

# Volume 2: Intranet Navigation, Menus, and Information Architecture

## Intranet Usability Guidelines

4<sup>th</sup> Edition

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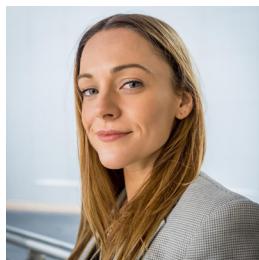
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# Executive Summary

## OUR RESEARCH STUDIES

Findings in this and other reports in this series are based on four large behavioral research studies. These were planned, conducted, and funded by Nielsen Norman Group. The research included the following:

- **Fifty-seven intranets**, with 18 years between the first study and the most recent. We studied:
  - 14 intranets in 2002
  - 13 intranets in 2005
  - 15 intranets in 2011
  - 15 intranets in 2019
- **More than 285 employees** (75 in our most recent round of research). They were all employees of each organization and users of the intranet.
- **Three continents:** North America (the United States and Canada), Europe, and Asia

We conducted these studies to learn about the following:

- How employees use intranets
- What makes intranets helpful or unhelpful
- What can be done to make intranets better

## METHODOLOGY

We used three basic usability methods for each round of research:

- **Usability testing** in a lab or conference room setting, with one or a few researchers watching users for 75–120 minutes as they attempted anywhere from nine to 15 realistic tasks on the intranet
- **Field studies** during which a researcher watched employees work for anywhere from one to five hours to see how and when they used the intranet in their personal work areas
- **Expert reviews** during which researchers used the design considering users, top tasks, and established design principles

## ABOUT THE FOURTH EDITION

Our most recent round of intranet research followed the same study protocol as in previous rounds and involved more than **75 employees at 15 different organizations**. We usually observed **four to eight employees at each study location**, which ranged from small companies to large enterprises across the United States, Canada, and Europe.

An NN/g researcher conducted one-hour field study sessions, observing participants in their work environment as they went about their normal work. One or two NN/g researchers conducted usability testing sessions, using either company computers or the employee's own work-computer and the think-out-loud protocol. Usability testing sessions were 75-minutes and followed this structure:

- **Initial survey:** Included gender, age, tenure with the organization, job title, department, frequency of intranet use, and device(s) often used to access the intranet.
- **Typical task attempts:** Users attempted to complete between nine and 13 realistic tasks on the intranet. Most of the administered tasks were directed (meaning they had specific criteria for success), while a few were exploratory (meaning they were used to measure engagement and had no success criteria).

## FINDINGS FROM ALL STUDIES

Please note that the screenshots and scenarios in this and the other reports in our intranet series represent only a moment in time. It's entirely possible that some of the intranet designs you see in these reports have changed since our research. Many teams and designers learned from our usability studies and changed their designs immediately after the testing.

In addition, some screenshots or quotes in this report were captured in prior rounds of intranet research. Where they substantiate a long-standing guideline, we've kept the older examples for discussion and instructional purposes. The commentary explains what we learned during the testing, and the design best practices we discuss remain true today and most for years to come. Find a complete list of the organizations who participated in our intranet guidelines research over the years at the end of this report.

## HOW TO USE THIS REPORT

After conducting this research and reflecting on the findings and insights, we have compiled a comprehensive set of recommendations and guidelines to help you make better intranet designs.

## Five Types of Recommendations

Each recommendation in this report falls into one of five categories, displayed differently depending on its type:

- Design guidelines
- Definitions, principles, and methods
- Process and strategic considerations
- Timeless design tips
- User behaviors

Following are explanations for recommendation types and examples of how they appear throughout this report: (and the entire Intranet Guidelines Report Series):

### 1. Design Guidelines

These include actionable advice, along with evidence, discussions, and screenshots to help designers make usable, engaging intranet designs, and are the bulk of the information in this report.

Concrete design guidelines and recommendations substantiated by behavioral evidence and years of usability expertise embodied by NN/g researchers appear as in the example below. Some of the guidelines are from previous rounds of research and remain valid today, while others are new with this round of research.

Here's an example of a **design guideline**:

**59. Avoid using an icon for search on desktop; it's only acceptable on mobile versions of the intranet.**

### 2. Definitions, Principles, and Methods

In these callouts, we explain the terms, principles, and methods we suggest you use in your intranet design work. They span UX design and research and are often used on intranets or at organizations in general.

We also define terms, principles, and UX research methodologies in the context of relevant guidelines and discussions. These terms will be bold.

Here's an example of **Definitions, Principles, and Methods**:

### Card sorting

#### Definitions, Principles, and Methods

Card sorting is a UX research method in which study participants group individual labels written on notecards according to criteria that make sense to them. This method uncovers how the target audience's domain knowledge is structured and helps teams create an information architecture that matches users' expectations.

## 3. Process and Strategic Considerations

These are larger-scale initiatives and tactical ideas, or those related to process best practices. They tend to focus less on the design itself but help enable good design. These usually require more time, involvement, and alignment from many people and teams across an organization.

Some recommendations are less about design detail and more about the process or strategic ideas behind designing an intranet. These ideas are too large or unspecific to be a design guideline, so they are categorized under this type.

Here's an example of **Process and Strategic Considerations**:



### Conduct card sorting early.

#### Process and Strategic Considerations

Conduct card sorting early in the design process to determine the intranet's information architecture. Card sorting can be done once you know the initial content topics and navigation categories you want to offer on the site.

## 4. Timeless Design Tips

These are general, sometimes basic, good design practices that apply to both intranets and digital design as a whole.

Basic reminder guidelines, many of which continue to hold after decades of research, are included in this report and, in many cases, apply to the design of digital products in general, not just intranets. When one of these more basic recommendations is mentioned in the report, we will call it out like this to denote that it has withstood the test of time.

Here's an example of **Timeless Design Tips**:

### Use clear link labels.

#### Timeless Design Tips

Front-load text and navigation links with information-carrying keywords.

## 5. User Behaviors

These describe the ways employees acted as they used the intranets. This doesn't mean your users will act the same way as the ones we saw, but they may behave similarly. There's no substitute for doing usability tests and watching your own employees use your intranet. But, if you're not doing much of your user research, refer to these behaviors as a best guess for how your users may act.

Here's an example of **User Behaviors**:

### Cleaning up browser tabs

#### User Behaviors

Many employees had several browser tabs open at a time while completing their work or using the intranet. When they encountered links, which opened in yet another new tab, they often wanted to stop and pause between tasks to clean up their tabs. This housekeeping behavior indicated that users felt the interface became cluttered or unmanageable.

## Scrubbed Screenshots

You'll notice throughout this report; some screenshots have been scrubbed to protect the organization's proprietary information. Also, individuals' personally identifiable information, including employee names, phone numbers, office locations, profile photos, and sensitive company information, has been removed or blurred from all screenshots and replaced with placeholder images, icons, shapes, or text.

This is intentional to protect and respect the identities of the individuals and organizations who took part in our research.

**Employee Name**  
DEPARTMENT: Corporate Communications  
PHONE: 555-555-5555  
LOCATION: 12345-67

POSITION: Communications Specialist  
EMAIL: [email@nait.ca](mailto:email@nait.ca)  
MAIL DROP: PEB200 (Reception)

*Here are two examples of how we mask participants' personally identifiable information throughout the report. Where you see icons or masked text are areas where an employee's actual photo, email address, phone number, or office location would otherwise appear.*

## LONG-STANDING EXAMPLES

### Cumulative Findings Across All Studies

Some screenshots or quotations in this report were captured in our early intranet research, and given how long we have been studying intranets, some may have been captured **almost 20 years ago**. We've kept older examples that substantiate a long-standing guideline, interesting finding, or discussion. Find a complete list of the organizations that participated in our intranet guidelines research over the years at the end of this report.

Please note that the screenshots and scenarios in this and other reports in our intranet series represent only a moment in time. The intranet designs and screenshots you see in these reports may have **changed since our research**. In fact, many teams and designers learned from our usability studies and modified their designs immediately after the testing.

# Guidelines

# Guideline List

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# Information Architecture

## A CONTENT-DRIVEN APPROACH TO IA

Information Architecture (IA) is concerned with how information is structured and presented so that users can easily access that information when needed. To build a solid IA, you must identify what content you have and then group and present that content in ways that make sense to your users.

When designing an IA, it's important to consider whether how content is produced over time could break it. For example, an intranet that mimics the organization's structure too closely will be in trouble when the organization restructures. An IA should be flexible and able to adapt to and easily absorb new content.

Several organizations in our most recent study had recently redesigned their intranets. As part of this redesign, some teams had focused on removing unnecessary content and performed user research to inform the best structure for their content. By doing so, they produced a more robust IA, and as a result, employees were much more successful in finding the content they were looking for in the usability tests we conducted.

You cannot build an intuitive IA if you don't know what content you have and what content you produce. If you're thinking of redesigning your intranet, it's important to start with a **content inventory** to document exactly what you have.



### Content inventory

#### Definitions, Principles, and Methods

A **content inventory** is a list of every piece of digital content you currently have captured at either the page or asset level. It includes specific characteristics about each piece.

Once the content inventory is complete, perform a **content audit** to understand which content is crucial to your users' work and which pieces of content are rarely consumed. Analytics, surveys, and user research will tell you which pieces of content are crucial to your organization's employees.



### Content audit

#### Definitions, Principles, and Methods

A **content audit** examines, assesses, and evaluates the quality of the content listed in the inventory. Audits uncover content that needs updating, where gaps exist that new content could fill, and help determine if certain pieces of content are ready for removal.

## Grouping Information

When thinking about how best to group information, consider using [card sorting](#) techniques to learn how users would group content and how they would name those groupings.



### Card sorting

#### Definitions, Principles, and Methods

**Card sorting** is a research method for developing an IA in line with users' mental models. In a card sort, users are given a list of representative content items to group and label as they see fit.

There are two types of card sorting, which measure different aspects of users' mental models for information architecture:

**Open card sort:** This is the most common type of card sort. Users can assign whatever names they want to the groups they've created with the cards in the stack.

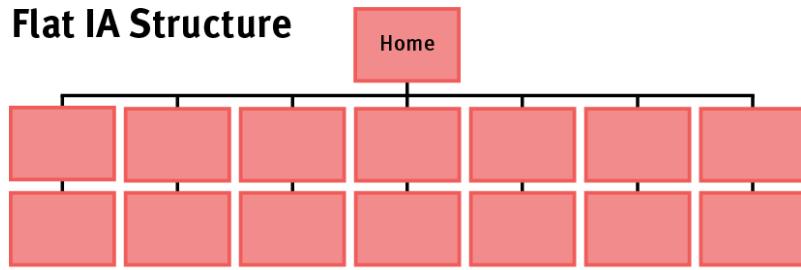
**Closed card sort:** This is a card sort variation where you give users a predetermined set of category names and ask them to organize the individual cards into these predetermined categories. Closed card sorting does not reveal how users conceptualize a set of topics. Instead, it is used to evaluate how well an existing category structure supports the content from a user's perspective.

## Determining the Best IA Structure: Flat, Deep, or Hybrid

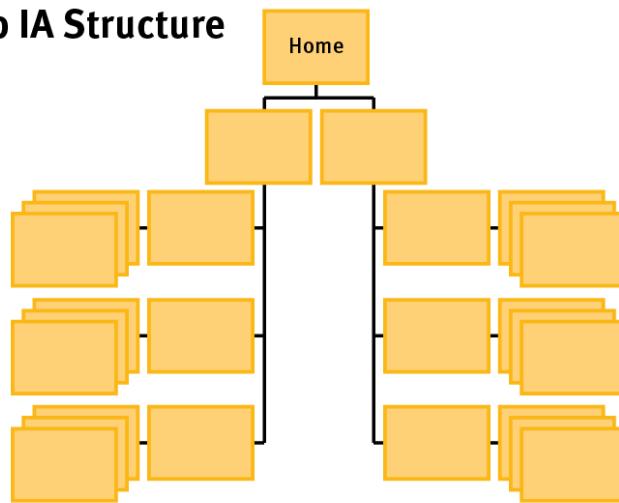
Once you've performed a card sort, you should have an idea of the content groupings that make the most sense to users. The next thing to consider is how you'll organize content within those groupings. There are [three IA structure options](#): flat, deep, and hybrid.

- **Flat** structures offer more choices at the topmost menu level and fewer levels overall. Thus, users can scan and evaluate many options at once on the first step of their path.
- **Deep** structures offer fewer choices at the topmost navigation level and more levels overall. Users have fewer choices at the start of their path and must look deeper for certain pieces of content.
- **Hybrid** structures offer a mix of both flat and deep structures; some navigational items have many levels, whereas others have only one or two.

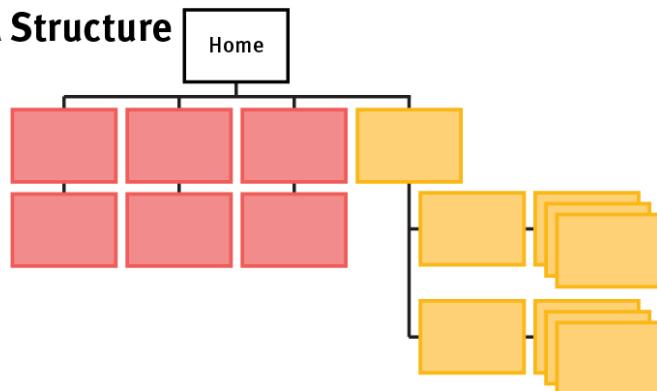
### Flat IA Structure



### Deep IA Structure



### Hybrid IA Structure

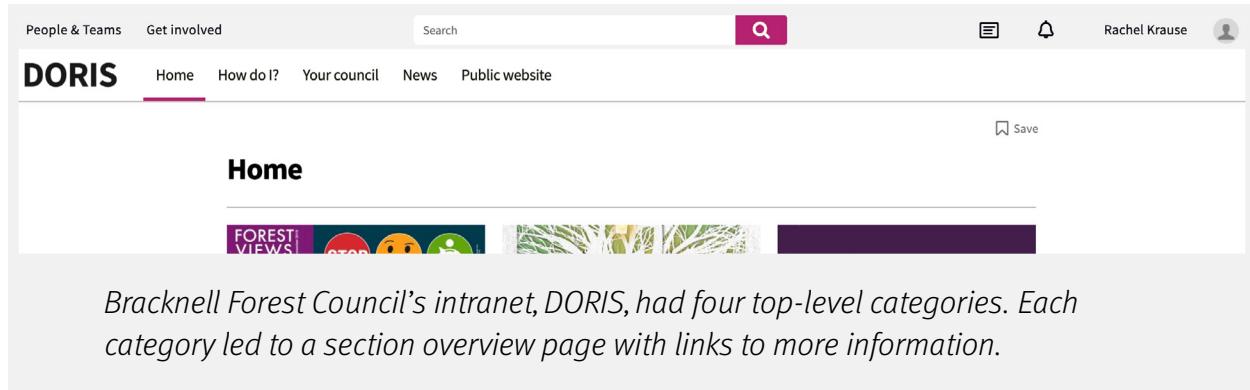


*There are three possible IA structures to consider when designing an intranet: flat, deep, and hybrid.*

Which IA structure you choose will depend on the content you have and the results of your card sorts. We've provided some benefits and drawbacks of these structures in the table below.

Structure	Pros	Cons
Flat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Easy to see all options and content types right away</li> <li>✓ Primes users to get a sense of what content is available on the site</li> <li>✓ Content can be found with fewer clicks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✗ May result in many top-level categories, which can result in cluttered navigation</li> <li>✗ Easier for top-level categories to overlap</li> <li>✗ Could result in long, information-heavy pages</li> </ul>
Deep	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Fewer choices</li> <li>✓ Less likely users will select the wrong navigation item in the topmost level</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✗ Content is less discoverable</li> <li>✗ Requires a greater number of clicks to find content</li> </ul>
Hybrid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ More content is exposed through a greater number of top-level categories</li> <li>✓ The design can promote certain types of content, such as information about leadership, without it being hidden in another category</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✗ Some content requires many clicks</li> </ul>

A flat structure might be well suited for small organizations that have less content. Bracknell Forest Council utilized a flat structure for its intranet, DORIS. Each category in the main navigation led to a section overview page with further links, and each category had either two or three levels.



The screenshot shows the DORIS intranet homepage. At the top, there is a header with links for "People & Teams", "Get involved", "Search", and a user profile for "Rachel Krause". Below the header, the main navigation bar has links for "Home", "How do I?", "Your council", "News", and "Public website". The "Home" link is underlined, indicating the current page. The main content area is titled "Home" and features a decorative banner with icons for "FOREST VIEWS", a red leaf, an orange leaf, a green leaf, and a magnifying glass over a leaf. Below the banner, a text box contains the following text:

*Bracknell Forest Council's intranet, DORIS, had four top-level categories. Each category led to a section overview page with links to more information.*

The Delivery department is led by [Kevin Gibbs](#). His PA support is [Employee Name](#). There are 7 sections.

Section	Lead	PA
Business Intelligence	<a href="#">FirstName LastName</a> , Deputy Head and <a href="#">Name Name</a> , Business Intelligence Lead (GiS)	N/A
Contracts	<a href="#">Employee Name</a> , Assistant Director	<a href="#">Employee Name</a>
Customer Experience	<a href="#">Employee Name</a> , Assistant Director	<a href="#">Employee Name</a>
Democratic Services	<a href="#">Name Name</a> , Head of Democratic Services	N/A
IT	<a href="#">Employee Name</a> , Interim Assistant Director	<a href="#">Employee Name</a>
Legal	<a href="#">Employee Name</a> , Borough Solicitor	<a href="#">Employee Name</a>
Property	<a href="#">Employee Name</a> , Assistant Director	<a href="#">Employee Name</a>

**Documents**

[Delivery department health and safety policy.pdf](#)

Does anything need adding to this page? [?](#)

**In this section**

- [Contract Services](#)
- [Corporate complaints procedure - guidelines for staff](#)
- [Corporate Property](#)
- [Customer Experience and IT Services](#)
- [Democratic and Registration Services](#)
- [Legal Services](#)
- [Scheme of delegations](#)
- [more](#)

**External links**

- [Departmental service plans](#)
- [Quarterly service reports](#)
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- [Corporate complaints procedure - guidelines for staff](#)
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- [Support for Members](#)
- [Democratic Services](#)
- [Register of Delegated Contract Authority](#)

*When users selected Your Council from the main navigation on DORIS, they were brought to a page with links to different departments and groups. Each group had its own subpage (as shown above for the Delivery department.) This page is the second and lowest level in the IA structure (not counting Home), as shown by the breadcrumbs.*

For organizations with a lot of content, and the top-level choices are very distinct (and therefore, it's unlikely that people will choose the wrong top-level item), a deep structure may be a better solution.

It might be appropriate to utilize a hybrid IA where some items have a deep structure and others have a flat structure. Many sites we tested in our latest study used a hybrid structure. For example, categories such as *News* were typically flat, while categories such as *My Workplace* often had numerous sub-levels.

The Scottish Government's intranet, Saltire, had a hybrid IA structure. The category *My Workplace* had three levels, whereas the other categories were flat and took users to an overview page or tool.

## Naming Links

When designing menu items or [link labels](#), users should be able to read them and quickly understand what they mean to decide whether to click them. Thus, using the correct terminology is essential to making any navigational structure work. In some cases, choosing terminology for intranets is easier than choosing it for other applications and sites because intranets can adopt widely known company language and terms. Still, you should ensure that each feature is explained and communicated well by the words you use to label them.

Once you've settled on some labels and a structure, it's a good idea to test them to see if they work. **Tree testing** helps you see whether users can find the content easily in the structure you're considering using.

### Tree testing

**Definitions, Principles, and Methods**

**Tree testing** is an evaluative research method usually used to test the result of a card sort. In a tree test, a user is presented with a hierarchical content structure (or tree) and asked to find a location in the tree where a specific task can be completed.

## NAVIGATIONAL FRAMEWORK

### 1. Create a navigational framework that reflects users' common tasks.

When employees look for information on an intranet, they shouldn't have to know which departments are responsible for producing certain content. In our previous studies, it was common to see intranet content structured around organizational departments. This causes two problems:

1. Users often don't know which department is responsible for producing the information they're looking for and therefore can't find it.
2. When an organization performs a restructure, the IA must undergo significant changes, causing users to lose familiarity with the navigation.

Fortunately, this trend seems to be dying as the intranets we studied for this report edition had mostly organized content based on users' common tasks. Content organized in this way ensures commonly accessed information and resources (such as news, company information, tools, forms, and policies) can be found quickly.

To design a navigational structure that reflects what users need to do on the intranet, you will need to understand:

- What tasks do (or should) employees perform on the intranet?
- What terms do they use to describe those tasks?
- How do they think about those tasks respective to one another?

Conducting early user research with employees ensures you can satisfactorily answer these questions.



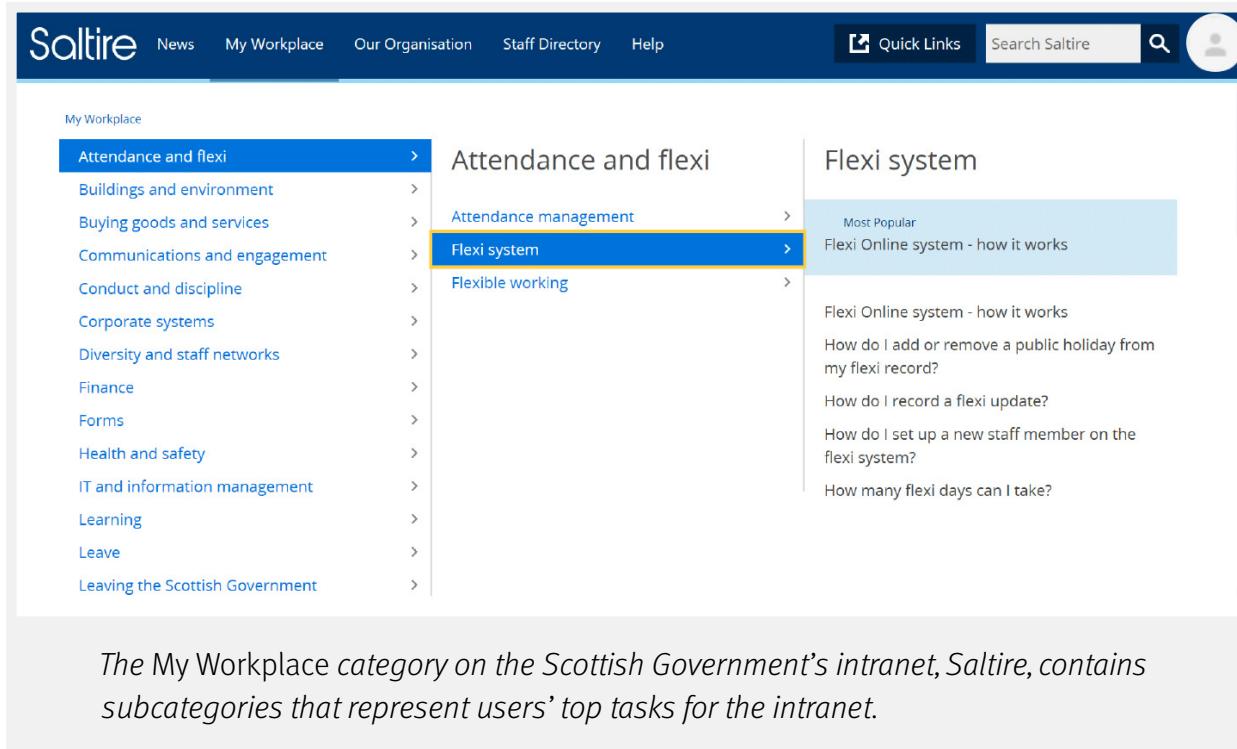
#### Conduct early user research with employees.

##### Process and Strategic Considerations

Observe employees at your organization as they perform their roles to learn what tasks they perform. If you have search data, analyze it to understand what keywords employees use to find content. Speak to users about what they look for and hope to find on the intranet. Conduct [open card sorting](#) to find out how users label content groupings.

The intranet team at the Scottish Government performed user research to understand its users' top tasks and consequently structured the IA around this. The intranet team also performed card sorting and tree testing to ensure users understood the meaning of any links and could find content easily in the navigation categories that the team had created.

“We had to shift our mindset from functions to user needs,” the intranet team lead said. As a result of these efforts, the Scottish Government’s intranet, Saltire, ranked in the top three (out of 14) intranets for success rate and time-on-task.



