the web accessible technology support tracking tool. All staff can also see live statistics from our technology support system and calling system.

## 4.11 Student Employees

This Student Employee area of the site is used mainly by the staff who serve as student supervisors. Included is an online application binder where staff can review recently submitted student employee applications. Also the area includes the Student Handbook, links to student training resources such as the Jeopardy Game, and the student supervisors' Blackboard site.

## 4.12 Consortiums and Associations

This section of the site includes links to various IT and library organizations.

## 5. SITE WIDE TECHNOLOGY

The intranet makes considerable use of Active Server Pages (ASP), and Microsoft Access and SQL Server databases. On the front page alone, an Access database is queried to provide the content for the "Staff News" section, an SQL Server database is queried to provide the HEAT (client call logging and problem tracking software) statistics for the current day, and a second Access database is queried to deliver the randomized inspirational "Thought for the moment". Another section of the page uses the VBScript FileSystem object to read from a directory of staff photos, and select three at random each time the page is loaded.

The entry page excluded, every page on the site refers to two files, a header and a footer, using server-side include commands. In addition to their cosmetic function, ensuring a common look and feel throughout the site, the files contain ASP code that serves to dynamically generate a breadcrumb navigation trail based on where the page resides in the site's directory structure. A "comments" button can be found at the bottom of every page which, when clicked, will take the user to a form where they can enter feedback about that particular page. The form receives the title and url of the referring page and passes it along with the user's comments to the webmasters. After submitting the form, the user is returned to the page on which they were commenting.

### 5.1 Selected Examples

Areas of the site that receive particularly heavy use from staff are the Computer and Media Equipment Locator, Outage and Alert Center, ISR Staff Directory, and Student Employee Application Binder. Incidentally, these are also the most programming-intensive areas, and required the largest amount of time, energy, and input from other members of the organization.

The Computer and Media Equipment Locator (CAMEL) evolved from an excel spreadsheet living in one individual's network space into a searchable database with web-based user and administrative interfaces that are accessible to the technology support team. With its introduction, information about every technology classroom and computer lab on campus became available, including:

- The number and type of computers in each facility
- Software installed on each platform
- Available multimedia equipment such as, cable television, data projectors, VCRs, and DVD players.

A future goal for the site is to include digital floor plans of each facility so that staff will be able to view the layout of each room.

The Outage and Alert Center consists of an external "public" view, and an internal administrative interface. Its primary function is to communicate timely information to the campus community about planned server down time, unplanned crashes, and new virus warnings. Qualified staff members are able to enter upcoming outages in a form which sends the information into an Access database and also to the pagers of the technology support team members. The editors must proofread and approve submitted outages which are then displayed on the ISR home page, the public Outage and Alert Center, and the Intranet home page.

The ISR Staff Directory is another section of the site that consists of both an internal and external portion. Approximately 99% of the ISR web pages, internal and external, have a link to the staff directory, which contains each employee's name, email, job title, phone number, and other relevant information. Once authenticated, staff members can update any part of their directory entry and are urged to make it even more useful by including a small descriptive paragraph outlining their responsibilities. The staff directory information is currently stored entirely within an Access database, but future plans involve moving to LDAP, in which directory information for the entire campus community is currently stored. This would take some of the maintenance responsibilities off of the ISR web team and leave us with only the pieces of information that are not included in the campus directory.

The origin of the student employee binder was similar to that of the Computer and Media Equipment Locator—born from the desire to make an existing process more efficient. Before the intranet, students seeking employment only had the option of completing a paper application form which was then delivered in person to the ISR office. In order to share the applications with the entire group of student supervisors, multiple photocopies were necessary. This somewhat inefficient group of exchanges was replaced with a web form from which students' application data is entered into an Access database. At the same time, the student supervisory team is notified by email that a new application has been submitted and is awaiting review. The team members can then view a list of all available applicants, their job preferences, and their hours of availability. Notes can be entered for each applicant, and applicants can be deleted from the list as they are hired. At the end of each hiring period, (fall semester, spring semester, and summer) the applicants who were not hired can be selectively emailed a notice that their application is being purged from the database and will need to be resubmitted for future hiring periods.

## 6. STAFF REACTIONS

Overall, staff members have responded quite positively to the concept of having an internal site. Much of the feedback has proclaimed it to be extremely helpful and aesthetically pleasing, but some comments have alluded to a "cluttered" feeling on the front page due to the large number of links. Future plans include addressing this issue, as it has been commented on from time to time concerning the ISR home page as well. The majority of the

feedback consists of suggested additions and updates to the existing content, which is to be expected in a site as large and dynamic as this.

## **7. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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Also we would like to extend a thank you to all members of ISR who have offered suggestions and comments on the intranet.

## **8. REFERENCES**

- [1] Gene Spencer, Associate Vice President for Information Services & Resources, August 2002