

Seven Essential Components of a Successful Rollout

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It is never too early to begin thinking how a new web site or intranet is going to be launched. What promotion activities will usher in the new online resource? What are the promotion objectives? How will activities be coordinated? Who is going to do the work and make it happen? Whether revamping an existing site or bringing a new intranet online, it is important that plans include the resources and time needed for a promotion rollout. Here are 7 components of a launch plan that put a rollout on the fast track to success.

1. Allow enough time and resources to do a good job.

Do not wait until 6 weeks before the intranet or web site goes live to think about its rollout. The time for planning is 5 - 6 months in advance of that date. Even for a small rollout there is a lot to do. Start with a list of what you "think" you might use in a rollout and get lead-time and price estimates so you are not caught short. Establish milestone dates in the rollout project plan and allow for holidays and unexpected time delays. As the weeks and work progresses, modify plans accordingly, adding greater detail to the "to do" list as the launch date gets closer. Fourteen weeks before rollout the actual launch date should be within a 3-day range. By 10 weeks the plans should be highly detailed, including the exact launch date and time, rollout activities, resource assignments and estimated budgets. If you do not have project planning software, use a spreadsheet program like Excel to track activities and due dates. Make sure you have contingency plans for "what if" scenarios on launch day. What if the servers go down? What if launch promotions are preempted by another department's announcement? Imagine your worst rollout nightmares and then create alternate strategies—just in case.

2. Create positioning objectives and statements.

Decide how you would like the web site or intranet to be perceived by target audiences. Use the objective and goal statements developed in the planning stages of the web project as a jumping off point. Positioning objectives outline the desired perceptions to be communicated to the target audience. For instance, a web site could be positioned to be a gateway as opposed to be a primary information source. Positioning statements are derived from the objectives. The statements are phrases, sentences and vocabulary identified and developed to achieve the position or perception—how you want your target audience to "recall and remember" the web site or intranet, and how you want them to "think" about it compared to other similar products and services they may encounter. Positioning objectives and statements will pay off when it comes time to evaluate or construct the brand image and create messages for rollout communications.

3. Implement a creative promotion theme.

It is important to have a promotion theme to help catch the attention and imagination of the people being targeted for the rollout. While evaluating theme ideas, take the organizational culture into account but do not let it prevent you from thinking outside-of-the-box. Even conservative organizations respond to well-executed, imaginative themes. If you get stuck for ideas, scout out the nearest card or party shop, monitor the promotion campaigns of companies with seasonal products, or scan the advertising pages of upscale business magazines. Of course, the promotion theme should give you plenty of opportunities to construct and broadcast messages that support positioning objectives. The promotion theme does not have to be directly tied to the positioning objectives, but should provide enough flexibility for creating an imaginative rollout with attention-getting messages which support one or more positioning objectives.

4. Develop messages and repeat them.

If "Location. Location. Location." is good for real estate, then the mantra for a successful rollout would be "Repeat. Repeat. Repeat." The rollout plans should include a complete list of all

the promotion opportunities and formats you intend to utilize during the launch, and the release schedule. The most effective rollouts are implemented in stages over a period of time. A staged promotion requires more work but it provides ample opportunities for repeating messages—an important key to realizing position objectives. Start with the positioning statements and derive a series of 3 to 4 headlines that convey position objectives for the web site or intranet. Keep the headlines short and use vocabulary with punch and color. Develop a list of attributes that you want to draw attention to. Again, keep the attribute descriptions short and to the point. Look at the headlines and attribute list for slogan potential. If a slogan is not apparent, do not agonize over it. Repeating the key 3 to 4 headlines in all rollout promotion activities and materials will be just as effective.

5. Create a brand image to build strong visual identity.

Web sites and intranets are products and services. As such they require marketing management strategies, starting with a brand image. The name and logo graphic form the foundation of an image—both the visual and perceived. The name should be unique and memorable. Stay away from acronyms and names that are long, end with an “s,” and are difficult to pronounce. If you are inheriting a brand name and feel that it is a problem, including negative perceptions from a previous bad design or site content, then the rollout is the perfect time to start fresh with a new name and visual image. Plan to provide visual support to the brand name with a creative logo design. A graphic that is distinctive and recognizable adds the visual element to the brand image. By consistently using the name and visual image across all communications materials and rollout broadcasts, you will be setting the foundation of a strong visual identity which can support follow-on marketing activities.

6. Personalize messages to executive management and loyal customers.

Never assume that senior executive management does not know or care about a web site or intranet. Just because they may not exhibit a “hands on” persona, does not mean that your efforts are not being noticed. A rollout provides the perfect opportunity to garner goodwill, visibility, and support among senior executive management as well as loyal customers. Make sure that you include in the rollout plans something special for these two target audiences. It does not have to be fancy. A personally signed invitation to view the new web site or intranet written on high quality stationery is one option. If the budget allows, sending a specially wrapped sample of a promotion item with a personally signed announcement is another option. Just make sure you do not use anything that is easily discarded. The objective is to send an item that will stay on their desk as a reminder.

7. Give people a reason to return.

Getting people to visit the web site or intranet is one goal of the rollout. The second goal is to have them bookmark it, come back, use it, and incorporate its resources into their everyday work. While there are many factors influencing why a person does or does not return, the rollout plans can help tip the balance in your favor. As you outline the rollout, especially the promotion activities, make sure to incorporate those which lend themselves to repeat contact with the target audience and which offer rewards for “repeat visit” behavior. Online contests are probably the best example of promotion schemes that offer a dual benefit. Other promotion activities can be constructed to encourage and reward repeat visitors. Even if the promotion activity focuses on a contest drawing, announce the winner online and make online visiting a condition of winning.

Planning and executing a carefully crafted rollout plan is an essential component in successfully developing and releasing an online endeavor, be it a web site or intranet. While there are numerous considerations to incorporate into a rollout plan, these 7 components can mean the difference between a high profile, successful launch or one with limited impact and visibility.

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