The screenshot shows the Saltire intranet interface. At the top, there's a dark blue header with the 'Saltire' logo, a search bar, and a user profile icon. Below the header, the main content area has a light gray background. On the left, a sidebar under the heading 'My Workplace' lists various categories: Attendance and flexi, Buildings and environment, Buying goods and services, Communications and engagement, Conduct and discipline, Corporate systems, Diversity and staff networks, Finance, Forms, Health and safety, IT and information management, Learning, Leave, and Leaving the Scottish Government. The 'Attendance and flexi' category is expanded, showing subcategories: Attendance management, Flexi system (which is highlighted with a yellow box), and Flexible working. To the right of the main content area, there's a sidebar titled 'Flexi system' with a 'Most Popular' section containing links like 'Flexi Online system - how it works'. A callout box points to the 'Flexi system' link in the sidebar.

*The My Workplace category on the Scottish Government’s intranet, Saltire, contains subcategories that represent users’ top tasks for the intranet.*

Some intranets feature certain departments (such as HR and IT) as categories in the main navigation alongside other topic-based categories. While there’s nothing wrong with introducing department-based categories to your main navigation if users understand what those departments are responsible for; however, you should be careful if overlap could occur with other topic- or task-based categories.

For example, the intranet from the City of Calgary contained a category for *Tools & Resources* and a category for HR (*myHR*). When we asked users to find out about mileage reimbursement, they were unsure which category would house that information. They utilized a trial-and-error approach, exploring one category at a time. When we asked one participant how they eventually found the information, they responded, “I can’t remember what I selected to get here. I think maybe *Tools & Resources*? I can’t remember now to be honest.”

*The City of Calgary's intranet, myCity, had a task-based category, Tools & Resources, and a department-based category for HR-related information (myHR). In some cases, users weren't sure which of the two categories would house the information they sought.*

Don't stop at the top-level categories when constructing a navigational framework that reflects the user's tasks. Design secondary and tertiary categories with users' tasks in mind to ensure users can find content within each category efficiently.

## A Starting Point for Main Navigation

The following list presents some common main navigation items and can be used as a starting point for creating a task-based navigation scheme.

**News:** If you frequently post news articles, users will visit the intranet just to read news and will want access to past articles. In this case, having a primary navigation category just for news items about the company and the industry can be helpful.

**About [the organization]/Our Company:** Information about the organization, such as history, values, management, and office locations

**Working at [the organization]:** Information for employees about their work and life benefits, payroll, and time off

**Around the Office/Support Services:** Tools for office employees, such as IT help desk, maintenance requests, and cafeteria menus

**Departments/Teams:** Information for and about different departments (be sure to include all departments). Role-based personalized systems are the cleanest interface for teams presenting content for people within and outside the department because they serve content to users based on their login. In lieu of personalization, the section's main page can offer links catering to various types of users and groups.

**Projects:** Information for and about different projects (if applicable)

**Products:** Information for and about your company's products (if applicable)

**Tools/Forms:** A centralized resource for common applications and forms

**Training:** If training is a priority at your organization, you might want to include a primary-level menu item that links directly to training classes and resources

If using some of these as a starting point, perform user research to ensure these categories are intelligible to your employees and tailor them as appropriate.

## 2. Place each piece of content within the site's navigational framework; no item should be accessible only through search.

A user should be able to find any intranet content using the site's navigation alone. In addition to being a navigational device, the navigation also acts as an orientation device, helping users make sense of the site's structure. While it can be tempting to reduce the navigation to popular items or to remove links to keep the navigation simple, doing so can cause users to feel disorientated and result in weaker mental models of the site's structure.

Because the navigation primes users as to what content could be found on the intranet, if users don't see the content they're looking for represented in the navigation, they may assume it doesn't exist and won't search for it.

On some intranets we tested, certain content was only available on the homepage or via site search. When we asked users to find this content, they struggled to find it.

For example, Dell Technologies' intranet had several training tools in the *Learning* category. However, the *Learning* category dropdown only surfaced some of the training pages and tools, but not all of them. When we asked participants to find a training course on diversity and cultural literacy, they went straight to the *Learning* category in the navigation and expected to find the training in one of the links presented there, but could not, because the training was being offered within a training system called *Saba*, which did not appear in the navigation.

The screenshot shows the Dell Technologies intranet homepage. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links for News, My Communities, My HR, My IT, Learning (which is underlined), Organizations, Offerings, Tools & Resources, and a search icon. Below the navigation, there's a section titled "The Learning Studio" which includes links to "Dell Technologies Sales University", "Dell Technologies Education Services", "Educate Dell", and "Product & Operations Academies". Each item has a brief description and a small icon. On the far right of this section, there's a blue button labeled "FEEDBACK" with a speech bubble icon. The main content area below this section is mostly empty.

*The Learning menu on Dell Technologies' intranet was missing a link to a popular training platform, Saba.*

After a lot of clicking around and using site search, three of the five participants in our study eventually found the tool, and one employee remarked,

“There wasn’t a clear path to go to *Saba*, I had to click into a bunch of different things. . . . I think there should be a link. . . . If you were looking at this for the first time and you were supposed to take these trainings, there’d be no way to find it. You’d have to ask your manager for a direct link to find it.”

### 3. Allow users to move to any area of the site without forcing them to return to the homepage first.

Wherever a user is on the intranet, they should be able to move to another area of the site using the navigation, without being forced to return to the homepage first. On some of the intranets we tested, users were not able to move to another area of the site without first navigating home because of the following reasons:

- Links to content were only found on the homepage and in the main navigation
- The global navigation did not persist throughout the site
- Links in the main navigation took users to separate microsites with new navigation.

This made finding content more difficult and time-consuming as users had to make extra clicks and wait for more pages to load before finding the content they were looking for. It also caused some users to feel lost and less confident they could find content.

### 4. Don't place links to content in more than one parent category.

Every piece of content should have one place to live within the site structure. While it's true that users are more likely to find a link if it appears in more than one category, duplicating links across different categories will decrease users' understanding of how content is categorized on the site, causing them to lose confidence in the navigation. It will also mean your navigation will become much bigger and potentially more cluttered, reducing users' ability to find other content.

At the City of Calgary, the intranet team was told by senior stakeholders to add the *Safety and Security* category to the topmost level of the navigation. However, the *Safety and Security* link can also be found under the *Organization* category, introducing duplication and causing users to wonder if the links would take them to different places.

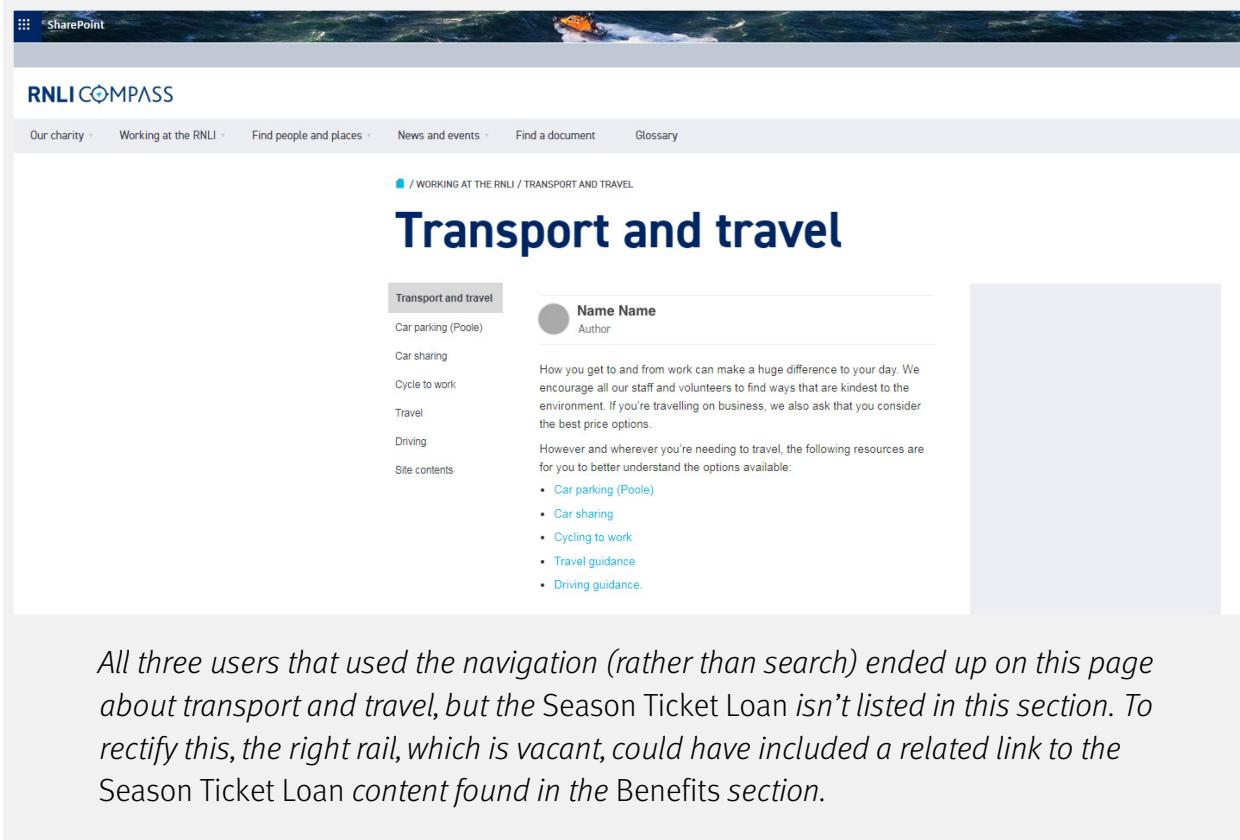
The screenshot shows the myCity intranet homepage. At the top, there's a red header bar with the "Calgary" logo and the "myCity" logo. Below the header is a navigation bar with links: Tools & Resources, myHR, Organization, News & Events, Dashboard, Safety & Security, and a search bar. The date "June 12, 2019" and a "Close" button are also at the top right. The main content area has a sidebar on the left with "Safety" and "Security" categories. Under "Safety", there's a link to "Security Home". Under "Security", there are links to "Report an Incident", "Security services", "Information Security", "Device security", "Personal security", "Workplace security", "Workplace violence", "About Corporate Security", "Security training and resources", and "Contact Security". To the right of the sidebar, there's a large callout box for "Security" with the phone number "403-268-8868" and the text "Call 24 hours a day for support.".

*The City of Calgary's intranet, myCity, includes Safety & Security in the main navigation, a request from senior stakeholders. However, the same category can also be found under Organization, thereby introducing duplication.*

If you have a situation where a piece of content could be found in more than one place, there are two options to remedy the situation:

1. **Review your categories:** Your topmost categories may be too broad and, as a result, overlap. In this case, you might need to reshuffle your IA to introduce distinct categories with little overlap
2. **Introduce related links:** If, despite changes to the IA, users are still seeking information from the wrong category, consider using a *related* link from the page that users often land on to redirect them to the correct place.

At the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, we asked test participants to find information about a season ticket loan (a program where the employer pays for a six-month or yearly travel card, and the employee pays back the cost in installments from their paycheck). Given that the task was related to travel, all three users who used the navigation (rather than search) for this task, selected the *Transport and travel* link, underneath the *Working at the RNLI* category. However, none were able to find it there because the content sat underneath the *Benefits* section (also found underneath *Working at the RNLI*). In this case, a related link to the *Season Ticket Loan* information on the *Transport and travel* page could have quickly redirected users to find the information they needed.



The screenshot shows a SharePoint site for RNLI COMPASS. The top navigation bar includes links for 'Our charity', 'Working at the RNLI', 'Find people and places', 'News and events', 'Find a document', and 'Glossary'. Below this, a breadcrumb trail shows the current location: '/ WORKING AT THE RNLI / TRANSPORT AND TRAVEL.' The main title 'Transport and travel' is displayed in a large, bold, dark blue font. To the left of the main content area, there is a sidebar titled 'Transport and travel' containing links for 'Car parking (Poole)', 'Car sharing', 'Cycle to work', 'Travel', 'Driving', and 'Site contents'. The main content area features a profile picture of a person and the text: 'How you get to and from work can make a huge difference to your day. We encourage all our staff and volunteers to find ways that are kindest to the environment. If you're travelling on business, we also ask that you consider the best price options.' It also lists resources for travel options like car parking, cycling, and driving. A callout box highlights a note about the Season Ticket Loan.

*All three users that used the navigation (rather than search) ended up on this page about transport and travel, but the Season Ticket Loan isn't listed in this section. To rectify this, the right rail, which is vacant, could have included a related link to the Season Ticket Loan content found in the Benefits section.*

## 5. Don't create a miscellaneous category to house content that doesn't fit in any other category.

Not every piece of content falls neatly into a category when carrying out initial card sorting. However, that's not a reason to create a miscellaneous category to house the leftover content. Categories such as *Tools*, *Resources*, and *More* are not descriptive and should be avoided.

DIRTT's intranet, myDIRTT, had a miscellaneous category called *Resources*, but the information it contained was diverse, making it difficult for users to understand what content the category did and didn't house. There were also further miscellaneous categories within the *Resources* category, such as a second *Resources* category and an *Additional* category.

When using the intranet, DIRTT employees struggled to find content in the *Resources* category and other top-level categories because of the lack of distinctiveness in the content groupings.

## 6. Link users directly to content by eliminating extra steps to access information.

On some of the intranets we studied, navigating to content required multiple meaningless clicks. Rather than linking directly to content, links took users to additional pages that offered the same link again. This was frustrating as users hated having to click many times (and wait for a page to load) to find information. Links should take users directly to the information of interest.

The content was often hidden behind progressive reveals, which meant users had to perform further unnecessary clicks. When we asked one of the users in our study why they were frustrated using the intranet, they replied, “It might just be there, but there are too many clicks to get to where you need to go.”

When using Dell’s intranet, users found that there were sometimes too many clicks to get to a desired page or application. For example, when we asked users to find out what the DELL discount was for employees, these are the steps they had to follow:

**Step 1:** The user lands on a page from the search results page and clicks on the *Discounts and Deals for Dell Team Members* link and is taken to a new page.

**Step 2:** The user clicks on two progressive disclosure links to view more content since it’s unclear which link will have the information the user needs.

**Step 3:** The user doesn’t find details about the discount. Instead, the user needs to choose a further link taking the user to Dell’s public site.

**Step 4:** The user finds information about the discount on Dell’s public site.

All of these steps are unnecessary. Ideally, the content should be found directly from the first results page. If this is not possible because the discount changes often, then a link to the relevant page on Dell.com should have been provided from the first page.

The screenshot shows a dark-themed intranet page. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links for News, My Communities, My HR, My IT, Learning, and a user profile for John Doe. Below the navigation is a search bar with a magnifying glass icon and dropdown menus for 'United States' and 'Directory'. The main content area has a header 'Discounts and Deals - US' and a sub-header 'KB0959865'. A timestamp '2y ago' and view count '6334 Views' are shown, along with a rating of five stars. The article text discusses Dell's Employee Purchase Program (EPP) and Dell Extras. It includes a link to 'Discounts and Deals for Dell Team Members'. A sidebar on the right features a blue circular icon with 'My HR' text.

*When users searched for the Dell discount, they landed on this page, which contained no information about the discount but referred users to a new page with the inline link Discounts and Deals for Dell Team Members.*

The screenshot shows a light-themed intranet page titled 'Well at Dell' with a 'Log On' button. The top navigation bar includes links for Home, Health & Insurance, Well-Being, Wealth, Work/Life, and New to Dell. A search bar and a 'Print' button are also present. The main content features a section titled 'Discounts and deals for Dell team members'. Below this, a message states 'Dell provides these money-saving programs to help you stretch a dollar.' Two progressive reveal links are shown: '+ Save with discounts through Dell Extras' and '+ Employee Purchase Program'. To the right, there are two images with call-to-action boxes: 'Access team member discounts' (linked to Dell Extras) and 'Child care discounts'.

*After users had been referred from the previous page in their search for the Dell discount, they landed on this page where the content is hidden behind progressive reveals. They opened both links (requiring two extra clicks). Since there is no other content on this page, there was no need to hide content behind progressive reveal links.*

The same happened when users wanted to apply for an internal job on Dell Technologies' intranet. When users selected the link for internal jobs, they were taken to a page that explained the process for applying for an internal job, which was not what they expected. This resulted in extra clicks and wasted time. One user explained their frustration,

“[It’s] frustrating because it gives me the process rather than just taking me to the job searching [tool] . . . I have to click on *Find Jobs* to go job searching.”

On NAIT’s intranet, finding the cafeteria menu required many clicks. After finally finding out what the soup of the day was, one user commented,

“It should have been right there, on the first page. At least a link to the right restaurant as opposed to a generic one. I went generic, generic, then specific. My time is valuable. If I have to go here and here and here, it seems like a bit much to find a soup.”

Take users directly to pages or applications when they expect to be taken there. Limit the number of clicks required to get to key information or commonly performed tasks. Providing gateway pages is fine when there is a need and users expect this.

## 7. Provide section overview pages only if the pages contain worthwhile content. Don’t let a navigation scheme force you to create throwaway content because you have an empty page to fill.

Section overview pages are often unnecessary and simply add extra steps. Still, they can serve a purpose if some introduction to the content is needed and if they present content from pages located deeper in the IA. A section page can help intranets that have many pages and menu options by:

- Confirming which section a user is in (using a page title)
- Briefly summarizing the area (and possibly describing its purpose)
- Offering some of the section’s content from pages found deeper in the IA
- Listing and describing some of its features or sub-areas

For example, the City of Calgary had an overview page for the *Organization* category. The page introduced the city council’s mission and highlighted the different category child pages and what content could be found there.

**Calgary myCity**

Tools & Resources ▾ myHR ▾ Organization ▾ News & Events ▾ Dashboard ▾ Safety & Security ▾

June 12, 2019 ☰ 24°

[myCity home](#) > Our organization

## Our organization



### About us

Calgarians love their city, its opportunities and optimism. As the third largest municipality in Canada, we serve a city that 1.2 million people call home, a population that is young-with an average age of 36 years, diverse-with 28% visible minorities, and growing-with thousands of new people arriving each year from across Canada-and the world. An excellent quality of life, low taxes, proximity to nature and cleanliness make Calgary one of the most liveable cities on the planet! We are part of that success story-serving the city we live in, the city we love. And it shows. Calgarians are overwhelmingly satisfied with the service they receive. We listen, respect and act. United in a common purpose to make life better every day, for the citizens of today and tomorrow.

Please visit [calgary.ca/aboutus](#) to read about our culture, organization, services, [strategy](#) and [finances](#).

**City Manager & Leadership**

The corporate leadership team ensures that the actions and directions of management support the corporate vision and strategies.

[Learn more](#)

**Departments & Business Units**

See how we're organized and what business we do through our Departments & Business Units.

[Learn more](#)

**Our Culture**

Culture in an organization is what is expected, reinforced and recognized. See our vision, mission, values and promises.

[Learn more](#)

**Action Plan 2015-2018**

The overview and four-year business plans and budgets for The City of Calgary.

[Learn more](#)

**Mayor & Council**

City Council is the main governing and legislative body for The City of Calgary and is responsible for making the decisions necessary to allow the Corporation to achieve its purposes.

[Learn more](#)

**Office of the Mayor**

Naheed Nenshi was sworn in as Calgary's 36th mayor on October 25, 2010 and was re-elected in 2013 and 2017.

[Learn more](#)

**City Auditor**

The City Auditor is a designated officer appointed by Council and is independent of City Administration.

[Learn more](#)

**One Calgary**

Working together as One for Calgary to provide service value for citizens, customers and communities.

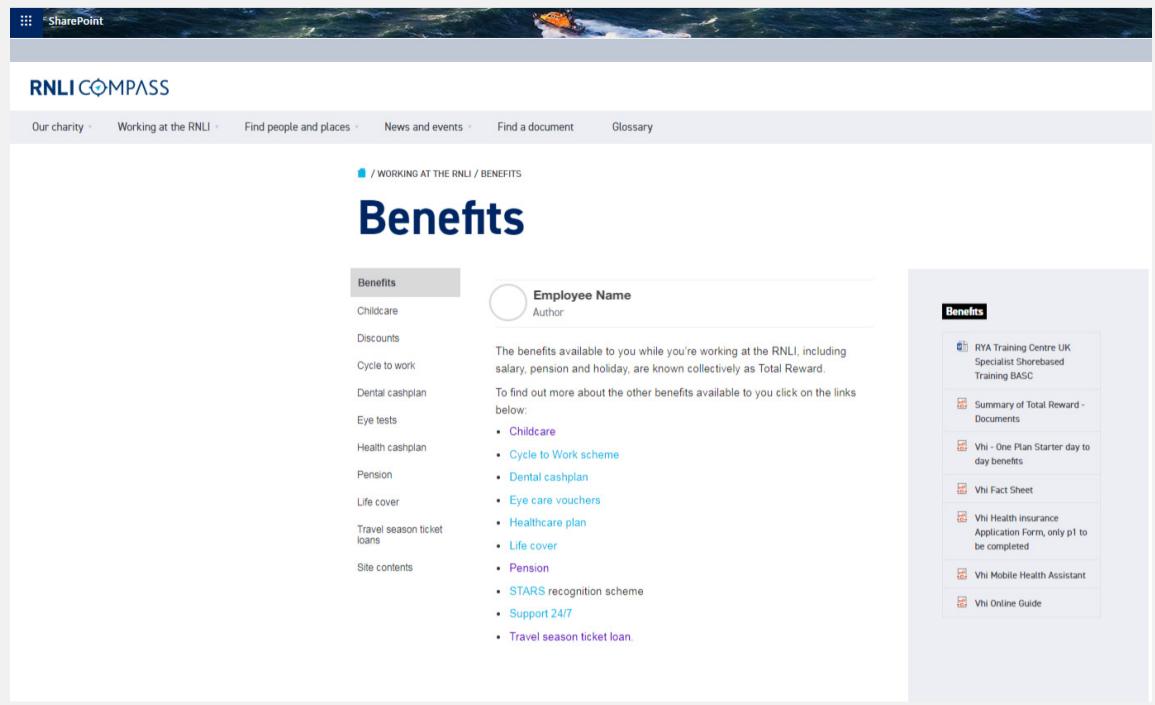
[Learn more](#)

### Related links

[Departments & Business Units](#)  
[Locations](#)

*The City of Calgary's intranet had an overview page for the Organization category, which contained a reminder of the council's mission and an overview of links to pages located deeper in the site structure.*

RNLI's intranet had several section overview pages; however, many of these did not contain any helpful content and were just an extra click to get to needed content.



The Benefits overview page on RNLI's intranet contained very little helpful information. The list of links in the main content area only served to duplicate the links already found in the local navigation.

When you have empty or sparsely populated overview pages, consider whether there is any information users might need to know right away and include it there. Overview pages can also contain contact information for content authors or people who know the content.



The Resources section on myDIRTT contained five groups of links that had little in common.

DIRTT's intranet only had three items in the main navigation. The main navigation could have benefited from having more top-level items with greater specificity which would probably result in little need to resort to a miscellaneous category, such as *Resources*. For example, the *Company* subcategory under *Resources* could have been moved to a top-level menu item so that it could be more easily found.

If faced with leftover content after initial card sorting, further card sorting, and tree testing may be needed to create an optimal structure to house all of your content. Consider whether your content labels are descriptive enough when conducting closed card sorting. If not, that may be one reason why content is being left over.

# Menu and Link Labels

## 8. Choose descriptive terms for menu and link labels and ensure menu items are mutually exclusive.

When users interact with your navigation, they should feel confident that they know what information may be contained behind each link. Users shouldn't have to wonder what each option means or feel divided on which category would be the best choice.

Labels such as the following result in questions being asked.

- **Resources:** What kind of resources? Resources for whom?
- **Productivity:** What counts as a productivity tool, and what doesn't?
- **Support:** What kind of support? Support for what?

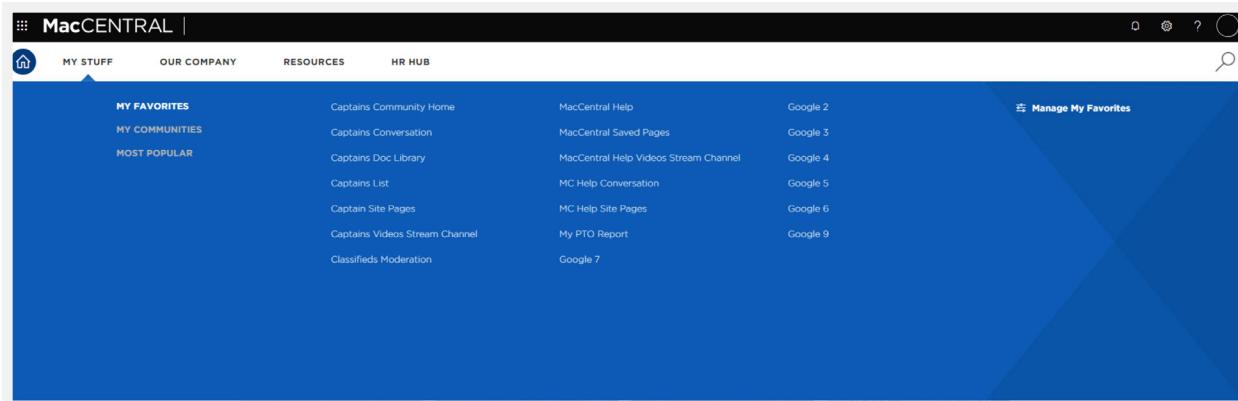
Categories in your main navigation should also be **mutually exclusive**, which means the categories should not overlap. When categories are mutually exclusive, users feel confident they know which category will be the right one for a given task and, therefore, spend less time on simple information-retrieval tasks.

When employees at Burns & McDonnell were given a directed task on MacCentral, they often had trouble deciding between *Our Company* and the *Resources* category.

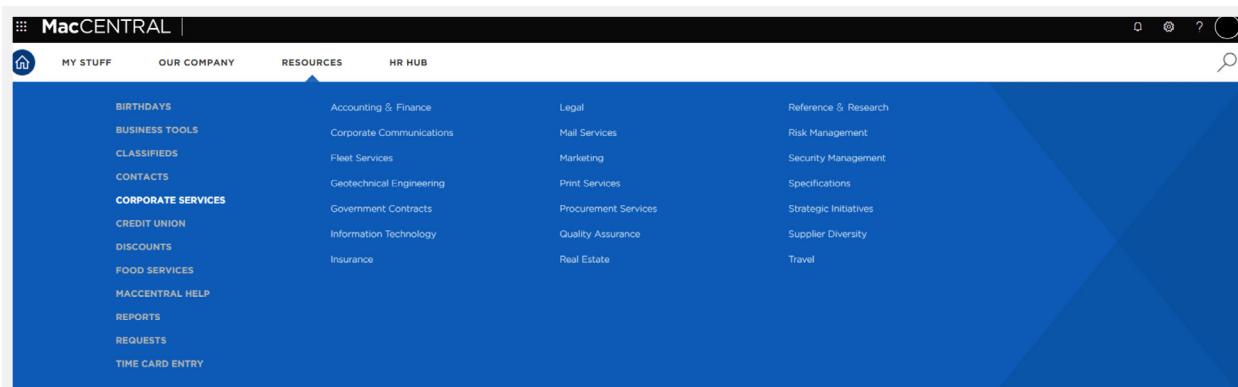
“The difference between *Our Company* and *Resources* seems ambiguous to me. I don’t know what’s in each one. It’s hard to find stuff in there.”

“I use the intranet a lot, and I still forget where it is. Under *Our Company*? *Resources*? ”

Users struggled because the category labels were ambiguous, and the content contained within each category was not distinctive enough and, in some cases, overlapped. This contributed to users having a poor mental model of the content groupings.



*The Our Company navigational category on MacCentral contained information about the organization as well as resource-like information such as policies and guidelines. This contributed to the confusion between this category and the Resources category.*



*MacCentral's Resources category contained links to work resources, as well as links to departments, which users expected to find under the Our Company category.*

MacCentral's navigation could have benefited from some card sorting and restructuring, which may have led to better content groupings and more intuitive group labels.

Eyeo GmbH's intranet — which was only a couple of months old when we tested it — had five main navigation categories. We found users were often unsure about whether the categories *Internal Support*, *Company*, or *Community* would house the information they needed for a specific task. This was because the category labels were not descriptive enough and overlapped with one another. For example, *Company* and *Community* were similar, and while *My Work* often felt like the right place to find certain tools and resources, some were found underneath *Internal Support*, and others were under *Collaboration*.

**News & Announcements**

Welcome to the Intranet  
Internal Collaboration Tools Company News

All you need to know about the new eyo ...  
eyo Central Company Announcement +1

**Upcoming Events**

- Adblocker Dev Summit 2... ...  
Sep 27, 2019, 9:00 AM - 7:00 PM  
Springhouse, Amsterdam  
Conference
- Acceptable Ads Committ... ...  
Sep 27, 2019, 4:00 PM - 6:00 PM  
New York  
Conference
- Easter Egg no.4 ...  
Oct 1, 2019, 8:00 AM - 9:00 AM
- Lean Coffee for Product ... ...

*Users were often unsure about which category in Eyeo's main navigation to use to find information for a given task. They would often inspect multiple categories to find a link they'd like to try first.*

It was common to see employees checking several dropdowns before finding a link they wanted to try. After one Eyeo employee had completed several tasks using the navigation, they remarked,

“If it’s community-related, I would definitely know where to go (...) Otherwise, I would not be sure, and I would go through everything and look at things again.”

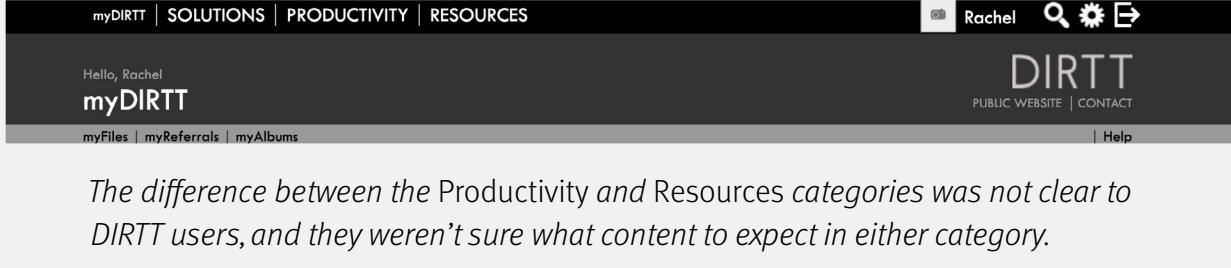
After our study, the team at Eyeo made some improvements to ensure category labels reflected the content within them better. For example, *Internal Support* became *Resources and requests*, and *Company* became *All about eyeo*.

**Company news & announcements**

**Start typing to se...**

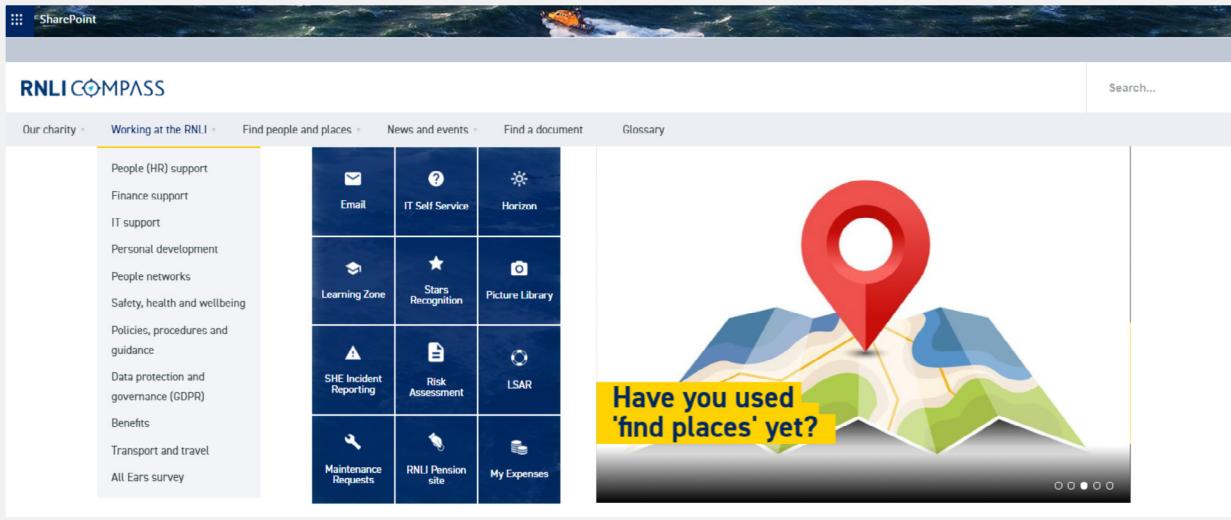
*After our study, the Eyeo team improved the category labels to provide stronger information scent. Internal Support became Resources and requests; Company became All about eyeo; and Collaboration became Our setup.*

DIRTT had the same problem with the categories in its main navigation. Users often opened both the *Resources* and *Productivity* categories and weren't confident they knew which category to try first. When one employee was exploring the main navigation, they said, "I don't know if I'm navigating to the right place."



*The difference between the Productivity and Resources categories was not clear to DIRTT users, and they weren't sure what content to expect in either category.*

RNLI's intranet had better top-level category labels that were intuitive and mutually exclusive. In our usability tests, employees were able to know which category they should try; however, some struggled when comparing options in the dropdown menus. For example, the *Working at RNLI* category had second-level categories that were not mutually exclusive. Sometimes users would choose the wrong category and need to retrace their steps to try a different category.



*The Working at the RNLI category contains items that are not mutually exclusive, such as People (HR) support, Benefits, Transport and Travel, and even Policies, procedures, and guidance. Users would often visit the wrong category and then retrace their steps to try another category.*

RNLI employees in our usability tests mentioned that the navigation was often tricky to use, and they would often rely on memory to find content.

“The way the [Working at RNLI category] list reads, it didn’t flow right or make sense. Sometimes I have to trigger my memory for where I’ve seen things. Looking at the list and trying to remember what I’ve seen before.”

“I know that I could probably find ITS [IT Services] in the menus, but I find that it’s hard to find anything in the menu right off the bat anyways.”

This example just shows that although it’s important that top-level categories have intuitive labels and are mutually exclusive, it’s just as important that second and tertiary levels do too, to ensure users can successfully find content.

## 9. Use whole words, not abbreviations, in site navigation.

While using abbreviations or acronyms may save space, they can confuse users as users may not:

- Expect to look for abbreviations or acronyms when scanning the navigation
- Understand what the abbreviation or acronym stands for

There are some exceptions of course. For example, some — although few — acronyms are universal (such as IT or HR). In these cases, it’s not necessary to spell them out in full in your navigation, but most acronyms require some level of insider knowledge that not all users have. To ensure users can find the content they need, spell out any acronyms in full. If some users are familiar with the acronyms, place them in parentheses after the full word.

As a government agency, the GSA is comprised of many offices. Instead of listing indecipherable acronyms in the intranet’s navigation, each office is labeled in full, and the acronym follows it in parentheses. Although this makes the options long and introduces some redundancy, this ensures users understand the options and can find information about the relevant office.

The screenshot shows the GSA InSite intranet homepage. At the top, there's a dark header with the "GSA InSite" logo. Below it is a navigation bar with tabs for "EMPLOYEE RESOURCES", "SERVICES AND OFFICES", "LOCATIONS", and "ABOUT US". To the right of the navigation bar are a search icon and a user profile icon. The main content area has a sidebar on the left titled "Employee Resources" with links to "Acquisition, Purchases and Payments", "Book Space and Meetings", "Buildings and Real Estate", "Communications", "Directives, Forms and Regulations", and "Financial Management". The main content area lists various government offices under "OFFICE OF THE ADMINISTRATOR", "FEDERAL ACQUISITION SERVICE (FAS)", "PUBLIC BUILDINGS SERVICE (PBS)", "OFFICE OF GOVERNMENT-WIDE POLICY", "STAFF OFFICES", and "OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL (OIG)". To the right of these lists is a vertical column of links to "CIVILIAN BOARD OF CONTRACT APPEALS (CBCA)", "Office of Administrative Services (OAS)", "Office of the Chief Financial Officer (OCFO)", "Office of Congressional & Intergovernmental Affairs", "Office of Civil Rights (OCR)", "Office of Customer Experience (OCE)", "Office of General Counsel (OGC)", "Office of GSA IT", "Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM)", "Office of Mission Assurance (OMA)", "Office of Small Business Utilization (OSBU)", and "Office of Strategic Communication (OSC)". At the bottom of the page, there are links for "Training and Development", "Staff Directory", "All Tools", and "Customer and Citizen".

*GSA's list of offices is spelled out in full, and each is followed with its acronym in parentheses. This ensures users aren't faced with a long list of acronyms.*

## 10. Avoid branding areas of the intranet with catchy names.

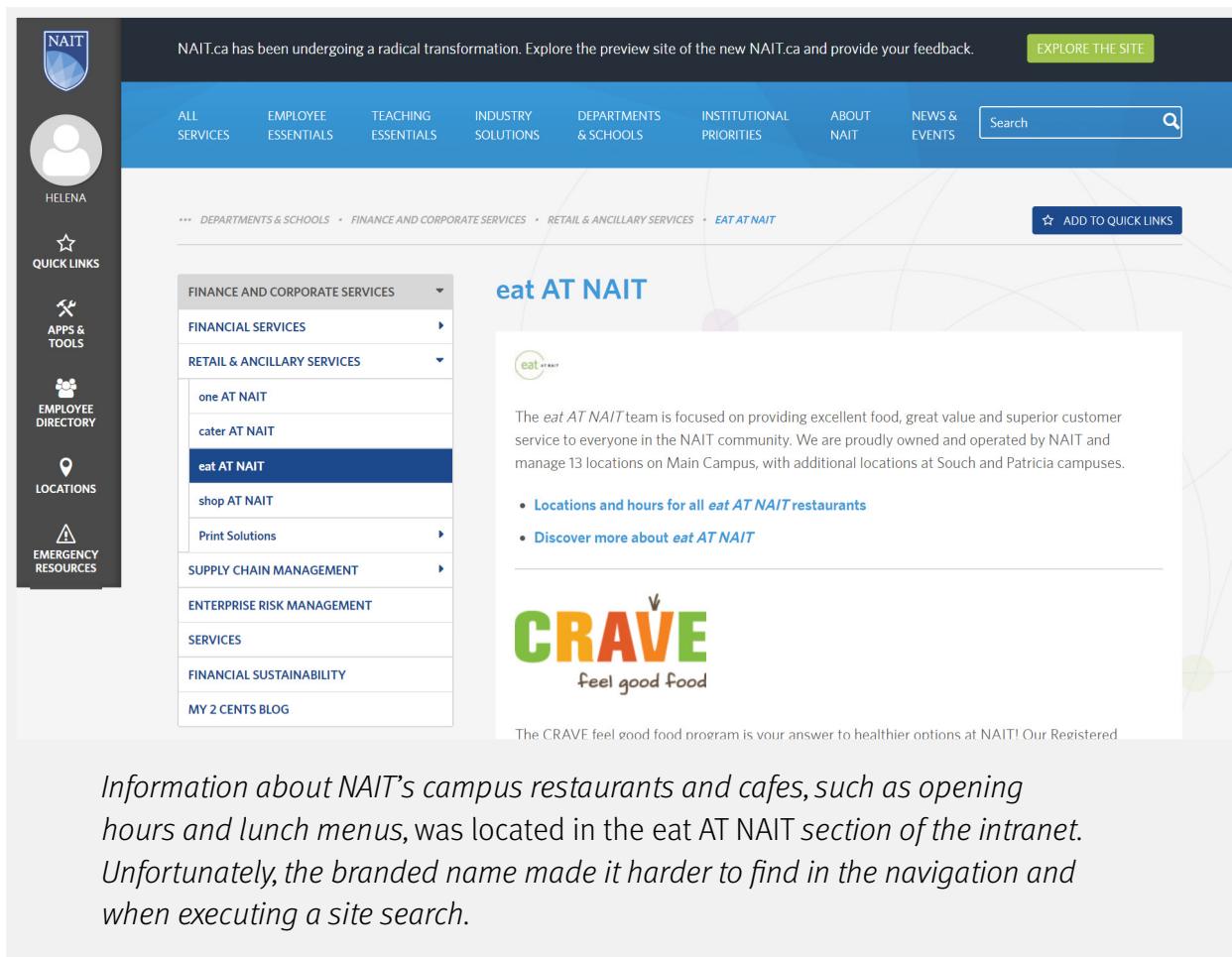
Branded areas of the intranet don't communicate to users what they are; as a result, they have **low information scent**. When information scent is low, users are unlikely to click on these branded links unless they have prior knowledge that the area will have the information they need.

Eyeo's intranet had a section called *eyeo Central*, where users could read all company news and view the full events calendar. Some users struggled to find news and events because they were not expecting to look for the term *eyeo Central*. Instead, they were scanning for *News* or *Events* in the navigation.

The screenshot shows the Eyeo intranet homepage. At the top, there's a header with the "The Intranet" logo and a search bar with various icons. Below the header is a navigation bar with tabs for "My Work", "Internal Support", "Company", "Collaboration", and "Community". The "Company" tab is currently selected. The main content area features a "News & Announcements" section with a large black background and a white circle containing the word "INTRA". To the right of this are sections for "Communication" (listing "eyeo Central", "All Hands Presentations", "eyeWoW Presentations", and "New eyeo FAQ") and "About Us" (listing "Vision & Strategy", "Meet the C's", "Departments", and "Teams"). On the far right, there's a "Upcoming Events" section with a list of events: "Adblocker Dev Summit 2019" (Sep 27, 2019, 9:00 AM - 7:00 PM, Springhouse, Amsterdam Conference) and "Acceptable Ads Committee Me..." (Sep 27, 2019, 1:00 PM - 2:00 PM). At the bottom of the page, there's a quote: "Eyeo employees can find all news and events in the eyeo Central section of its intranet, but users struggled to find it because of its branded name."

While there's nothing wrong with applying branding to various initiatives, you should avoid using only branded terms for those items in the navigation. If you use the branded term in the navigation, ensure it is followed by a descriptive label.

When NAIT employees were looking for a campus cafeteria lunch menu on the intranet, they struggled to find it because it was listed under the label *eat AT NAIT* instead of a more descriptive term such as *Cafeteria menus*. It would be better if the navigation was changed to something like *Restaurants and cafeterias* and a prominent link to the cafeteria menus was visible on the overview page.



The screenshot shows the NAIT.ca intranet homepage. On the left, there is a vertical sidebar with icons for HELENA, QUICK LINKS, APPS & TOOLS, EMPLOYEE DIRECTORY, LOCATIONS, and EMERGENCY RESOURCES. The main navigation bar at the top includes links for ALL SERVICES, EMPLOYEE ESSENTIALS, TEACHING ESSENTIALS, INDUSTRY SOLUTIONS, DEPARTMENTS & SCHOOLS, INSTITUTIONAL PRIORITIES, ABOUT NAIT, NEWS & EVENTS, and a SEARCH bar. A banner at the top states: "NAIT.ca has been undergoing a radical transformation. Explore the preview site of the new NAIT.ca and provide your feedback." Below the banner, the navigation path is shown as: "... DEPARTMENTS & SCHOOLS • FINANCE AND CORPORATE SERVICES • RETAIL & ANCILLARY SERVICES • EAT AT NAIT". There is also a "ADD TO QUICK LINKS" button. The central content area features a section titled "eat AT NAIT" with a sub-section for "FINANCIAL SERVICES" containing links to "one AT NAIT", "cater AT NAIT", and "eat AT NAIT" (which is highlighted). Other sections include "RETAIL & ANCILLARY SERVICES" with links to "shop AT NAIT", "Print Solutions", and "SUPPLY CHAIN MANAGEMENT"; "ENTERPRISE RISK MANAGEMENT"; "SERVICES"; "FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY"; and "MY 2 CENTS BLOG". To the right of this content is a graphic featuring the "CRAVE" logo with the tagline "feel good food". Below the content area, a note reads: "The CRAVE feel good food program is your answer to healthier options at NAIT! Our Registered". At the bottom of the page, a block of text discusses the challenges of finding the cafeteria menu due to the use of the branded term "eat AT NAIT".

*Information about NAIT's campus restaurants and cafes, such as opening hours and lunch menus, was located in the eat AT NAIT section of the intranet. Unfortunately, the branded name made it harder to find in the navigation and when executing a site search.*

First Solar had an employee recognition program called *YOUshine* where coworkers or managers could reward an employee's good work with points, which could be used toward vouchers. Although the program had a branded name, employees could easily find it because of its sensible navigation label — *HR recognition*.

*First Solar's employee recognition program was named YOUshine; however, the navigation included a sensible label — HR recognition — to aid finding.*

## 11. Name links to branded third-party applications based on the tasks the applications support rather than the vendor's brand name.

Many intranets we tested included multiple vendor applications for employees but only provided links containing the vendor's brand name. Listing applications by vendor name can be tricky because employees — especially new ones — may not know the vendor's name that provides the application and, therefore, will struggle to find the tool. Also, some vendor tool names don't describe what the tool does and, as a result, carry low information scent. It's much better to name the tool based on what it helps users to do.

The screenshot shows the First Solar intranet homepage. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links for SharePoint, APPS & TOOLS, WORK RESOURCES, TEAMS & DEPTS, HR, OUR COMPANY, and a SEARCH bar. Below this is a main content area with a sidebar on the left containing a 'CLOSE' button and a 'ALL' category listing various apps like Concur, Kronos, and SAP Information. To the right, there are three main columns: 'ENTERPRISE SYSTEMS' (BPC, CAR, DCC, Intelec), 'ENGINEERING & QUALITY' (CMS, ECRETS, ETA, PCAR, PMV Engineering, TMSuite), and 'IT' (eVisitor Check-In, Guest Wireless Access, Jabber, My IT Portal, Productivity & Collaboration, Remote Access, Video Conferencing, WebEx Meetings). At the bottom of the page, there are several news cards.

Category	Link	Date
2019 EIA: Intersect Power Module Transition		Aug 21, 2019
Investing in Our Associates' Education		Aug 09, 2019
Scaling Plant Design and Analysis		Aug 09, 2019
Improving Plant Performance Predictions		Aug 06, 2019
Series 6 News and Updates		

*First Solar's intranet, Power, has a menu item for regularly used apps and tools. While the headings Enterprise Systems, Engineering & Quality, and IT give users some clues about what these systems might be used for, many of the systems that appear in the All category don't provide good clues.*

If you must use the vendor's name because employees are already familiar with the name of systems, lead with the function. For example:

- Travel and Expenses (Concur)
- Payroll (Kronos)
- Vacation Requests (Workday)

GSA provided links to workplace applications from the main navigation. Links included the tool name *and* a descriptor, which is recommended. Nevertheless, some of the descriptors could have been improved. For example, the descriptor for *BookIT!* was *Login*, which did not describe what the tool does. Additionally, the order of tool name versus descriptor was not always consistent; sometimes the tool was shown first with the descriptor in parentheses, such as *Telepresence (virtual meetings)*; and other times, the descriptor appeared first with the tool name in parentheses, such as *Meeting Space (Adobe Connect)*.

The screenshot shows the GSA InSite intranet's navigation bar and a dropdown menu from the 'About Us' section. The navigation bar includes links for Employee Resources, Services and Offices, Locations, About Us, a search icon, and a user profile icon. The 'About Us' dropdown menu lists several categories with their respective sub-links:

- ACQUISITION, PURCHASES AND PAYMENTS > BookIT! (Login)
- BOOK SPACE AND MEETINGS > Google Hangouts Meet
- BUILDINGS AND REAL ESTATE > Meeting Space (Adobe Connect)
- COMMUNICATIONS > Telepresence (virtual meetings)
- DIRECTIVES, FORMS AND REGULATIONS > Video Teleconferencing (VTC)
- FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT > VoIP Phone Conferences
- HR, PAY AND LEAVE > Webcasts (live event broadcasts)
- INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY >
- SAFETY AND SECURITY >
- TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT >
- SYSTEMS, TOOLS AND WEBSITES >
- TRAVEL AND EVENTS >

*The GSA intranet provided clues about the tools' functions so users didn't have to rely solely on the vendor or tool name. However, the navigation links could have been improved further by following the naming convention of descriptor first, followed by the tool name in parentheses.*

On Dell Technologies' intranet, a section overview page dedicated to HR resources contained links to commonly accessed tools. As shown in the example below, two of the tasks, *Request Time Off* and *Enter Time/Hours Worked* are done in the same tool. By providing the task first and the tool name second, users who need to accomplish a given task can easily find the right tool for the job.

**Tools for the Job**

- [My HR Profile \(Workday\)](#)
- [MyADP \(Pay Statements\)](#)
- [Request Time Off \(Workday\)](#)
- [Enter Time/Hours Worked \(Workday\)](#)

[View more >>](#)

*On a section overview page dedicated to HR resources on Dell Technologies' intranet, common tools are listed alongside the vendor's name in parentheses, except for myADP.*

Another approach to naming tools in terms of what they do is to write them as verbs rather than nouns. This helps users understand what they can do when they click the link and avoids ambiguity about whether the link will take users to a page about the topic or to the third-party tool itself.

Here are some tasks that users typically perform using linked, third-party tools that can be used for navigational items:

- Request vacation
- File expenses
- View jobs
- Book meeting rooms
- Book travel
- View paychecks
- Submit timesheets
- Request IT or report an IT issue

Bracknell Forest Council's intranet had a page called *How do I?*, which provided links to its third-party party tools; however, each link was named based on the user's task, which helped users to find the relevant tools and pages quickly.

Each link on Bracknell Forest Council's How do I? page was named with the user's task in mind. This page could have been further improved by sorting the icons and text vertically rather than horizontally to aid scanning.

One common pitfall with task-based organization is the belief that category names need to follow an “I need to . . .” pattern to be task-based. This isn’t necessary. Sometimes trying to fit link or menu labels into a specified format makes them long and more difficult to scan because the most meaningful words don’t appear until the end of the label. Task-based organization doesn’t require any particular grammatical structure for labels; it just means grouping information according to how employees use it rather than by who creates and maintains it.

## 12. If using an intranet technology platform, rename generic, out-of-box headings such as *lists* and *sites*.

Out-of-the-box tools, such as SharePoint sites, come with generic labels for certain functions. These terms can cause confusion or can clash with other labels you might have on your site. Where possible, consider whether you need all the features that come with the out-of-box solution; remove features if users do not need the feature. Next, consider sensible labels for these features.

For example, Eyeo GmbH selected Confluence for its intranet. The intranet looked very little like a Confluence platform because of its Linchpin integration, which allowed the team to provide all intranet features. However, Confluence structures, like *page trees* and *space tools*, could still be found in the left navigation, and these terms confused users.

**The Intranet**

My Work ▾ Internal Support ▾ Company ▾ Collaboration ▾ Community ▾

Pages

eyeo Central

Pages Blog Calendars Company Calendar & Events All-Hands Presentations eyeWoW Presentations Meet the C's Departments Teams Clusters Event PAGE TREE Company Calendar & Events Company Overview COMMUNICATIONS Space tools Company Calendar & Events Company Overview COMMUNICATIONS Space tools

**eyeo Central Home**  
Created by Employee Name last modified yesterday at 6:40 PM

**Company News & Announcements**

All you need to know about the new ey... eyeo Central [Company Announcement] +1

The Intranet How to Play the Launch Game Internal Collaboration Tools +1

**Search Company**

**Important Links**

**IRC** **Jira**

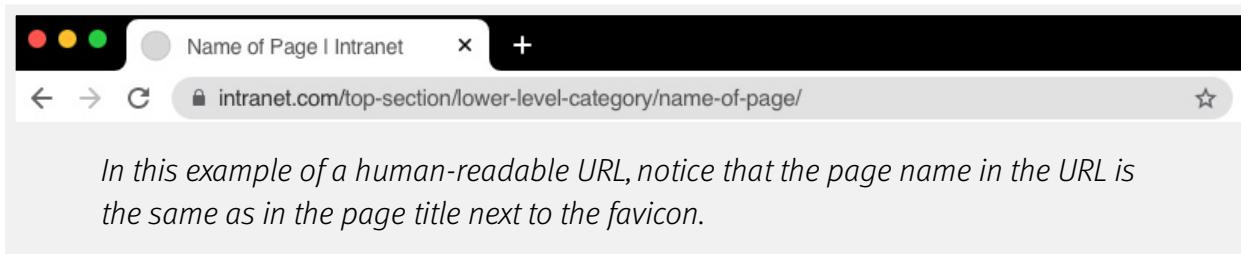
**Eyeo's intranet, *The Intranet*, was built using Confluence and retains some of its generic out-of-box headings, such as page tree and space tools, which confused users.**

In this case, it would be better to hide the *space tools* since they duplicate links found in the *page tree* and rename the *page tree* to better reflect typical left, local navigation.

## 13. Display understandable URLs in the browser's address field whenever possible.

The URL string serves as an orientation device; users can use the URL to get a sense of where a page belongs, in addition to any breadcrumbs you provide.

Unfortunately, a few of the intranets we tested had indecipherable URL strings, perhaps because of dynamically generated URLs and URL masking, which made understanding where the user was in the site structure difficult. Non-readable URL strings are also harder to copy and paste, remember, and type.



If you have dynamically generated content, you can re-write and map the URL so that users can view a human-readable URL.

## 14. Provide clear bookmark names and page titles.

Many users rely on bookmarks to save pages they want to return to later. If users bookmark an intranet page, current browsers use the TITLE tag in the page's HTML code to name the saved link. Because few users edit these entries, the default name typically serves as their reference to the page in the bookmark. Therefore, make sure the TITLE tag reflects the page title so that bookmark links are unique and help users locate what they have saved.

When users have a lot of bookmarks, which was often the case for participants in our studies, it becomes harder to find a particular link. That's why page titles should be short and **lead with information-carrying words** so users can scan them easily.



### Lead with information-carrying words.

#### Timeless Design Tips

Because users scan text on web pages, often skipping many words, it's best to lead with information-carrying words when writing link labels. When users scan down a list of menu options, they should be able to quickly get a sense of what each option means.

Leading with information-carrying words also helps users find a previous page if they're working with multiple open tabs, as they can easily distinguish pages using the page titles in the browser tab.

To ensure consistency, make sure page titles match what's listed on the page, in bookmarks and breadcrumbs (if you have them), as well as the URL.

## 15. Avoid changing URLs for main content areas so that bookmarks will always work.

Many participants across the 15 organizations we tested with used browser bookmarks to save frequently accessed pages. Avoid changing URLs, as this will render bookmarks no longer effective.

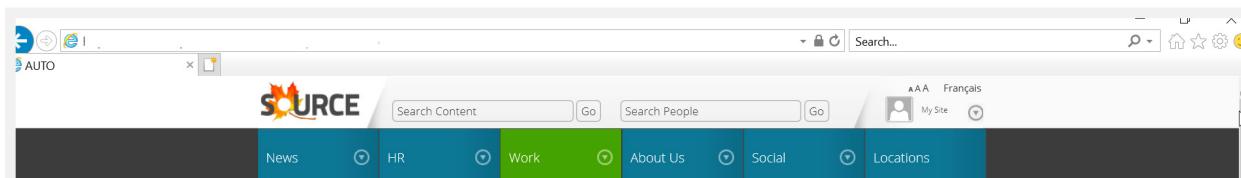
If you need to restructure your site's information architecture, make sure to add redirects from old URLs, especially for pages that get a lot of traffic.

## 16. Design an intranet favicon.

A favicon is a small logo that appears in the browser tab. Favicons are helpful because when users have multiple tabs open (which was often the case when we observed employees in our field studies), it makes handling multiple tabs much more efficient and helps users quickly return to the intranet.

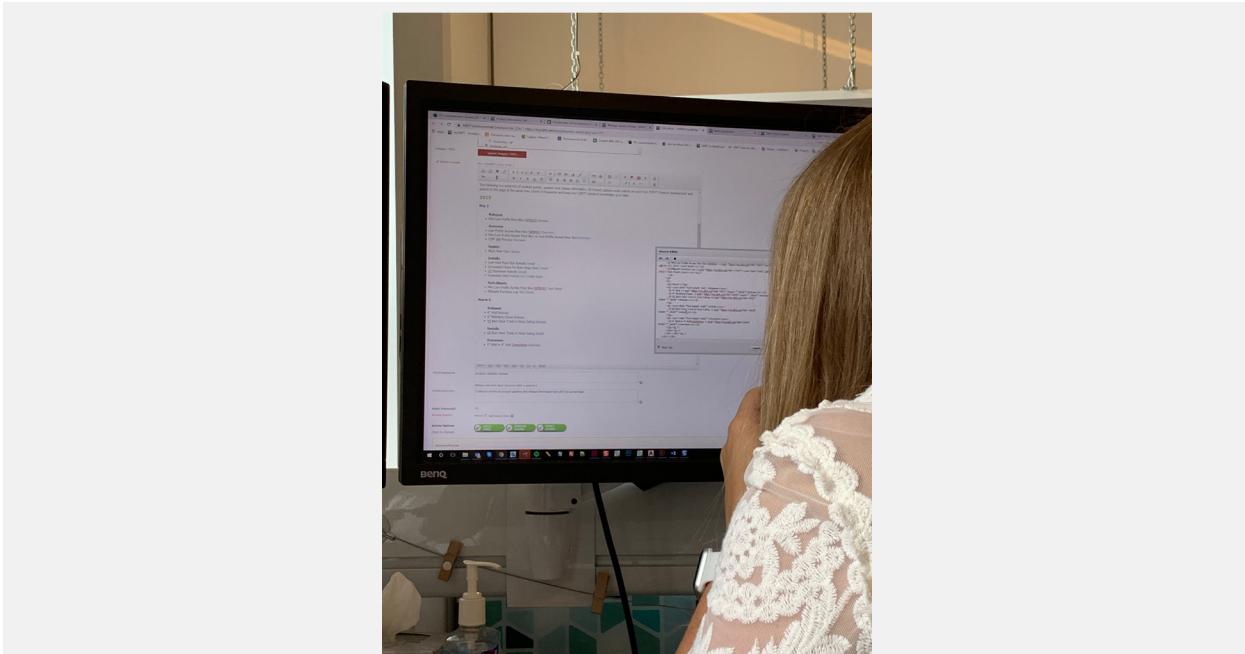
The favicon should be easily identifiable. Using a logo is a good idea, but if your logo is quite large, you will need a condensed version to ensure it is visible and recognizable when made small.

The Co-operators' intranet didn't have a favicon, which meant when users viewed multiple tabs in Internet Explorer (the browser of choice), it was difficult for them to distinguish which tab was which.



*The Co-operators' intranet could benefit from a favicon. The maple leaf used in its Source logo would make a recognizable icon to replace the Internet Explorer icon in the browser page tab.*

DIRTT's intranet had a company-branded image for the favicon, which made it easy for users to return to the intranet.



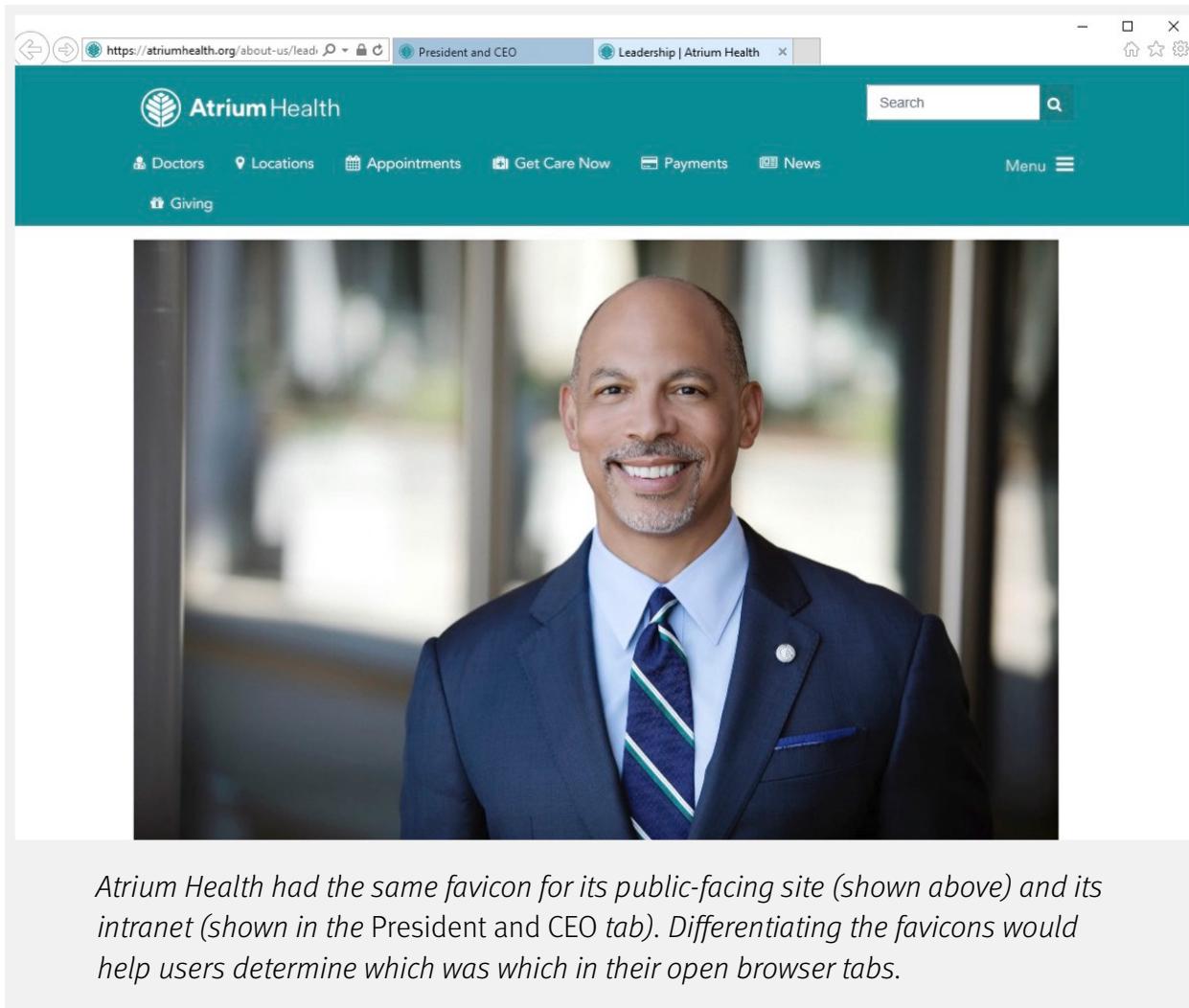
*A copy editor at DIRTT had multiple intranet pages and other web tools open simultaneously. Fortunately, DIRTT had a nice favicon, which made relocating an intranet page easy.*

Northern Alberta Institute of Technology's intranet has a favicon of the school logo, which made it easier to identify intranet pages across multiple tabs.

*When scanning the browser tabs, returning to NAIT's intranet page is easy because of the distinctive favicon.*

When using a company logo for a favicon, consider having a slightly different version for the intranet and the public site, especially if employees might be working with both.

For example, Atrium Health used the same favicon for the public-facing site and the intranet. When employees had both sites open, it was impossible to distinguish between tabs using the favicon alone.



A screenshot of a web browser window showing two tabs. The active tab is "Leadership | Atrium Health" which displays a portrait of a smiling man in a dark suit and striped tie. The other tab is "President and CEO". The main content area shows the Atrium Health logo and navigation menu. The menu includes links for Doctors, Locations, Appointments, Get Care Now, Payments, News, and Giving. There is also a search bar and a "Menu" button.

*Atrium Health had the same favicon for its public-facing site (shown above) and its intranet (shown in the President and CEO tab). Differentiating the favicons would help users determine which was which in their open browser tabs.*

# Main Navigation

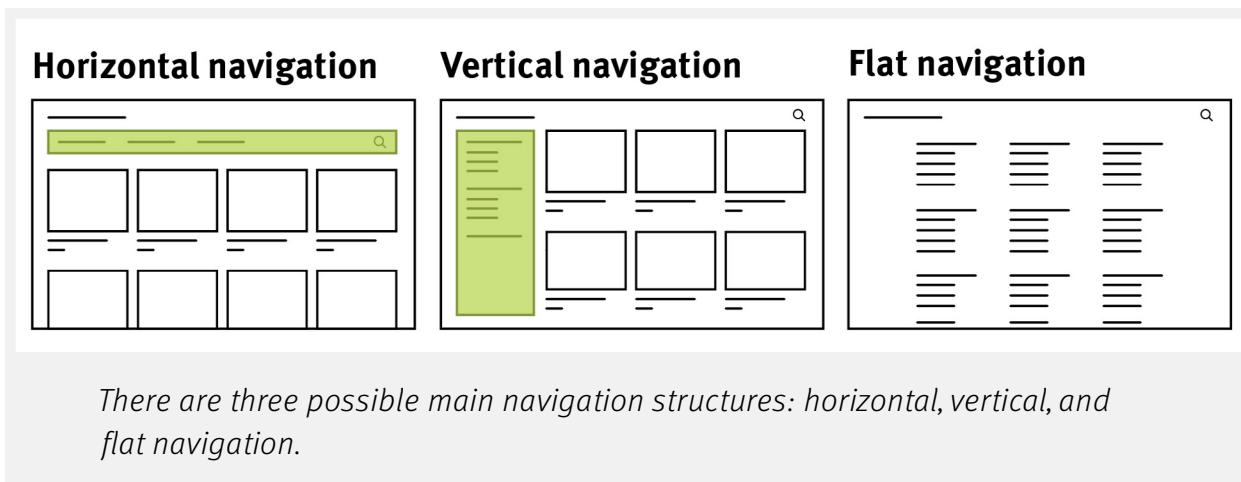
The main navigation (also known as global or primary navigation) is the menu representing the uppermost level of a site's structure. It sits in the global navigational area: an area that includes any utility navigation and site search. If you design the main navigation well, users will understand what kind of content is there and how to interact with it.

The main navigation is the most relied-upon type of navigation on your site. It's the navigation users typically interact with first. It helps move users from one part of the site to another.

There are three types of main navigation you can utilize on your intranet:

1. Horizontal
2. Vertical
3. Flat (or no main navigation)

The image below represents what these navigational structures look like.



Navigation menus that are always in the same place, don't change appearance and don't disappear unexpectedly, help users move around the intranet with confidence. Most intranets we studied used consistent and persistent navigation that connected various site areas. When this wasn't the case, it hurt the user experience.

## 17. Select a main navigation design that fits your intranet goals and your users' needs.

Usually, a horizontal menu at the top of the homepage is the best main navigation option. All the intranets we tested in this study utilized a horizontal navigation bar. In some cases, intranets may benefit from a vertical navigation bar, but these must be designed well to avoid becoming cluttered or taking too much screen estate.

Consider the table below to decide which main navigation style may be the best choice for your intranet.

Type	Pros	Cons
Horizontal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Users are familiar with this navigation since it is found on most websites.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✗ Space only allows a certain number of menu items.</li> </ul>
Vertical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Allows for more top-level items as menus can extend below the fold.</li> <li>✓ Useful for intranets that have evolving IAs and may require further navigational items.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✗ Not great for intranets with deep IAs.</li> <li>✗ Implies some sort of hierarchy—items at the top of the page carry more weight than items at the bottom.</li> <li>✗ Menu items must be short to avoid wrapping or taking up too much screen estate.</li> </ul>
Flat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Ideal for sites where most of the content is equally important, and the IA is flat.</li> <li>✓ Users can find a link without performing multiple clicks.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✗ The number of links can be overwhelming for users.</li> <li>✗ Navigation occupies prime real estate that would be otherwise used for news and announcements.</li> </ul>

### Having Two Main Navigation Bars Should Be Avoided

The Mayo Clinic's intranet utilized a horizontal main navigation bar; however, on the homepage, there was some navigation in the left rail that acted like an additional, vertical main navigation bar. The vertical navigation competes with the main navigation; it's unclear which should be used to navigate the site since the vertical navigation is visually more prominent, while the horizontal navigation is in a place that users expect. In this case, it would be better to combine both menus into a single main navigation menu informed by some card sorting and tree testing. Then the vertical left rail space could be used for other elements, such as to bring elements higher up on the page or display popular links or links users have saved themselves.

The Mayo Clinic's intranet had some vertical navigation on the homepage alongside the main horizontal navigation, making it unclear which should be used to navigate the site.

When utilizing a vertical main navigation bar, it's important that the items at the top of the navigation are the most important to users or most frequently accessed since a vertical navigation bar implies hierarchy. Do not order items alphabetically.

Lastly, opting for vertical navigation is not an excuse for your navigation to become long and unwieldy. The same principles of good IA and navigational design apply to vertical navigation as they do to horizontal navigation menus; ensure categories are mutually exclusive and that link labels describe the content contained within them adequately.

Another thing to consider is how to design the secondary navigation. The main navigation's mechanics — whether it opens links on hover or click or uses a mega menu versus an accordion or dropdown — can significantly impact how easy the intranet is to traverse. Several navigation options were utilized across the various intranets we tested:

- **No secondary navigation.** Users are taken to a section overview page with further links to explore content deeper in the site structure.
- **Dropdown menu.** Clicking or hovering on a menu item activates a dropdown menu for second-level items.
- **Second horizontal bar.** Clicking or hovering over a menu item changes items in a second navigation bar below.

- **Cascading or flyout menu.** Hovering or clicking an item in a dropdown menu produces another dropdown menu to the right with further options.
- **Mega menu.** Clicking or hovering on a menu item opens a dropdown exposing groups of links.
- **Accordions.** When the main navigation is vertical, accordions expose further levels of navigation underneath.

The table below highlights the advantages and disadvantages of these options.

Type of menu	Pros	Cons
No secondary navigation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Works well for intranets with flat IAs</li> <li>✓ Links work on click rather than hover, making them more accessible</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✗ Users must wait for the page to load to see further links</li> </ul>
Dropdown	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Allows for a fair number of items</li> <li>✓ Doesn't hide too much screen estate</li> <li>✓ Easy to see which dropdown relates to which navigational item</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✗ Not ideal for flat IA structures with a lot of second-level items</li> </ul>
Second horizontal bar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Avoids having menus obscure more content</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✗ Accommodates only a few choices; not very scalable</li> <li>✗ Uses vertical page real estate by pushing content further down the page</li> <li>✗ Can be hard to associate items in the second-level navigation with the top navigation bar</li> </ul>
Cascading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Can expose navigational choices multiple levels down in the IA without the user needing to visit a page</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✗ Doesn't work well for intranets with deep IAs and many levels</li> <li>✗ Often frustrate users because they require precise mouse movements</li> </ul>
Mega menu	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Can expose links to content at multiple levels in the IA structure in one menu and with only one click</li> <li>✓ Can be helpful for top-level categories with many items, that would make a dropdown too long</li> <li>✓ Can expose other key information alongside links (such as a contact number or an announcement)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✗ The number of links can overwhelm users, especially if not grouped and labeled well</li> <li>✗ Mega menu hides a lot of content on the page</li> </ul>
Accordions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Can expose navigational choices multiple levels down in the IA without the user needing to load a new page</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✗ Only available for vertical navigation</li> <li>✗ Can cause clutter and lack of orientation when many accordions are open and if there are more than three levels</li> </ul>

A simple dropdown is often the most effective choice for horizontal main navigation. About half of the intranets (seven out of 15) we studied in our latest utilized this type of navigation.

Human Resources ▾

- [Human Resources](#)
- [Benefits](#)
- [Careers](#)
- [Compensation](#)
- [Get Care Now](#)
- [Learning & Organizational Development](#)
- [Occupational Health and Safety](#)
- [Pay and Time](#)
- [PeopleLink](#)
- [Teammate Life](#)
- [Workers Compensation](#)
- [HR Forms](#)
- [HR Locations](#)
- [HR Policies](#)

*Atrium Health utilized a simple dropdown menu for its main navigation, which was effective.*

Another popular design choice was a mega menu. Five out of 15 organizations we studied utilized a mega menu for some, or all, of the intranet's secondary navigation.

ABOUT US

- [Charitable Giving](#)
- [Corporate Goals](#)
- [Global Locations](#)
- [Investor Relations](#)
- [Leadership Team](#)
- [U.S. Govt and Public Affairs](#)
- [Vision/Mission/Culture](#)

PRODUCT INFORMATION

- [Corporate Collateral](#)
- [Energy Services](#)
- [Glossary & Abbrev](#)
- [Modules](#)
- [Sustainability Information](#)
- [Technology Advantage](#)

NEWS & VIDEOS

- [Corporate News](#)
- [Corporate Videos](#)
- [Global Webcast](#)
- [Press Releases](#)

PEOPLE MATTER

- [Open Jobs](#)
- [Professional Development](#)
- [Recognition](#)
- [Referral Program](#)
- [Voice of the Organization](#)

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*First Solar used a mega menu design for its intranet's secondary navigation. Each category is arranged in a column and has a capitalized heading. Section dividers and white space help to distinguish categories. A close link appears in the top-right corner for users who want to abandon the navigation.*

Only one intranet, DIRT, had a secondary bar. When a user selected an item from the main navigation, a secondary navigation bar appeared below, shifting the myDIRT “home” link down.



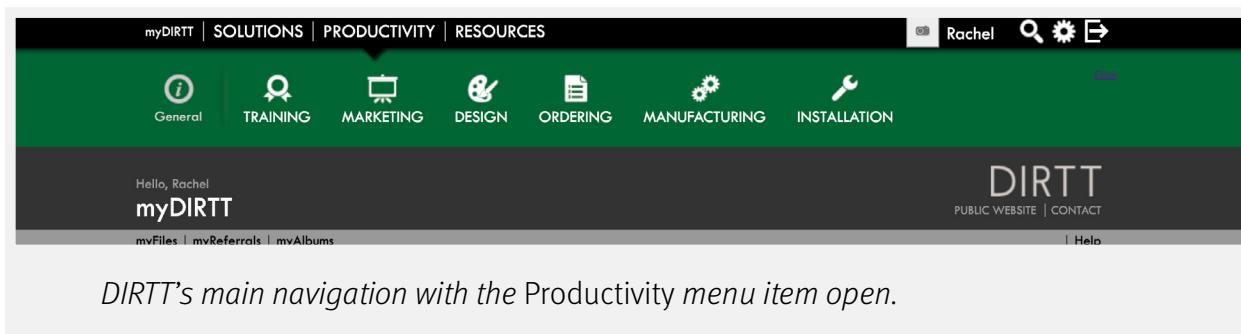
myDIRT | SOLUTIONS | PRODUCTIVITY | RESOURCES      Rachel      Search      Gear      Exit

Hello, Rachel  
myDIRT

myFiles | myReferrals | myAlbums      Help

DIRT  
PUBLIC WEBSITE | CONTACT

*DIRT'S main navigation as it appears without any menu items open.*



myDIRT | SOLUTIONS | PRODUCTIVITY | RESOURCES      Rachel      Search      Gear      Exit

General      TRAINING      MARKETING      DESIGN      ORDERING      MANUFACTURING      INSTALLATION

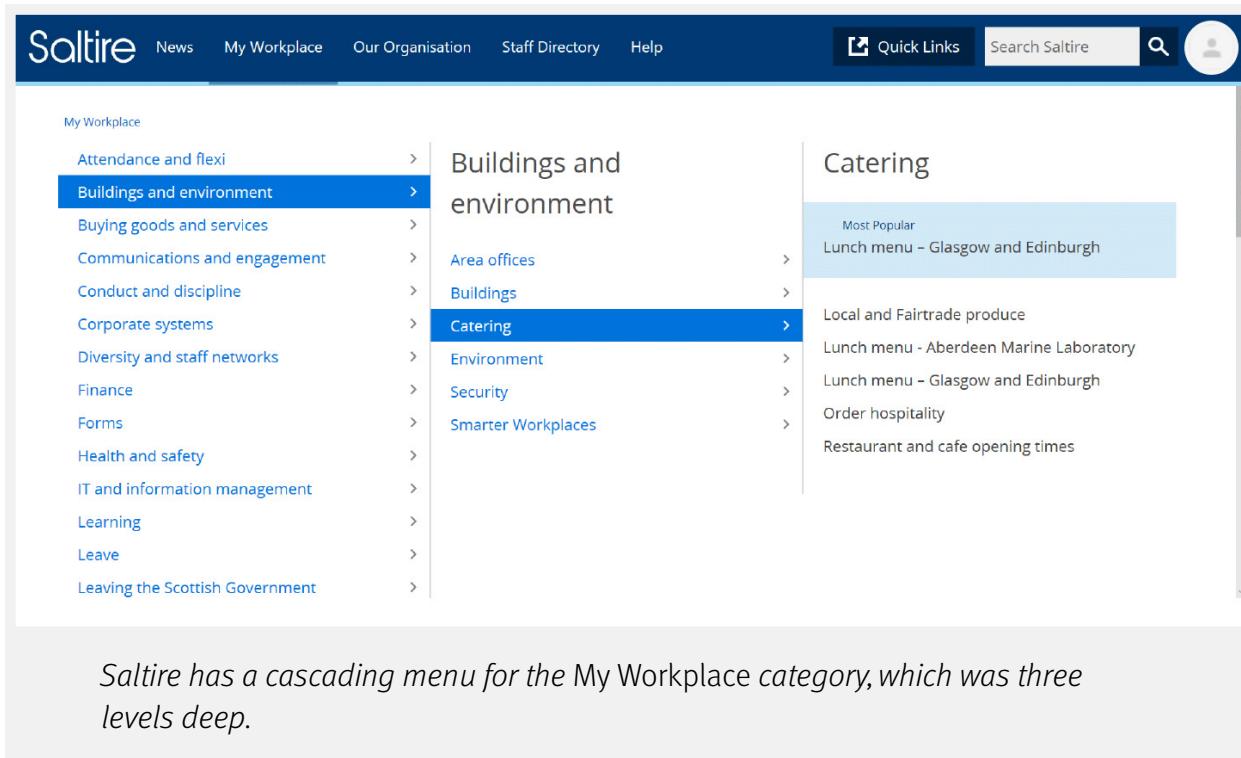
Hello, Rachel  
myDIRT

myFiles | myReferrals | myAlbums      Help

DIRT  
PUBLIC WEBSITE | CONTACT

*DIRT's main navigation with the Productivity menu item open.*

The Scottish Government’s intranet, Saltire, used a cascading menu for the *My Workplace* category (all other categories led to a section overview page).



Saltire      News      My Workplace      Our Organisation      Staff Directory      Help      Quick Links      Search Saltire      User Profile

My Workplace

- Attendance and flexi
- Buildings and environment >
- Buying goods and services
- Communications and engagement
- Conduct and discipline
- Corporate systems
- Diversity and staff networks
- Finance
- Forms
- Health and safety
- IT and information management
- Learning
- Leave
- Leaving the Scottish Government

Buildings and environment

- Area offices
- Buildings >
- Catering >
- Environment
- Security
- Smarter Workplaces

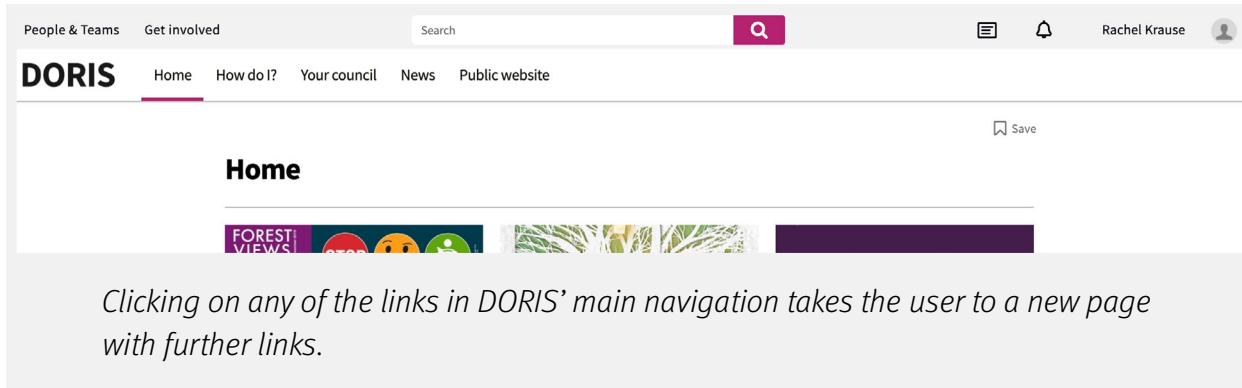
Catering

Most Popular  
Lunch menu - Glasgow and Edinburgh

Local and Fairtrade produce  
Lunch menu - Aberdeen Marine Laboratory  
Lunch menu - Glasgow and Edinburgh  
Order hospitality  
Restaurant and cafe opening times

*Saltire has a cascading menu for the My Workplace category, which was three levels deep.*

Bracknell Forest Council's intranet, DORIS, had no secondary navigation menus. Instead, each item in the main navigation took users to a section overview page with further links. This made navigating the site easy.



The screenshot shows the DORIS intranet homepage. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for "People & Teams", "Get involved", "Search" (with a magnifying glass icon), and user profile icons for "Rachel Krause". Below the navigation bar is the DORIS logo and a horizontal menu with "Home", "How do I?", "Your council", "News", and "Public website". The "Home" link is underlined. To the right of the menu is a "Save" button with a clipboard icon. The main content area has a heading "Home" and a decorative banner at the bottom featuring icons for "FOREST VIEWS", people, and nature.

*Clicking on any of the links in DORIS' main navigation takes the user to a new page with further links.*

Although none of the intranets we tested in this latest study used vertical navigation for the main navigation, KeyBank's mini-intranet for the Digital and IT Delivery teams used Confluence. Confluence has vertical navigation and allows users to dig deeper into the site structure using accordions.

The screenshot shows a Confluence page with a vertical navigation sidebar on the left. The sidebar contains several sections: 'Digital Team Col...' (with a dropdown arrow), 'Overview' (selected), 'Blog', 'Gliffy Diagram', and 'Space Settings'. Below these are 'SPACE SHORTCUTS' and 'Gliffy Diagram'. Under 'PAGES', there is a list of items, many of which are preceded by a right-pointing arrow, indicating they are accordions:

- Level 2 - Enterprise Digital Consumer Scorecard
- Service To Sales Initiatives
- Consumer Digital Consolidated Delivery View
- Digital Team Ceremony Recomendation
- Demo and QV Accounts
- Digital Operational Support Matrix
- Digital Product Profiles
- Digital Top 5's
- Meeting notes
- Online Banking Overview
- Product requirements
- Tableau Digital Data
- Digital Squad - IBX Capability Alignment
- Wellness In Digital
- Gliffy Diagram
- Transfer Funds calendar incorrectly blocks select Holiday date
- Brian Tiersky Onboarding
- Cross-Squad Backlog Alignment
- ARCHIVE

The main content area on the right is titled 'Digital Team Collaboration' and contains a section titled 'Digital Squads' with a table:

Account Servicing	Core Experience	Massaging and Communications	Money Movement
<b>Money Management</b>	Account Opening (AOX)	Universal Application Originations	Access Management
<b>MixTape</b>	<b>Guided Conversations</b>		

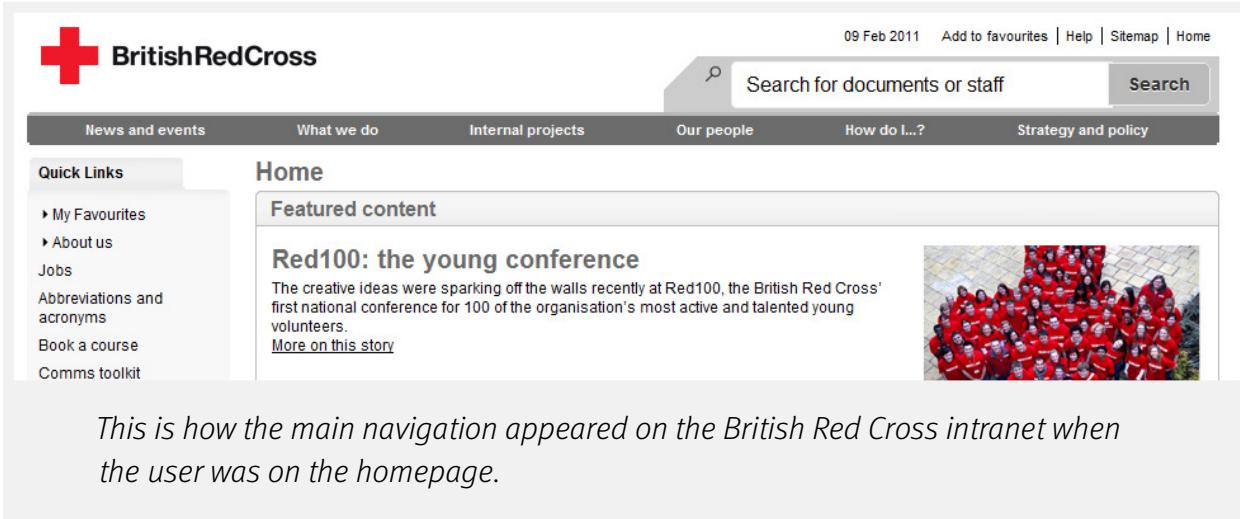
*Confluence has vertical navigation that allows users to browse the site structure using accordions.*

## 18. Ensure the main navigation persists across all subsites and pages.

The main navigation is supposed to be an anchor — something users need wherever they are on the site to orient themselves and to take them to different areas of the site. Even if your intranet is a collection of subsites, it's important that the main navigation is always present so users can navigate to another area of the site without being forced to return to the homepage first. If a page is meant to be part of the main intranet, implement the same navigation alongside other visual design changes to ensure consistency of look and feel and behavior. If a page is an external site or tool you have no control over, indicate to the user that clicking the link will leave the site.

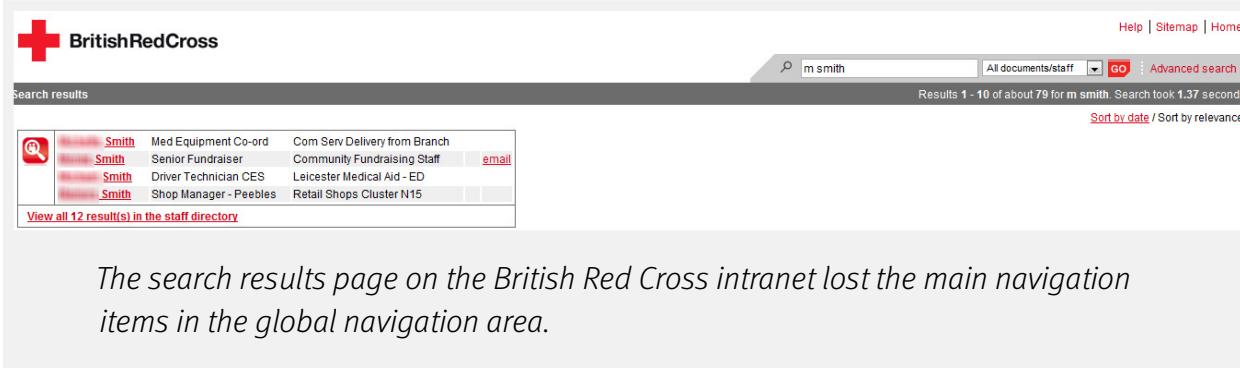
The intranets we studied in this latest round of research had persistent main navigation. However, some intranets had main navigation that took on different visual design implementations, which confused users.

The British Red Cross suffered from disappearing main navigation on its search engine results page in our previous study. When main navigation disappeared, users were inclined to use search again to find content because it was easier than returning to the homepage to use the navigation.



This screenshot shows the British Red Cross intranet homepage. The main navigation bar at the top includes links for 'News and events', 'What we do', 'Internal projects', 'Our people', 'How do I...?', and 'Strategy and policy'. A search bar is located in the top right corner. On the left, there is a sidebar titled 'Quick Links' containing links for 'My Favourites', 'About us', 'Jobs', 'Abbreviations and acronyms', 'Book a course', and 'Comms toolkit'. The central content area features a section titled 'Featured content' with a sub-section for 'Red100: the young conference'. It includes a photograph of a group of people in red shirts and a link to 'More on this story'.

*This is how the main navigation appeared on the British Red Cross intranet when the user was on the homepage.*



This screenshot shows the British Red Cross intranet search results page. The search bar at the top contains the query 'm smith'. Below the search bar, a message indicates 'Results 1 - 10 of about 79 for m smith. Search took 1.37 second'. There is a link to 'Sort by date / Sort by relevance'. The search results list four entries, each with a small profile picture, the name 'Smith', and a brief description of their role. At the bottom of the results, there is a link to 'View all 12 result(s) in the staff directory'.

*The search results page on the British Red Cross intranet lost the main navigation items in the global navigation area.*

## 19. Ensure the main navigation remains consistent across all subsites and pages.

The main navigation should remain the same across all areas of the site so that users understand what it is and feel grounded. Avoid changing the visual design of the main navigation based on different branded areas of the site since this may cause users to feel they are on a new site and result in confusion. Additionally, the order and number of navigational items in the main navigation should remain constant wherever the user is on the site.

The Mayo Clinic's intranet comprised several separate sites, which were all linked from the main navigation. On some of these sites, the main navigation persisted — which was favorable.

However, the navigation on these sites had a different visual treatment, making users less confident about the navigation.

*On the homepage of the Mayo Clinic's intranet, the global navigation area is white text on a black background.*

*On some Mayo Clinic subsites, the main navigation lost its white text on a black background treatment. Not only did the main navigation bar become gray (rather than black), but the positioning of menu items also changed. These changes made it seem like a completely new navigation.*

Employees using DELL Technologies' intranet also found the global navigation appeared differently depending on where they were on the site. On each subsite, a second navigational bar appeared underneath the main navigation; however, the second navigational bar had a different color and visual design treatment across subsites, making the navigation look like it had changed as users traversed the site.

*On Dell Technologies' My IT, the global navigation has a bright blue bar underneath the main navigation bar.*

The global navigation on Dell's My HR looks different because a dark blue bar (instead of bright blue) appears underneath the main navigation bar.

Additionally, the main navigation bar on InsideDellTechnologies had a hamburger icon to expose further navigation items. The main navigation appeared different when the hamburger icon was open, as shown below.

The main navigation on InsideDellTechnologies' homepage sits on a stylized image and contains a search field.

When the main navigation was opened fully (using the hamburger icon), the main navigation bar took on a completely different visual treatment. The search field was removed, and more items were exposed, pushing menu items to the left. Additionally, a gray background replaced the blue stylized one.

Main navigation should also behave the same way throughout the intranet. For example, don't introduce new ways to interact with the main navigation in different places. Also, don't expose new choices in the main navigation in different site areas. If you have contextually relevant links, they should sit in either local navigation or related links from any overview pages.

## 20. Avoid having multiple horizontal menus that could be mistaken for main navigation menus.

Having multiple horizontal bars can confuse users as they struggle to see how they relate to one another and to understand which one is the navigation menu they should rely on to navigate the entire site. We observed this trend on sites with many subsites, as the subsite landing page was often based on a homepage template.

The Mayo Clinic and Dell Technologies had intranets with many subsites, each with its own horizontal navigation bar. Users in our usability test sessions were often confused as to where they were on the site; the layered navigation bars made it difficult to understand how they worked together and what the structure of the site was, especially as there were no breadcrumbs and many of these pages lacked selection cues for the main navigation.

**Department of Nursing Intranet**

Home | Arizona | Florida | MCHS – SEMN | MCHS – SWMN | MCHS – NWNI | MCHS – SWWI | Rochester | EHR Resources

**Home**

Welcome! The Department of Nursing intranet is your source for communication, administrative information, and an additional access point to My Nursing. Go to My Nursing for quick access to the resources you use most and search all nursing resources.

**My Nursing**

My Nursing is a web-based application that will provide quick access to nursing content, resources and documents. The application can be personalized using bookmarks for frequently used items. Staff can also bookmark their most frequently referenced procedures.

**The Mayo Clinic's intranet consisted of many subsites, each with a home template and a corresponding horizontal navigation bar. On this subsite, the second navigation bar has greater prominence than the gray main navigation bar.**

There are several problems with the Mayo Clinic subsite screen shown above. First, there are **no selection cues** on the main navigation, so it's hard to understand within which top-level category the *Department of Nursing Intranet* can be found. Second, there are no breadcrumbs, so users don't know how deep they are in the site structure and cannot move up within it conveniently. Third, the page title for the subsite homepage uses the word "intranet," which is confusing because **the word intranet should only be used to refer to the entire Mayo Clinic internal site** and not to subsites. Using the word intranet to refer to subsites can cause confusion among employees.

Dell Technologies had a similar issue with the double navigation bars on its subsites. However, the design was less confusing because the bars were stacked closely together, making it seem like the second bar was used to expose second-level navigation. The design could be improved by showing the *My IT* category in the main navigation in a selected state to reduce ambiguity. If you make this design choice, the items should match what's in any of the dropdowns.

*InsideDellTechnologies had a second navigation bar directly beneath the main navigation, making it appear as if it were exposed second-level navigation (but not reinforcing that appearance). The My IT link in the main navigation bar at the top of the page should be highlighted to show that this page belongs to that category. This would clarify the relationship between the main navigation and the second level below.*

The safest design option is to avoid using a second horizontal menu bar. Use them only if you consistently use them throughout the site to expose second-level navigation items, as DIRT<sup>T</sup> did. On the Mayo Clinic's and Dell Technologies' intranets, the design would be better without the second horizontal navigation bar, and the space would be better utilized by breadcrumbs. Any secondary or tertiary navigation items could be relocated to the left rail to serve as local navigation. This would provide a better user experience.

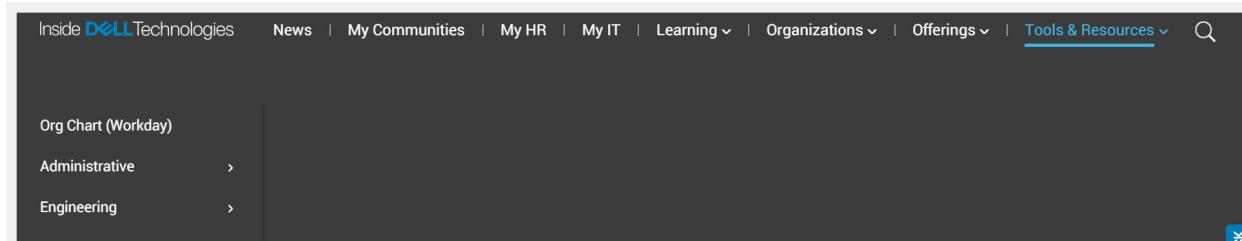
## 21. Don't hide navigational items behind a hamburger menu on large screens.

Mobile-first is not the same thing as mobile-only. Hamburger menus are acceptable for mobile, but they are not necessary on desktop, where there is more available screen real estate.

The problem with using a hamburger menu on desktop is that menu options that would have otherwise been visible become hidden, which causes a few negative repercussions, including:

- Neglects to remind users of the possible choices
- Can prevent users from knowing a link is available
- Forces users to click just to see the whole menu
- Requires users to store menu items in their working memory
- Adds an additional click to navigate to the content

Dell Technologies utilized a hamburger menu on its intranet. However, rather than applying a traditional implementation of a hamburger icon (where menu items are completely hidden until the icon is triggered), it used the hamburger icon to expand the number of menu items. This meant that when the hamburger icon was not activated, the main navigation displayed five menu items, and when activated, the main navigation displayed the full eight menu items. This made it easy for users to miss the three additional items.



*InsideDellTechnologies used a hamburger menu to expose three additional menu items in the main navigation. The screens here show what the hamburger menu looks like when it's closed (above) and open (below).*

The problem with this design is that when the hamburger menu was open, the search field was reduced to an icon (which was moved to the far right), and each of the menu items shifted left to make room for the three additional items. In addition to introducing visual design changes to the main navigation, which we recommend against, this change in the placement of the menu items made the navigation appear entirely different, causing confusion.

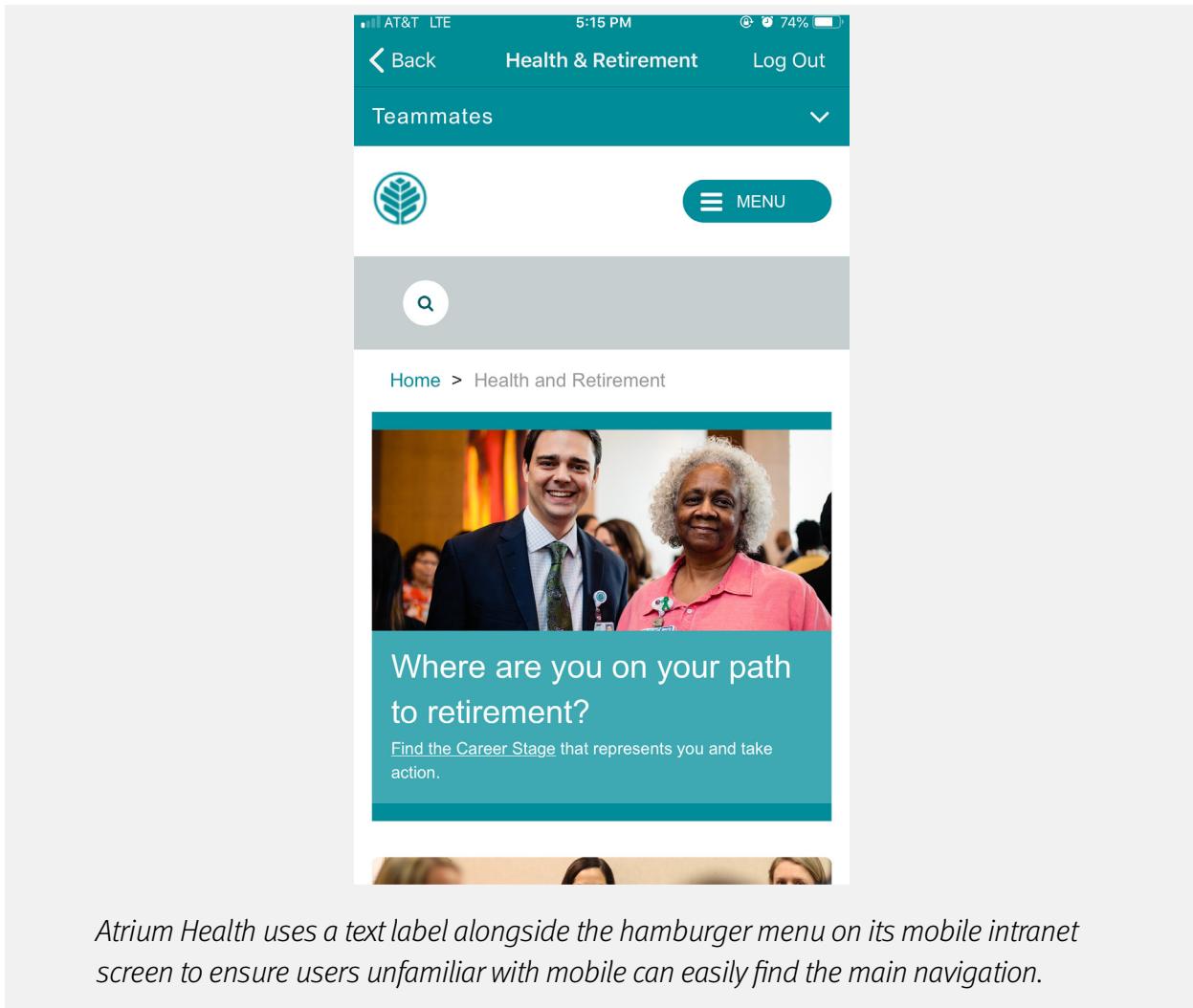
This design could be improved by dropping the main navigation below the search field — or the banner — meaning all navigational categories would be visible, and there would be no need for a hamburger menu. Then the area where the main navigation currently is could be used for any utility navigation.

When intranets we studied made it difficult for users to find or use the navigation, users typically relied on search instead, resulting in varying degrees of success in finding content. One user at Dell Technologies said,

“My confidence level in knowing where things are is very minimal. My most confident response is to use the search bar . . . It doesn’t always work, but 75% of the time, it does.”

If your intranet has weak search, it’s best to make the navigation as usable and findable as possible.

On mobile, hamburger menus are acceptable since space is an issue. Hamburger icons are becoming universal, so your employees will likely be familiar with the icon. If you expect that your employees may be new to using websites on mobile, then you can include a text label alongside the icon, as Atrium Health did.



## 22. Ensure dropdown menus are appropriately sized to fit the content they contain. Avoid having dropdown menus take up more space than necessary.

When designing dropdowns, don't set them to static lengths and widths. Instead, ensure they fit the content they contain. When dropdowns take up more space than the content, they obscure other navigational items on the page, such as any local navigation.

The Co-operators' intranet, Source, had dropdown menus set to static lengths. When the dropdown had a second level, the second level was opened by default, even though no content was displayed there.

The screenshot shows the Source intranet homepage. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links for News, HR, Work, About Us, Social, and Locations. Below this is a secondary navigation bar for 'News' which includes 'All Companies' and lists for CGIC, CLIC, HB Group, CUMIS, Sovereign, Addenda, and Federated Agencies. To the right of the main content area, there's a sidebar featuring a blurred employee photo and a poll titled 'Employee Poll' with four redacted options. A red banner at the bottom of the page encourages users to visit the news page.

*The dropdown menu on Source, The Co-operators' intranet, occupied more space than required, obscuring more page content than necessary.*

The Co-operators could improve its navigation by sizing the menu to the needs of the content and only opening the second level when a user hovers or clicks on an item in the dropdown menu.

RNLI's intranet, Compass, had menus sized to the content; as such, they didn't obscure too much of the page when in use.

The screenshot shows the RNLI COMPASS intranet homepage. The top navigation bar includes links for SharePoint, RNLI COMPASS, and a search bar. Below this is a secondary navigation bar with categories like 'Our charity', 'Working at the RNLI', 'Find people and places', 'News and events', 'Find a document', and 'Glossary'. On the left, there's a sidebar with links for various support services. The main content area features a map with a red location pin and a call-to-action button that says 'Have you used 'find places' yet?'. The overall layout is clean and functional.

*RNLI's intranet, Compass, had menus sized appropriately to the content.*

## 23. Be selective when choosing which links to include in mega menus, and group content under logical headings.

Mega menus are large dropdown menus, usually divided into groups of navigation options. They frequently present links to secondary and tertiary pages, making lower-level content more visible to users. This can dramatically improve the discoverability of previously difficult-to-find information or applications, but mega menus are not as helpful to users on mobile devices.

Including category headings will make mega menus more scannable. This also allows you to group related links, something that's not possible with regular dropdown menus. However, just because you *can* expose more links simultaneously does not mean you should include everything or neglect to perform IA research. In fact, because of the number of links often included in mega menus, it's even more critical that your groups are mutually exclusive and have clear text labels.

## 24. When designing mega menus, display grouped links in columns rather than rows.

Users find it easier to scan links arranged in a column list rather than in a row format. To make browsing many links in a mega menu easier, display each link group in a column rather than dividing the mega menu into rows and having links listed across columns. This helps users to scan more quickly.

The mega menus on NAIT's intranet were organized by having each new group appear in a new row. Links within each group spanned three columns. This design choice made the mega menu more difficult to scan. This design could also benefit from increasing the spacing between the sections so that users can read the links more easily.

The screenshot shows a complex mega menu for NAIT.ca's Employee Essentials section. The menu is divided into several categories: Orientation, Pay & Benefits, Getting Around Campus, Health and Safety, Other Resources, and more. Each category contains multiple links. On the left, there's a vertical sidebar with icons for various services like HR, Payroll, and IT. At the top right, there's a search bar and a button to explore the site.

*NAIT's Employee Essentials mega menu has headings listed in rows, with links listed across three columns. This arrangement makes it harder to scan.*

The mega menu on Eyeo's intranet, The Intranet, was much easier to scan because of the placement of grouped links into columns.

The screenshot shows a well-organized mega menu for The Intranet. The menu is structured into columns: Internal Support, Collaboration, and Community. Each column contains grouped links for specific categories like Clusters, Communications & Advocacy, Monetization & Business, Products & Support, etc. The layout is clean and organized, making it easier to scan.

*Eyeo's intranet had well-laid-out mega menus where categories appeared in columns, which is favorable. Columns also had adequate white space between them.*

## 25. Favor menus that activate on click rather than activate on hover.

Designers sometimes use activate-on-hover menus when top-level items have section overview pages and dropdown menus, as this allows one link to two different interactions and outcomes. However, activate-on-hover menus are less usable and are not accessible. They are problematic for the following reasons:

- Users need greater motor coordination to ensure they hover over the correct item. This is challenging for older users and those with reduced motor control.
- Employees using a screen reader or a touchscreen cannot interact with them.

If you need to utilize an activate-on-hover menu, avoid using multiple cascading levels and ensure that:

- Screen reader users can activate links using their keyboard
- A different implementation is used if users access the intranet on mobile
- The entire menu is activated on hover; otherwise, this can quickly become confusing if users must hover over some items and click on others

You can avoid having activate-on-hover links by doing the following instead:

- **Have top-level items lead to a new page with further links:** This works well if the IA is reasonably flat but may not be suitable for intranets with deep IAs.
- **Design top-level items so they don't have a section overview page:** Instead of having a section overview page, you can move content to child pages in that category to avoid needing a section overview page. This can be a viable option for intranets that have rarely used section overview pages or ones that lack useful content.
- **Add the section overview page as an item in the dropdown:** If you need a section overview page and need to present child pages in the secondary navigation (while keeping menus activate-on-click), you can include the section overview page as a link in the dropdown. Ensure that this is the first item if you do so. The downside of this approach is that it introduces some repetition.

Atrium Health's intranet had section overview pages for some top-level items in the main navigation. In these situations, the section overview page was included as the first link in the dropdown. This avoided the need for an activate-on-hover menu.

On Atrium's intranet, the Human Resources section overview page is listed in the dropdown underneath the Human Resources navigational item, thereby avoiding the need for an activate-on-hover menu.

## 26. Avoid text wrapping with vertical navigation links.

Text wrapping in a menu can make a single label seem like two separate options, and it becomes hard for users to distinguish between links or quickly scan the navigation.

If your intranet utilizes vertical navigation (where the main navigation appears vertically rather than horizontally), then make menu items short enough or the navigation wide enough to support legibility and easy scanning of menu options. The same applies to any submenus of the main and local navigation since options are often presented in a vertical list.

The screenshot shows the City of Calgary's myCity website. The top navigation bar includes links for Tools & Resources, myHR, Organization, News & Events, Dashboard, and Safety & Security. A search bar is located in the top right corner. The main content area has a breadcrumb trail: myCity.home > Tools & Resources > How Do I...? > Computers & Phones. The page title is "Computers & Phones". On the left, there is a sidebar titled "How Do I...?" with a section for "Computers & Phones" containing several links, many of which begin with the word "Request" (e.g., Request access to a shared folder, Request to be removed from an email mailing list). The main content area also contains sections for "Help topics" and "Related Links".

*The local navigation on The City of Calgary's MyCity contains links that wrap. While line dividers help the user understand which are new items, the list of navigation choices is still hard to scan.*

In the example above, several items have redundant words (e.g., *Request*) at the beginning of the navigational links. It would be favorable to remove these. This approach makes it harder for users to quickly read the links since they scan the first few words of items in a list.

When people read lists, they scan the first words.

**User Behaviors**

When users are scanning down a list, they often scan the first few words on each line. If line items wrap, they can become difficult to scan.

RNLI had short menu items in its navigation, which helped avoid links wrapping in the local navigation.

*On RNLI's intranet, Compass, local navigation links were short, avoiding links wrapping.*

Another option, if you have page titles that can't be shortened, is to increase the width of the area that houses the links. (**Do not** reduce text size to ensure the links don't wrap, as this will make it more difficult for users to read and select them.)

*A larger area was given to the local navigation on NAIT's site, ensuring menu items didn't wrap.*

## 27. Try to avoid organizing dropdown menu items alphabetically.

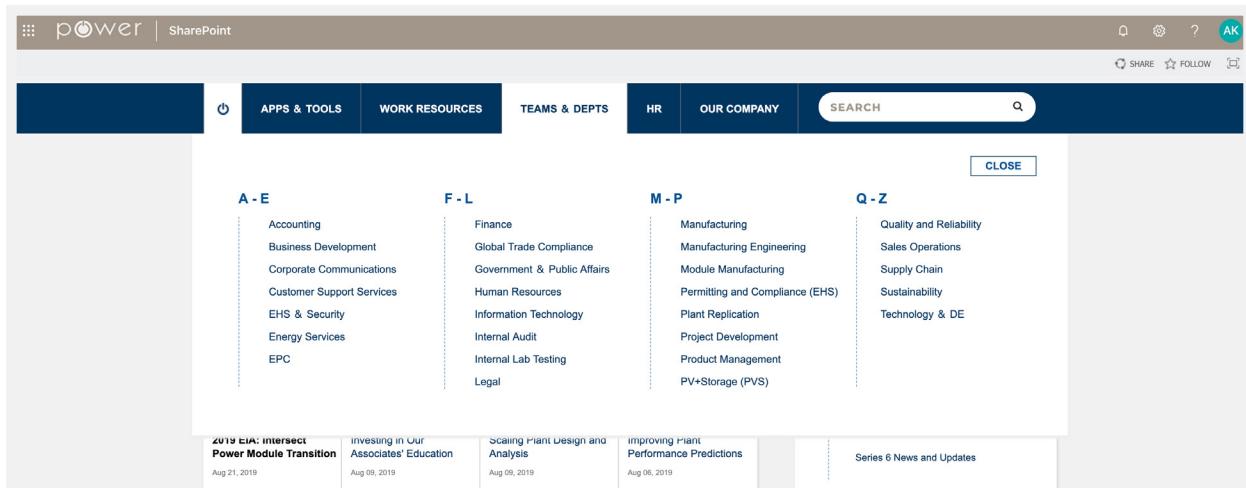
Alphabetical lists can be helpful when the listed items are predictable and well-known, such as lists of names, months of the year, and locations. However, alphabetizing typical menu items is not recommended as users might not know the terms that the designers choose. For example, a user might want to find an *Announcement*, but the designer might have named that element *Event*, *News item*, or *Latest News*, making the item more difficult to find in an alphabetical rather than topic-based list. It's better to organize elements in a dropdown menu based on access frequency or by topic.

While the Scottish Government's navigation structure was largely intuitive and had strong information scent for link labels, the *My Workplace* navigation was organized alphabetically. Organizing the items based on how frequently they are accessed or by topic would be a favorable improvement for this navigation. For example, *Leave* appears at the bottom of the list under the *My Workplace* category, but *Attendance and flexi* appears at the top of the same category. Both items relate to hours and time off work, so grouping them together would make more sense.

*Items underneath the My Workplace category on the Scottish Government's intranet were organized alphabetically. Organizing the navigation according to how frequently they are accessed or by topic would be more favorable.*

The City of Calgary's intranet, myCity, organized items in its main navigation by how frequently they were accessed. When a user selects Safety and Security, it's more likely they have a security issue they want to solve than they want to read about corporate security. As such, the items are appropriately ordered.

On the Mayo Clinic's intranet, users can access different subsites based on location within the Mayo Clinic Health System. In this case, it makes sense to alphabetize the list.

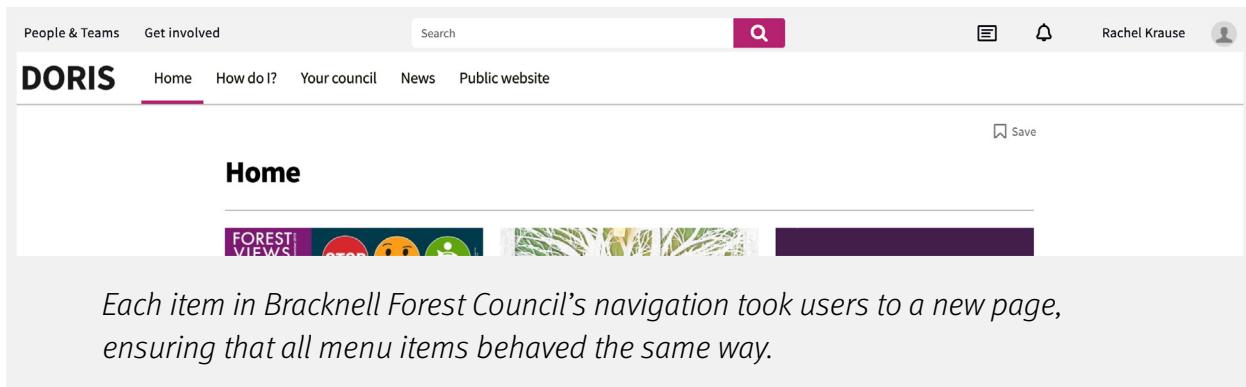


*Teams and departments are listed here alphabetically, which makes sense since a department has only one name.*

## 28. Try to avoid having some menu items open submenus and others open a page.

When UI elements look the same, users expect them to function in the same way. It can be disconcerting for some menu items to open pages while others open menus. It's helpful if you can design the navigation and IA so that all top-level menu items function similarly — such as opening a dropdown menu or mega menu or leading to a section overview page.

Bracknell Forest Council's intranet navigation was intuitive and easy to use because each item in the main navigation took users to a section overview page with further links (except for the link to the public site).



The Scottish Government's intranet had one menu item, *My Workplace*, that opened a large cascading menu, whereas all other menu items took users to a new page. Since the *My Workplace* menu is the most used, users will likely remember that it behaves differently from the other links;

however, for new users, the *My Workplace* link could use a visual indicator to show that it opens a submenu.

The screenshot shows the Saltire intranet homepage. At the top, there's a dark blue header with the Saltire logo, a navigation bar with links for News, My Workplace, Our Organisation, Staff Directory, and Help, a Quick Links button, a search bar, and a user profile icon. Below the header, there are several sections: 'News / Must Read' featuring a photo of Leslie Evans (@PermSecScot) and a vlog link; a banner for 'Public information, to help people prepare for EU exit, is now available on mygov.scot' with a 'Learn more' button; a 'Welcome Checklist' box listing items like 'Scottish Government structure', 'Learning and development', etc.; and other news briefs like 'News in Brief' (Monday 08 April 2019) and 'Diversity in action'.

*The Scottish Government's intranet only had one item in the main navigation with a dropdown menu. The other items took users to a landing page.*

## 29. Indicate when some menu items open submenus and when others don't.

If it's impossible to have all menu items behave the same way (e.g., all open a submenu), include a down arrow on links that open a menu. A small, downward-facing arrow helps to indicate at first glance which menu items have submenus. Many users will not see this, but those who do and learn it will at least be able to recall that the menus with the arrows in them do something different from the menus without the arrows.

The City of Calgary's intranet, myCity, utilized downward-facing arrows to indicate that clicking on each menu item would open a submenu. While, in this case, it wasn't necessary — since all menu items open a submenu — if the team implemented another option in the navigation without a submenu, this visual treatment would help to differentiate the behavior of different menu items. Additionally, the arrows help indicate to users that they can expect a submenu instead of a section overview page.

Although there were some issues with navigation on Dell Technologies' intranet, the main navigation indicated when menu items had submenus and when they didn't, using downward-facing arrows for those that did, which was favorable.

*Inside DELL Technologies had a main navigation bar that indicated which items had submenus and which didn't, using down arrows, which was helpful for users.*

When implementing a downward-facing arrow, **turn the arrow to the right when the menu is opened** to indicate it will close when clicked. Also, ensure that the open menu item appears selected clearly, as in the example above from Dell Technologies, where the opened menu, *Tools & Resources*, appears in blue. This is a general guideline, but it's a critical guideline to uphold when some menus show an arrow, and others don't, as users might otherwise see the arrow as a selection indicator.

### 30. Provide a consistent, identifiable link to the intranet homepage in the upper-left corner of every page.

Users should always have a link back to the homepage. This link is important for users who become lost or disoriented when browsing deep in the navigation hierarchy or jumping to different pages via the search results.

Although many users know to click on a logo to return to the homepage, not all users do. So, it's still a best practice to **provide a text link** to the homepage in the top-left corner of the page and name this link *Home*.

On the GSA's intranet, InSite, not only was the *GSA InSite* logo a link to the homepage but a *Home* link with a home icon was also displayed directly underneath. (This *Home* link would become part of the breadcrumb when users navigated away from the homepage and deeper into the site structure.)

The GSA's intranet, *InSite*, presents a link to the homepage, titled Home, underneath the GSA logo.

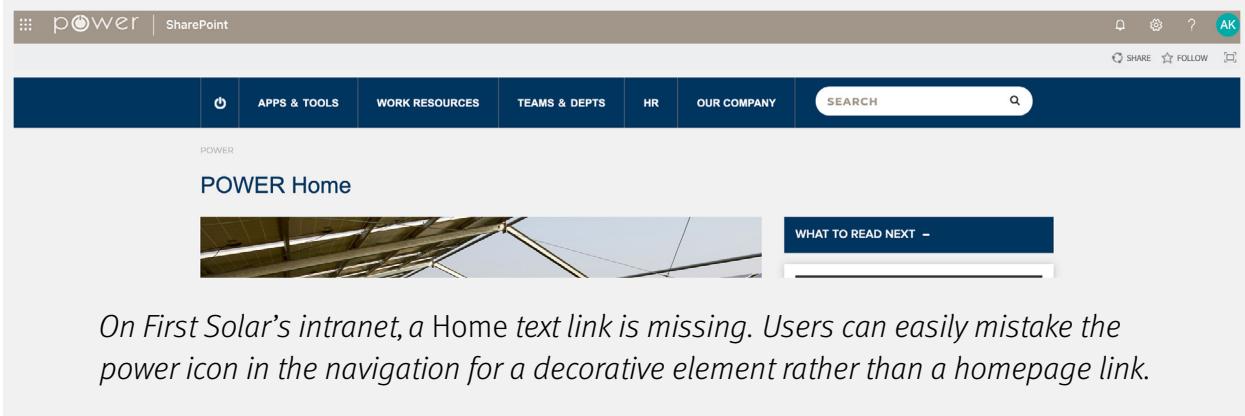
Some websites include the home link in the main navigation, which is fine if the link is closest to the left side of the page, where users expect to find it.

*Bracknell Forest's intranet, DORIS, includes a link to Home as the first option in the navigation. The Home link is underlined to show users they are on the homepage.*

**Avoid replacing the text link with just an icon**, as icons carry less information than a simple text link. For example, MacCentral used a home icon instead of a text label. It would be better to provide a text link instead of the icon, as in the example above from Bracknell Forest Council.

*Burns & McDonnell's intranet, MacCentral, had a home link presented as a white home icon on a blue circle. While the placement is optimal, the design and lack of a text label make it easy to miss.*

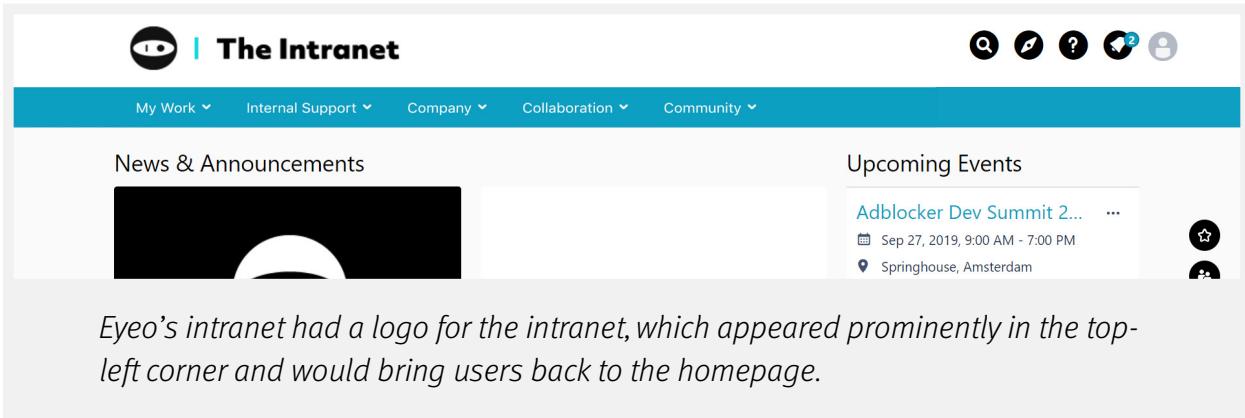
First Solar's intranet didn't have a home link; instead, it had a logo above the main navigation and an icon in the main navigation to take users back to home. While some users might know that the logo or icon will take users back to home, not all users will. It would be better if the power icon in the main navigation were converted into a text label that read, *Home*.



On First Solar's intranet, a Home text link is missing. Users can easily mistake the power icon in the navigation for a decorative element rather than a homepage link.

### 31. If the intranet has a logo, it should also be a link to the homepage.

Users have come to expect that logos are clickable and will return the user to the homepage. Many users rely on the logo to take them quickly back to home. In addition to a home link, logos are easier to select because they are usually larger.



Eyeo's intranet had a logo for the intranet, which appeared prominently in the top-left corner and would bring users back to the homepage.

On Atrium Health's intranet, there was a company logo and a button with the intranet's name above it. Sometimes, participants in our usability tests would select the *People Connect* button to return to the homepage, but this didn't do what users expected; instead, it opened a dropdown where users could choose a different version of the intranet. One user commented,

“A pet peeve of mine is I want to click the [People Connect] tab to get back to People Connect, but I have to click here [Atrium Health logo].”

*When employees in our usability tests tried to go back to the Atrium Health homepage, some clicked on the People Connect link rather than the Atrium Health logo. However, this just opened a dropdown to select a different intranet.*

Another problem with the design was that the Atrium Health logo would take users back to the homepage of whichever intranet the user was currently on. One user in our usability tests left PeopleConnect after clicking a link and found themselves on the Teammates Site, an intranet for new employees. To go back to PeopleConnect, the employee explained, “I always click on the Atrium logo to go back to the home screen even if I don’t need to.” However, they were brought back to the Teammates site, not the PeopleConnect site, confusing them.

**Avoid having an intranet logo that takes users to different places** on the site or different versions of the intranet, as this confuses users. Users shouldn’t have to wonder where a logo or home link will take them.

Atrium Health could improve its intranet by reducing the number of intranet instances. For example, there’s no reason a wellness site and a subsite with information for new employees can’t exist under the main intranet’s navigation.

## 32. Include a link to the intranet homepage on subsites along with a link to the subsite homepage; only call the intranet homepage link *Home*.

If your intranet consists of multiple subsites, include a *home* link to the main intranet homepage within the top navigation area of each subsite. Users associate many subsites and applications with the intranet and expect that any *home* links will take them to the homepage of the intranet proper. Investing resources in making this navigation link function across different subsites and applications that users consider part of the intranet is worthwhile.

On the Mayo Clinic's intranet — which consisted of many subsites — the logo and *Home* link take the user back to the intranet homepage, which is good. However, the second navigation bar also contains another *Home* link, which is confusing. Additionally, the subsite for the Department of Nursing also has the word “*intranet*” appear after it, which made matters worse.

The screenshot shows the Mayo Clinic's Department of Nursing Intranet homepage. At the top, there's a grey header with the Mayo Clinic logo and a search bar. Below it is a dark blue header with the text "Department of Nursing Intranet". A horizontal line separates this from the main content area. The main content area has a green header bar with the word "Home" and a blue header bar with "Department of Nursing Intranet". Both the green and blue bars have a "Home" link. The main content area contains a "Welcome!" message, a "Send to a Co-worker" button, a "Print" button, and a "My Nursing" section featuring a photo of three healthcare professionals. The "My Nursing" section includes a brief description of the application.

*While the Mayo Clinic's intranet has a link to the nursing subsite home and the intranet homepage, both links are called Home, which is confusing.*

## Avoid having multiple links with the same text label take users to different places.

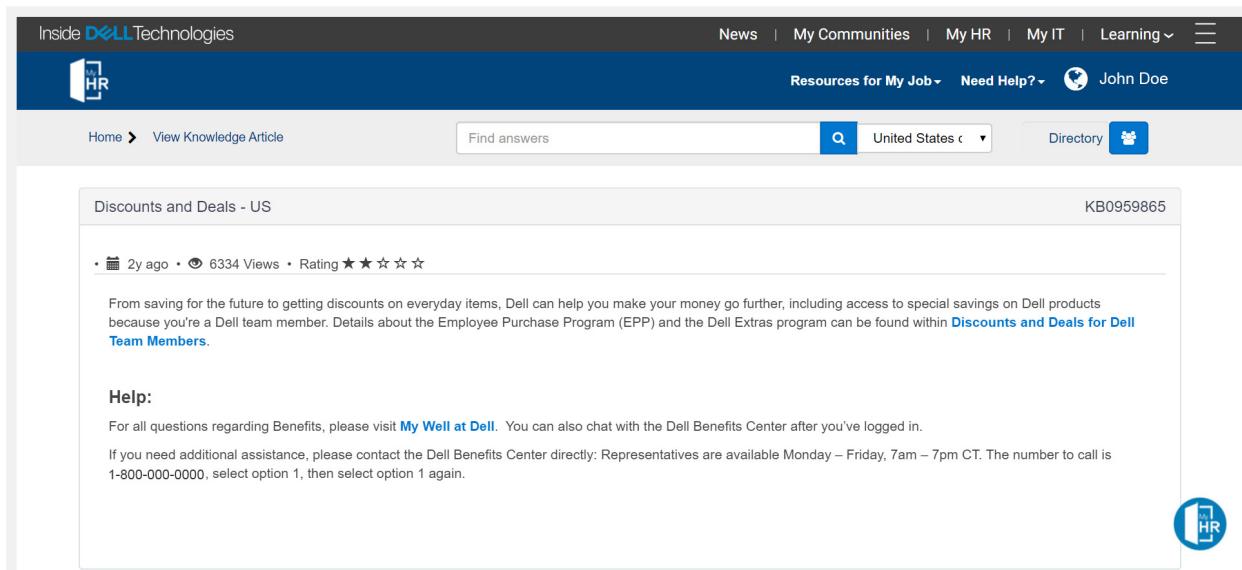
### Timeless Design Tips

When choosing link labels, each link label must be unique. Having the same text link appear but take users to different places causes confusion.

One way intranet designers get around this problem is by using the name of the subsite or section and adding *home* to the end of the link label. Try to avoid this, as it only partly solves the problem. It would be better to name the link with the subsite name. For example, in the example above, it would be better if the *Home* link was replaced with *Department of Nursing*, or even better if the subsite had some breadcrumbs and local navigation to make it feel part of the wider intranet rather than a secondary navigation bar.

## 33. Refer to the main intranet sections by their name; don't call them *Home* in the IA and page titles. Do not give sections within an intranet a “homepage.”

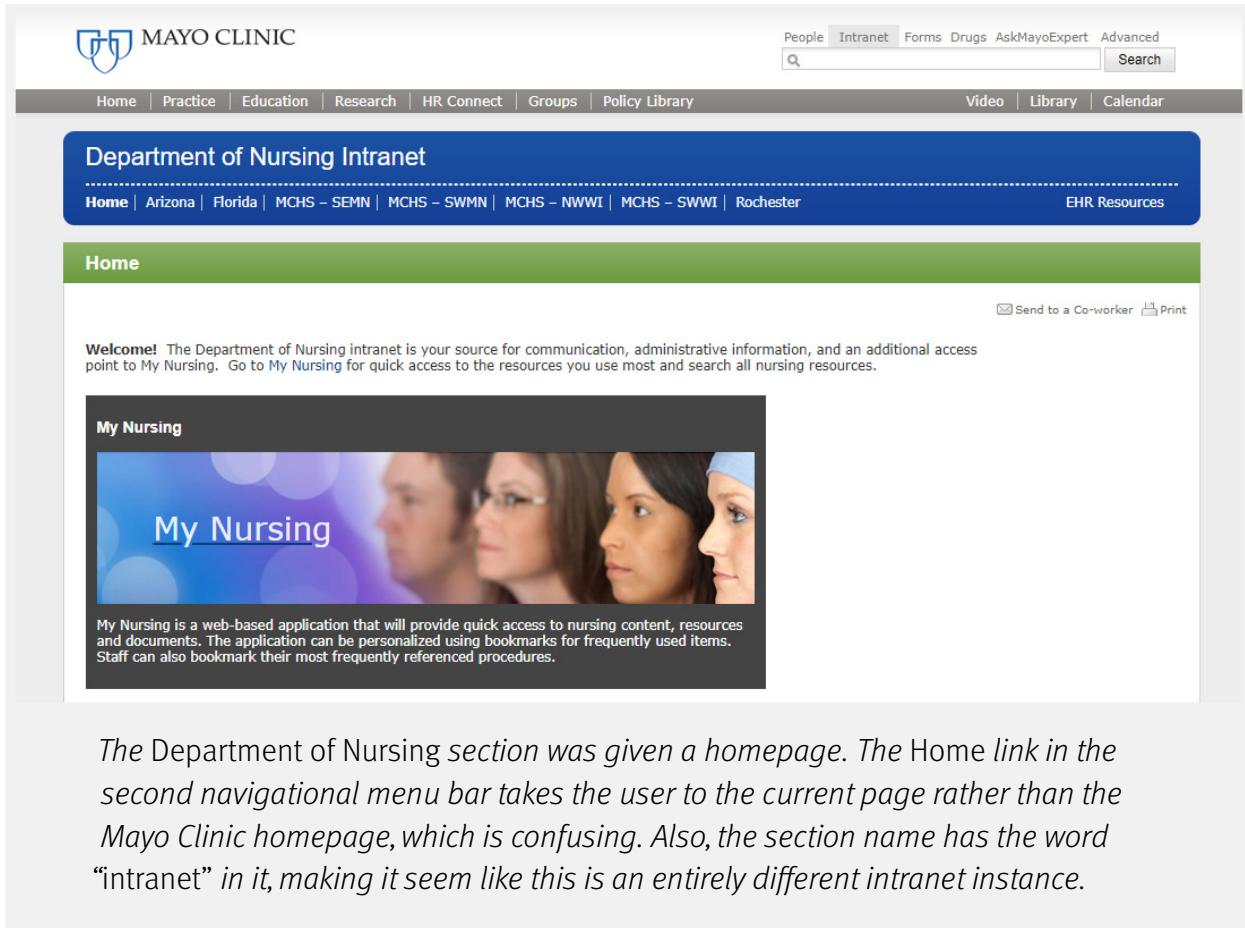
Dell Technologies' intranet comprised many sites consolidated into one intranet and housed in the main navigation. A main navigation bar was applied globally across all the sites, which was good. However, each of these sites had its own homepage and *home* link, making it feel like a separate site and causing users to feel disoriented.



The screenshot shows the Dell Technologies intranet homepage. At the top, there's a dark header with "Inside DELL Technologies" and a "My HR" logo. The header also includes links for News, My Communities, My HR, My IT, Learning, and a user profile for John Doe. Below the header, a breadcrumb trail says "Home > View Knowledge Article". There's a search bar with "Find answers" and a dropdown for "United States". A "Directory" button with a user icon is also present. The main content area has a title "Discounts and Deals - US" and a KB number "KB0959865". It shows a post from 2 years ago with 6334 views and a rating of ★★★☆☆. The post content discusses Dell's Employee Purchase Program (EPP) and Dell Extras program. Below the post, there's a "Help:" section with information about contacting the Dell Benefits Center. A small "My HR" logo is in the bottom right corner of the content area.

*The Home link in the breadcrumb leads to the homepage of the MyHR site rather than the Inside Dell Technologies' intranet homepage.*

The Mayo Clinic also had many subsites connected under its central intranet. Unfortunately, a second *home* link appeared on some of these subsites, and sometimes the page was named *Home*.



The screenshot shows the Mayo Clinic Department of Nursing Intranet homepage. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links for Home, Practice, Education, Research, HR Connect, Groups, Policy Library, Video, Library, and Calendar. A search bar is also present. Below the navigation bar, a blue header bar displays "Department of Nursing Intranet". Underneath this, a green navigation bar has "Home" selected. The main content area features a welcome message: "Welcome! The Department of Nursing intranet is your source for communication, administrative information, and an additional access point to My Nursing. Go to My Nursing for quick access to the resources you use most and search all nursing resources." Below this, there's a section titled "My Nursing" with a sub-section titled "My Nursing" featuring a photo of three healthcare professionals. A descriptive text box states: "My Nursing is a web-based application that will provide quick access to nursing content, resources and documents. The application can be personalized using bookmarks for frequently used items. Staff can also bookmark their most frequently referenced procedures." To the right of the main content area, there are links for "Send to a Co-worker" and "Print".

*The Department of Nursing section was given a homepage. The Home link in the second navigational menu bar takes the user to the current page rather than the Mayo Clinic homepage, which is confusing. Also, the section name has the word “intranet” in it, making it seem like this is an entirely different intranet instance.*

Eyeo made a similar mistake on one of its intranet sections. A page dedicated to news and events was named *Eyeo Central Home*. This page could be easily mistaken for the intranet homepage because of its name and how similar the layout was to the intranet's homepage.

*eyeo Central — a news and events hub — has the word “Home” after the title, making it seem like it’s the intranet homepage. Because of its similar layout to the homepage, users could easily mistake the page for the intranet, especially as there are no breadcrumbs or visual selection indicators on this page.*

## 34. If the organization has more than one commonly used intranet or different views, offer links between those intranets or views, and give users a clear indication of which one is currently active.

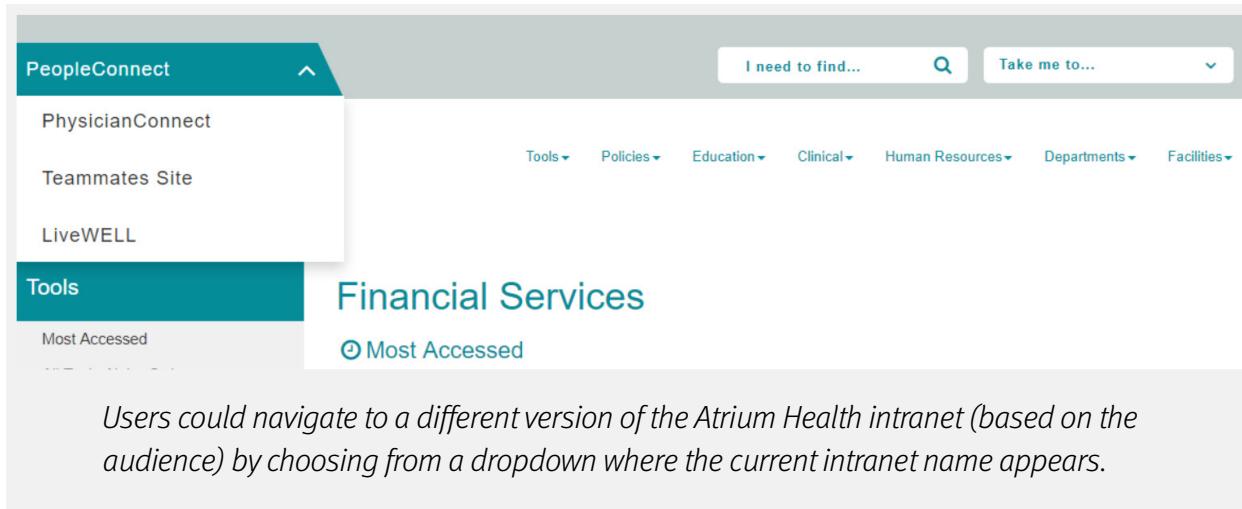
While it's better if there's just one intranet (and one URL) within an organization, some organizations have drastically different user groups with very different needs. Those needs can't be met through personalization alone.

Atrium Health was one such organization. For example, corporate staff had different informational needs than physicians. As a result, the intranet team supported different versions of the intranet, which were essentially their own sites.

There were four such sites:

- **PeopleConnect:** the main intranet for corporate staff
- **PhysicianConnect:** a specialized intranet for physicians
- **Teammates Site:** a site dedicated to onboarding new employees and for HR information
- **LiveWell:** a site devoted to health-related information

Users could navigate to a different site by selecting the arrow next to the current intranet instance and selecting a different intranet from the dropdown.



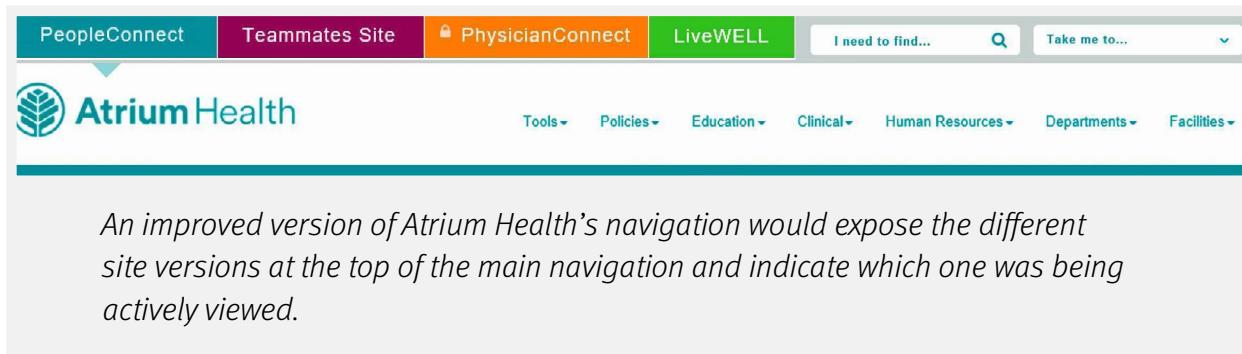
The screenshot shows the Atrium Health intranet homepage. At the top left, there's a dropdown menu with "PeopleConnect" as the active option. Below it, other options like "PhysicianConnect", "Teammates Site", and "LiveWELL" are listed. The main content area has a teal header bar with "Financial Services" and "Most Accessed". A callout box highlights the "Most Accessed" link under the "Tools" section. A text overlay on the right side of the page reads: "Users could navigate to a different version of the Atrium Health intranet (based on the audience) by choosing from a dropdown where the current intranet name appears."

While it was clear which intranet a user was on, it was not clear how to navigate to the other intranet versions. Because of the way the design was implemented, the links to the other sites were not immediately apparent as they were hidden. None of the users in our usability tests used them, indicating that they didn't think they could navigate to another intranet instance in this way. Instead, when users found themselves on one of the other sites and wanted to return to PeopleConnect, they typed the first few letters of the intranet's address into the URL field and relied on the saved sites to populate. After using this strategy, one participant said,

“I don’t use PhysiciansConnect that often and from a manageability standpoint, it’s difficult to toggle between the two.”

Another participant who couldn't figure out how to get back to PeopleConnect closed all her tabs and opened the intranet again from a desktop icon.

It would be better if the links to the other sites were exposed in the navigation. For example, these could appear in the utility navigation area, and visual selection cues could highlight which intranet was selected (as shown below).



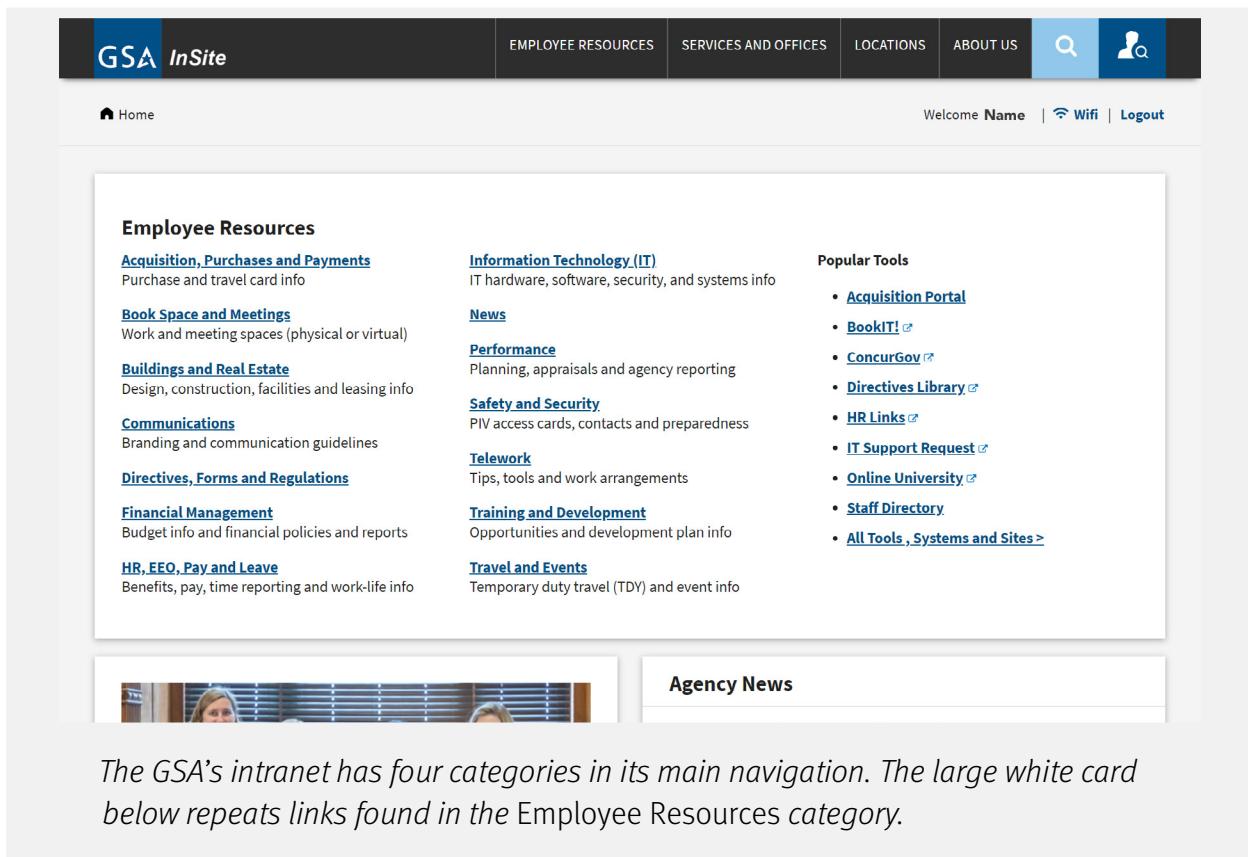
The screenshot shows the Atrium Health intranet with a revised navigation bar. The top bar now includes four tabs: "PeopleConnect" (highlighted in blue), "Teammates Site", "PhysicianConnect" (highlighted in orange), and "LiveWELL". Below the top bar, the "Atrium Health" logo is centered. The main content area has a teal header bar with "Financial Services" and "Most Accessed". A callout box highlights the "PhysicianConnect" tab. A text overlay on the right side of the page reads: "An improved version of Atrium Health's navigation would expose the different site versions at the top of the main navigation and indicate which one was being actively viewed."

Ideally, the LiveWell and Teammates Site should be incorporated into PeopleConnect, as there's no need to have a separate intranet to house HR or wellness information. This would provide only two intranet versions to toggle between.

## 35. Don't repeat navigation choices in the main content area of the homepage.

Repeating links can be confusing; it increases the user's cognitive load as they need to decide where to click. Additionally, users puzzle over which link is the right one and where each one leads.

The GSA intranet, Insite, duplicates navigation choices from the *Employee Resources* category in the main content area of the homepage.



The screenshot shows the GSA Insite homepage. At the top is a dark header bar with the "GSA InSite" logo, a search icon, and a user profile icon. Below the header is a navigation bar with links for "EMPLOYEE RESOURCES", "SERVICES AND OFFICES", "LOCATIONS", and "ABOUT US". To the right of the navigation bar are "Welcome Name", "Wifi", and "Logout" buttons. The main content area features a large white card titled "Employee Resources" containing several links: "Acquisition, Purchases and Payments", "Book Space and Meetings", "Buildings and Real Estate", "Communications", "Directives, Forms and Regulations", "Financial Management", and "HR, EEO, Pay and Leave". To the right of this card are sections for "Information Technology (IT)", "News", "Performance", "Safety and Security", "Telework", "Training and Development", and "Travel and Events". Further to the right is a "Popular Tools" section with links to various internal tools. Below the main content area is a "Agency News" section featuring a small photo of a person and a headline.

*The GSA's intranet has four categories in its main navigation. The large white card below repeats links found in the Employee Resources category.*

When links are duplicated, as in the example above, it's unclear which navigational device should be used. Because the central card is so big on Insite's homepage and has greater contrast, users will likely use it over the main navigation menu, missing out on content available in the other categories.

The area immediately underneath the main navigation and above the fold is prime real estate on an intranet. Replicating links from the main navigation in this central area causes user confusion and an associated opportunity cost; the area is no longer available for communicating important news or announcements.

The screenshot shows the GOV.UK homepage with a dark blue header. The header includes the text "Welcome to GOV.UK", "The best place to find government services and information", "Simpler, clearer, faster", a search bar with placeholder "Search GOV.UK" and a magnifying glass icon, and a sidebar with links to "Popular on GOV.UK" such as "Coronavirus (COVID-19): what you need to do", "Travel advice: coronavirus (COVID-19)", "Transition period", "Find a job", and "Personal tax account". Below the header is a grid of categories: Benefits, Disabled people, Money and tax; Births, deaths, marriages and care, Driving and transport, Passports, travel and living abroad; Business and self-employed, Education and learning, Visas and immigration; Childcare and parenting, Employing people, Working, jobs and pensions; Citizenship and living in the UK, Environment and countryside; and Crime, justice and the law, Housing and local services.

**24**  
Ministerial departments

**409**  
Other agencies and public bodies

The websites of all [government departments](#) and many other agencies and public bodies have been merged into GOV.UK.  
Here you can see all [news and communications](#), [statistics](#) and [consultations](#).  
Find out [how government services are performing](#) and how satisfied users are.

*GSA's navigation style was inspired by Gov.uk (above). However, Gov.uk uses flat navigation and has no main navigation bar, so it does not have this duplication problem.*

## 36. Code a *skip navigation* link before the main navigation links to avoid forcing screen reader users to listen to navigation on each page.

When screen reader users interact with a website, they must listen to a long list of navigation links, logo icons, and other elements on every page before they can listen to the main content. That is unless the site has a *skip navigation* link. A *skip navigation* link is a visible (or invisible) link at the beginning of the navigation that provides an anchor to the main content.

If you decide to implement an invisible *skip navigation* link (as some teams do to reduce clutter in the navigation), it's best if the link becomes visible when it receives keyboard focus, as this supports sighted users who can only use a keyboard to interact with websites. Keyboard-only users can then move quickly to the main content without having to tab through all links.

# Local and Contextual Navigation

If the main navigation is the interstate highway, local and contextual navigation are the residential roads. Both local and contextual navigation allow users to move fluidly around the site and further explore content. Here's how:

- **Local navigation:** Allows users to move to another page at the same level. Typically, local navigation is located in the left rail and sometimes underneath the main navigation bar.
- **Contextual navigation:** Includes inline links and related links. Contextual navigation takes users to similar types of content, which could sit in a completely different site area.

Related links can help solve the problem that users don't know what content the intranet has to offer. Rather than making users hunt for that information, provide clearly named links to the information on logical pages of content in a predictable and constant place on the page.

## 37. Provide local navigation if users need to switch between pages in the same category.

On many intranets we tested, categories had numerous pages, and users often moved between pages to find information for a given task. This is where local navigation becomes useful, reminding users what pages exist in that category and avoiding users needing to leave the page or open any dropdown menus from the main navigation. Instead, users can view content on another page in the same category with one click.

The Co-operators provided local navigation throughout its intranet. This local navigation was consistently located in the same place and was easy to scan. It also helped orient users with its strong selection cues.

The screenshot shows the Source intranet homepage. At the top, there is a header with the logo "SOURCE" on the left, followed by two search fields: "Search Content" and "Search People", each with a "Go" button. On the right side of the header are links for "Français", "My Site", and a user icon. Below the header is a main navigation bar with six categories: News, HR, Work, About Us, Social, and Locations. The "About Us" category is highlighted with a green background, indicating it is the current page. A secondary navigation menu on the left, under the "About Us" heading, lists several sub-pages: Our Difference, Mission, Vision & Values, Our Value Proposition, Our Strategy, Our Performance, Our History, Media & Recognition (which is also highlighted with a green arrow pointing to it), Corporate Reports, Our Executive Team, Org Charts, and Brand Guidelines. The main content area displays the "Media & Recognition" page, which features a blue-themed background image of stage lights and a quote: "As a thriving Canadian co-operative insurer, we strive to raise the bar in how we service our clients, support our communities, engage our employees and promote sustainability. These awards recognize our collective efforts – there is much to be proud of here!"

*The Co-operators' intranet, Source, provided local navigation so users could easily switch to other pages in the same category. Here, the current page is selected in the local navigation, and the topmost category is selected in the main navigation, so users understand where they are.*

Local navigation can also reveal pages deeper in the IA (known as child pages) as well as at the same level (known as sibling pages). This design choice can work if there aren't too many levels or subpages. However, the **local navigation shouldn't just show child pages for the current page** but should also show sibling pages. The City of Calgary's intranet, myCity, had local navigation but only displayed child pages for the current page rather than sibling pages. Users would need to move up a level or use the main navigation to view other pages at the same level.

The screenshot shows the City of Calgary's myCity intranet. At the top, there's a red header bar with the "Calgary" logo and the "myCity" logo. Below this is a grey navigation bar with links: Tools & Resources, myHR, Organization, News & Events, Dashboard, and Safety & Security. A search bar with a magnifying glass icon is also at the top right. The main content area has a breadcrumb trail: myCity home > Our organization > Departments & Business Units > Law and Legislative Services > Corporate Security. The main title is "Corporate Security". On the left, there's a vertical local navigation menu under "Law and Legislative Services" with options like "Report an Incident", "Security services", and "Contact Security". The main content is divided into sections: "Overview" (with text about security processes), "Security Spotlight" (with text about public photography), and "Security information" (with icons of a smartphone, keyboard, and laptop). To the right, there's a sidebar with a heading "Report a Security Incident" and a "Report a security incident online" button with a monitor icon. Below this are "Quick links" to Emergency response info, ID cards, Locks, keys and safes, and Lost and found (Municipal Complex).

*The City of Calgary's myCity has local navigation but doesn't show users other pages that sit at the same level in the site structure. Instead, the local navigation encourages users to view pages lower down in the structure.*

When intranets utilized this design treatment, it meant that sibling pages were not visible, so users would have to remember the pages in the same category or use the navigation to find the other sibling pages. When users may be unsure which category to try first, having local navigation expose the sibling pages makes it easier for users to adopt a trial-and-error approach.

## 38. Avoid repeating navigational items from the main navigation in the local navigation.

If your intranet has a main navigation menu and local navigation, it's best not to repeat links from the main navigation in the local navigation. Users use both sets of navigation to get a sense of the site structure, so duplicating choices from the main navigation in the local navigation will not only increase the cognitive load (as users wonder which link to choose) but will also make them less confident in their orientation on the site, as well as clutter your local navigation.

The Mayo Clinic's intranet consisted of many subsites, which unfortunately had a second horizontal menu underneath the site's global navigation area, which caused confusion. In addition to this, the subsite's navigation was repeated in the local navigation area, offering the same link twice.

*The Mayo Clinic's intranet had subsites with their own horizontal navigation menu, which caused confusion. To make matters worse, the local navigation on these subsites repeated all the links in the second main navigation bar, creating further confusion.*

Although you shouldn't repeat links from the main navigation in the local navigation, it's okay to repeat the category within which the current page (and sibling pages) can be found. However, avoid including all previous categories. That's what breadcrumbs are for!

If you do include the parent category in the local navigation, ensure it's at the top and visually distinct from the child pages below.

NAIT's local navigation provides the parent category for the current page and sibling pages. The parent page link is a gray fill, while the child pages are a white fill with blue text, ensuring they are visually distinct. Additionally, on NAIT's intranet, breadcrumbs provide further information on the page's location in the site structure.

The screenshot shows the NAIT intranet homepage. On the left is a vertical sidebar with icons for NAIT logo, user profile (Helena), quick links, employee directory, locations, and emergency resources. The main navigation bar at the top includes links for All Services, Employee Essentials, Teaching Essentials, Industry Solutions, Departments & Schools, Institutional Priorities, About NAIT, News & Events, and a search bar. A banner at the top states "NAIT.ca has been undergoing a radical transformation. Explore the preview site of the new NAIT.ca and provide your feedback." Below the banner, the breadcrumb trail shows HOME > DEPARTMENTS & SCHOOLS > HUMAN RESOURCES > TRAINING & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT. To the right of the breadcrumb is a "TRAINING & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT" section featuring a photo of a corkboard with a note that says "What Motivates You?" and a list of services offered by Organizational Development Services (ODS). The local navigation for "HUMAN RESOURCES" is shown on the left, with "TRAINING & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT" expanded to show its child pages: Respect at NAIT, Learning Opportunities, Credential Enhancement Program, Dependent Scholarship Program, NAIT Tuition Benefit, AWARDS & RECOGNITION, PERFORMANCE ENHANCEMENT PROCESS (PEP), CODE OF ETHICS & CONDUCT, STAFF EVENTS, SERVICES, CLAYTON'S BLOG, and HR & ODS CALENDAR.

*NAIT's intranet has local navigation that reminds users which category the page can be found within (in this case Human Resources).*

The Co-operators' intranet had a few pages where the local navigation included three levels in the local navigation, which were only distinguished by indenting. The result was a cluttered and confusing local navigation. It would be better to present only the parent category along with the child pages of this category.

The local navigation on this Co-operators intranet page is confusing because so many pages higher up in the IA are presented alongside the sibling pages in the Forms category. This makes the local navigation long and difficult to parse.

## 39. Don't hide or collapse local navigation behind accordions.

The local navigation should be a fixture of your site and should always remain visible. Do not hide your local navigation behind accordions.

When GSA employees were using the intranet, Insite, they were occasionally confused because the sibling pages were hidden behind accordions. In addition, there was no visual indicator in the local navigation to highlight which page they were on.

The screenshot shows a navigation bar with links for 'EMPLOYEE RESOURCES', 'SERVICES AND OFFICES', 'LOCATIONS', and 'ABOUT US'. Below the navigation bar, a breadcrumb trail reads 'Home > Employee Resources > HR, EEO, Pay and Leave > Benefits'. On the right, there's a welcome message 'Welcome Name WiFi | Logout' and icons for search and user profile.

**HR, EEO, Pay and Leave**

**Benefits**

As a federal employee you are offered a wide array of benefits. You can choose from a number of health benefit plans, supplemental vision and dental insurance, life insurance, and long term health care. You can also set aside pre-tax funds to pay for common, out of pocket health and dependent care expenses by enrolling in a [Flexible Spending Account](#) during Open Season each November. Federal retirement plans outpace those of the private sector. And, to help you set aside additional money for retirement, you can enroll in the Thrift Savings Plan which functions similar to a 401k.

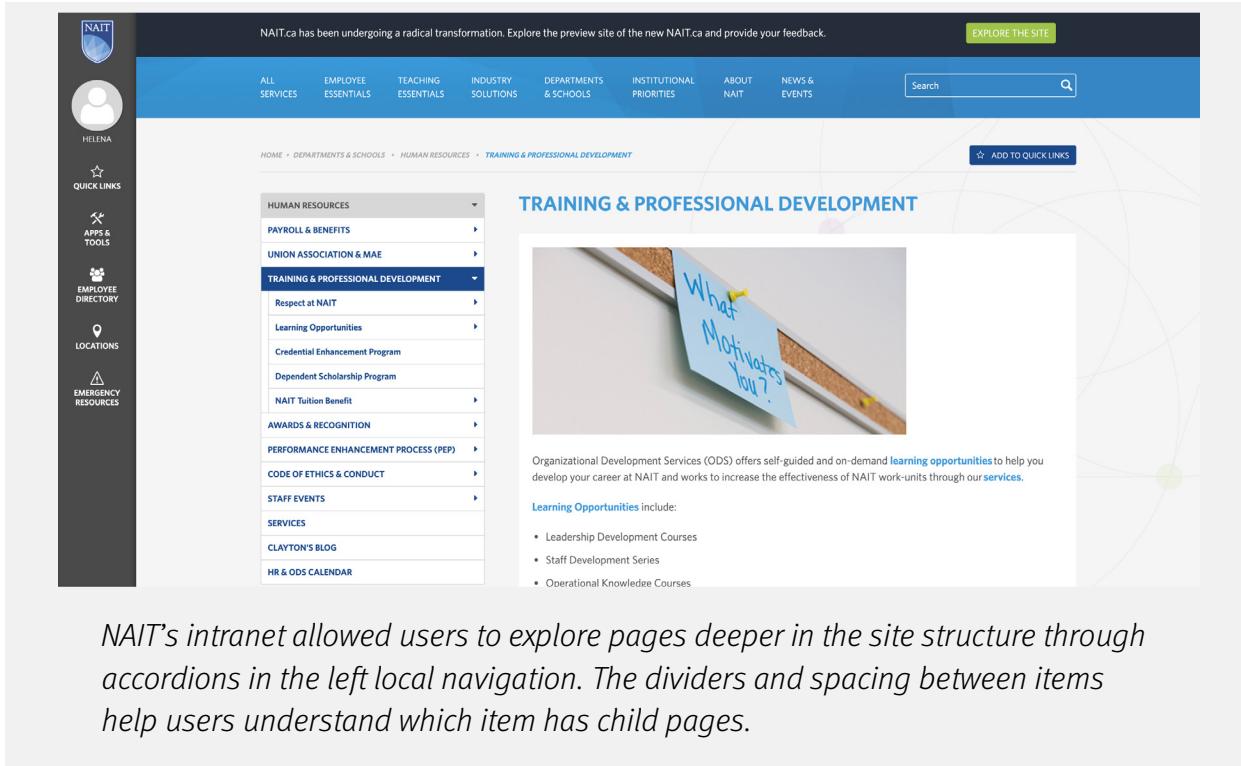
**Benefits**

- [Long Term Care Insurance](#)
- [Retirement](#)
- [Worker's Compensation](#)
- [Life Insurance](#)
- [Benefits and Retirement Specialists](#)
- [Health Insurance](#)
- [Employees Called to Active Military Duty](#)
- [Military Service Deposits](#)
- [Thrift Savings Plan](#)

*The GSA's intranet, InSite, forced users to perform an extra click on an accordion to expose other pages at the same level in the site structure.*

Some intranets exposed sibling pages but used accordions to reveal pages deeper in the structure. If you implement accordions, ensure sufficient spacing between the page link and the accordion link to avoid having users accidentally trigger the wrong link. In the GSA example above, some child pages in the *Benefits* section had child pages, which were indicated with a plus icon. While the accordion has enough distance from the text link, the local navigation would benefit from some extra vertical spacing between each link so it's easier to relate the accordion icon with the relevant link.

On NAIT's intranet, the sibling pages are exposed and not hidden behind accordions, which is favorable. Users can use the accordions to explore pages deeper in the site structure.



NAIT.ca has been undergoing a radical transformation. Explore the preview site of the new NAIT.ca and provide your feedback.

**EXPLOR THE SITE**

HELENA

QUICK LINKS

APPS & TOOLS

EMPLOYEE DIRECTORY

LOCATIONS

EMERGENCY RESOURCES

ALL SERVICES    EMPLOYEE ESSENTIALS    TEACHING ESSENTIALS    INDUSTRY SOLUTIONS    DEPARTMENTS & SCHOOLS    INSTITUTIONAL PRIORITIES    ABOUT NAIT    NEWS & EVENTS

Search

HOME • DEPARTMENTS & SCHOOLS • HUMAN RESOURCES • TRAINING & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

**TRAINING & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Respect at NAIT  
Learning Opportunities  
Credential Enhancement Program  
Dependent Scholarship Program  
NAIT Tuition Benefit  
AWARDS & RECOGNITION  
PERFORMANCE ENHANCEMENT PROCESS (PEP)  
CODE OF ETHICS & CONDUCT  
STAFF EVENTS  
SERVICES  
CLAYTON'S BLOG  
HR & ODS CALENDAR

What Motivates You?

Organizational Development Services (ODS) offers self-guided and on-demand learning opportunities to help you develop your career at NAIT and works to increase the effectiveness of NAIT work-units through our services.

Learning Opportunities include:

- Leadership Development Courses
- Staff Development Series
- Operational Knowledge Courses

NAIT's intranet allowed users to explore pages deeper in the site structure through accordions in the left local navigation. The dividers and spacing between items help users understand which item has child pages.

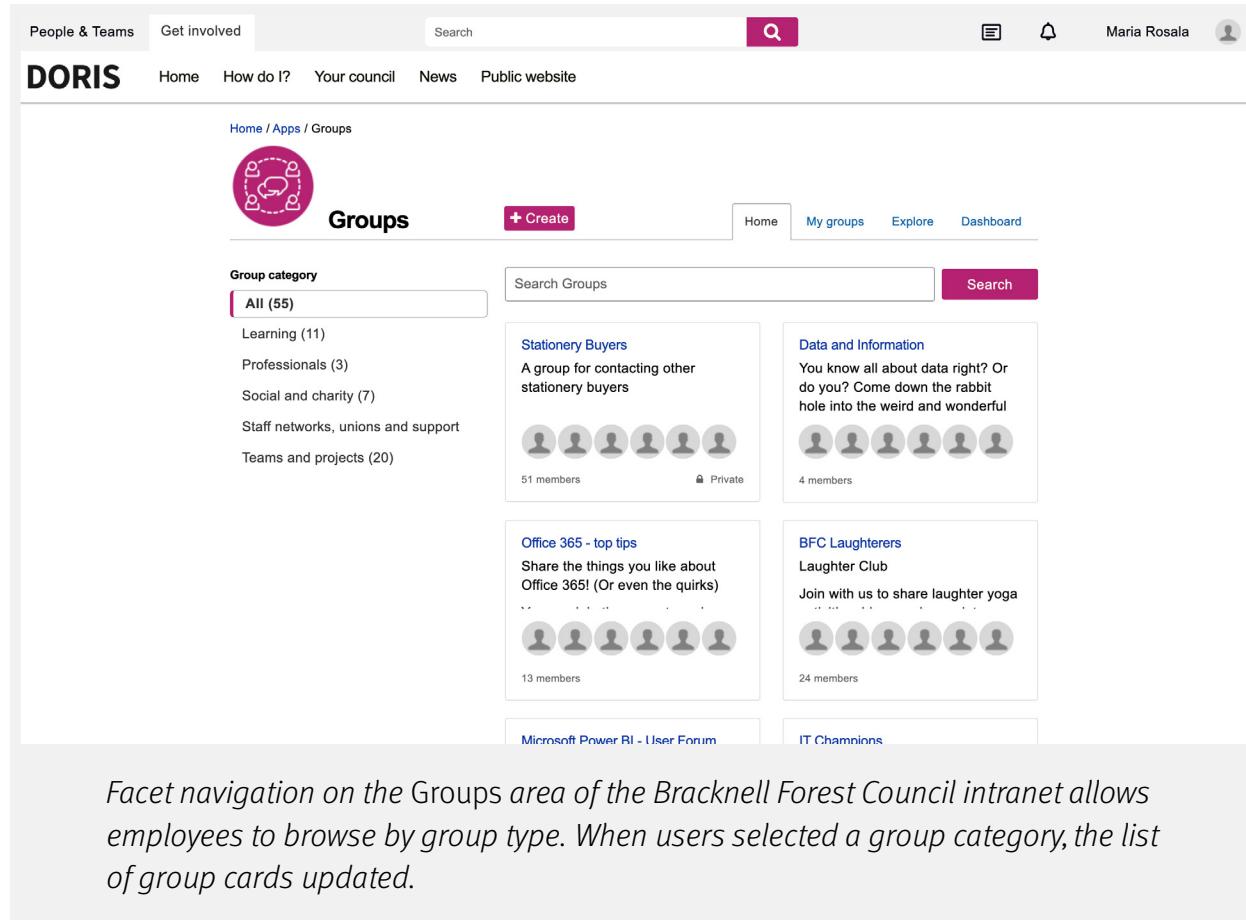
## 40. Consider implementing faceted navigation in site areas with highly varied content that can be organized in many ways or can't be easily categorized in menu-like navigation.

Faceted navigation offers users an alternative to browsing site content through a fixed hierarchy. Faceted navigation is similar to faceted search in that it lets users narrow down the content displayed using criteria they choose. However, in the case of faceted navigation, users don't have to perform an initial search.

Many intranet site areas could benefit from faceted navigation. Below, we highlight several examples. For each, we have also included a list of possibly relevant facets, but it's important to tailor facets (and their values) based on your organization and how your users think about the content. No two intranets are alike.

- **News** — possible facets: topic, author, source, date, format
- **Projects** —possible facets: topic, departments, team members, date started, status
- **Events** — possible facets: topic, location, date, duration
- **Document repository** — possible facets: topic, author, date, format, department
- **Careers** — possible facets: job title, department, location, level
- **HR** — possible facets: topic, type
- **Groups** — possible facets: topic, type

Bracknell Forest Council used faceted navigation on the *Groups* area of its intranet. This helped users explore different types of employee-run groups based on qualities they were looking for, such as educational or social groups.



The screenshot shows the 'Groups' section of the DORIS intranet. At the top, there's a navigation bar with 'People & Teams', 'Get involved', 'Search', and user profile icons. Below the header, the 'Groups' section has a title 'Groups' with a 'Create' button. A sidebar on the left lists 'Group category' options: 'All (55)' (selected), 'Learning (11)', 'Professionals (3)', 'Social and charity (7)', 'Staff networks, unions and support', and 'Teams and projects (20)'. To the right, there are several group cards. One card for 'Stationery Buyers' shows a description, 51 members, and a private status. Another card for 'Data and Information' shows a description, 4 members, and a public status. Other visible cards include 'Office 365 - top tips' (13 members), 'BFC Laughterers' (Laughter Club, 24 members), 'Microsoft Power BI - User Forum', and 'IT Champions'. A search bar and a 'Search' button are also present.

*Facet navigation on the Groups area of the Bracknell Forest Council intranet allows employees to browse by group type. When users selected a group category, the list of group cards updated.*

Content must be tagged so that it can support faceted navigation. Tags must be applied consistently and appropriately to the content for faceted navigation to be effective. This means content contributors should be trained or advised on how to add appropriate tags.



### Train content contributors on tagging guidelines.

#### Process and Strategic Considerations

In addition to training employees on how to craft good content, also train content contributors on how to add good metadata and tags. Having documentation can be helpful for those who only contribute content occasionally.

While faceted navigation has its uses, traditional navigation shouldn't be abandoned in favor of it. Having an entire site only navigable via facets would make finding content difficult as there would be too many tags, and users would need to work too hard to find the content they need. Instead, use faceted navigation once users are at their destination to help them discover and find content that interests them the most.

## 41. Provide links to related content, but only if you have a lot of content on a particular topic. Label related links with descriptive terms rather than using generic terms such as “Quick Links” or “Popular Links.”

Although related links are designed to help users discover more content that might be of interest to them, they can also be helpful when users have a different mental model of where content should sit within the site structure because you can direct users to the correct place if they take a wrong turn. For instance, a form to request vacation time may be located within the *Forms* area of the *Human Resources* section of the site, but there may be links leading to that location from the *Policy* area, where information about taking a vacation is located, or from a company-wide vacation calendar found under *Tools*. Related links to a single location are preferable to having copies of the form on separate pages within each area.

Regardless of where they are taking the user, clearly label related links to ensure users understand why they are there and use descriptive terms rather than generic terms such as “Quick Links” or “Popular Links.”

When we asked employees from the Royal National Lifeboats Institution (RNLI) to find information about parental leave on the intranet, one user thought it would be a benefit and looked under the *Benefits* category in the navigation. When she didn't find it there, she retraced her footsteps and eventually found it under *Absence*. “Oh, hang on! It's under Absence,” she said. “That's sad! I think of absence as being ill.”

This is an instance where the *Benefits* page could have benefitted from a related link to the parental leave information located under the *Absence* sibling page. The local navigation could also have been improved to make the sibling *Absence* page visible.

The screenshot shows a SharePoint intranet page for the RNLI. The top navigation bar includes links for 'Our charity', 'Working at the RNLI', 'Find people and places', 'News and events', 'Find a document', and 'Glossary'. Below the navigation is a breadcrumb trail: '/ WORKING AT THE RNLI / BENEFITS'. The main title is 'Benefits'. On the left, there's a sidebar with a 'Benefits' section containing links to 'Childcare', 'Discounts', 'Cycle to work', 'Dental cashplan', 'Eye tests', 'Health cashplan', 'Pension', 'Life cover', 'Travel season ticket loans', and 'Site contents'. The main content area features a post by Natalie Costello, an author, with a small profile picture. The post discusses 'Total Reward' benefits available while working at the RNLI, mentioning salary, pension, and holiday. It also provides links to various benefit schemes. To the right of the post is a 'Benefits' sidebar listing several documents and resources, each with a small icon: 'RYA Training Centre UK Specialist Shorebased Training BASC', 'Summary of Total Reward - Documents', 'Vhi - One Plan Starter day to day benefits', 'Vhi Fact Sheet', 'Vhi Health insurance Application Form, only p1 to be completed', 'Vhi Mobile Health Assistant', and 'Vhi Online Guide'.

*RNLI's intranet could have benefited from some related links to pages in the Absences section (a sibling page to Benefits) above the area where the documents are listed.*

The Scottish Government provided links to related content on each intranet page. The links were clearly labeled as “related.” And instead of a long list of links, the *Related links* section was used to highlight similar content users may be interested in.

The screenshot shows a Saltire intranet page. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links for News, My Workplace, Our Organisation, Staff Directory, and Help. To the right of the navigation is a 'Quick Links' button, a search bar with the placeholder 'Search Saltire', and a magnifying glass icon. Below the navigation, the breadcrumb trail shows 'My Workplace > Leave > Annual leave > Annual leave - request and record'. A small 'Article' icon is next to the title. The main title is 'Annual leave - request and record'. Below the title, a text block says: 'You should use the [eHR system](#) to request and record annual leave. You must not take annual leave without your manager's permission.' A section titled 'You should:' lists three points: 'make your request in advance', 'give your manager as much notice as possible', and 'not make firm plans before your annual leave is approved'. Another text block states: 'You must take annual leave in minimum blocks of half a day. Where your leave is shown in hours (i.e. part-time or non-standard working pattern), the minimum amount of annual leave is half of your contracted hours for the day of leave. Absence of less than half a day should be managed through the flexi system.' A note below says: 'Managers approve and monitor their team members' annual leave. Wherever possible,'. On the right side, there's a sidebar with social sharing icons (Share this page, Print this page, Add to My Quick Links, Provide feedback on this page), a 'Related links' section with links to 'Managing annual leave in eHR' and 'Contact HR Help for advice', and a 'Tags' section with two tags: 'annual leave' and 'request leave'.

**Annual leave – request and record**

You should use the [eHR system](#) to request and record annual leave. You must not take annual leave without your manager's permission.

You should:

- make your request in advance
- give your manager as much notice as possible
- not make firm plans before your annual leave is approved

You must take annual leave in minimum blocks of half a day. Where your leave is shown in hours (i.e. part-time or non-standard working pattern), the minimum amount of annual leave is half of your contracted hours for the day of leave. Absence of less than half a day should be managed through the flexi system.

Managers approve and monitor their team members' annual leave. Wherever possible,

*On the Scottish Government's site, a Related links section in the right rail contained links to similar content.*

On MacCentral, the intranet from Burns & McDonnell, related links were sometimes underneath the main content area, and they were found under the heading *Quick Links*, which was not descriptive of what these links were.

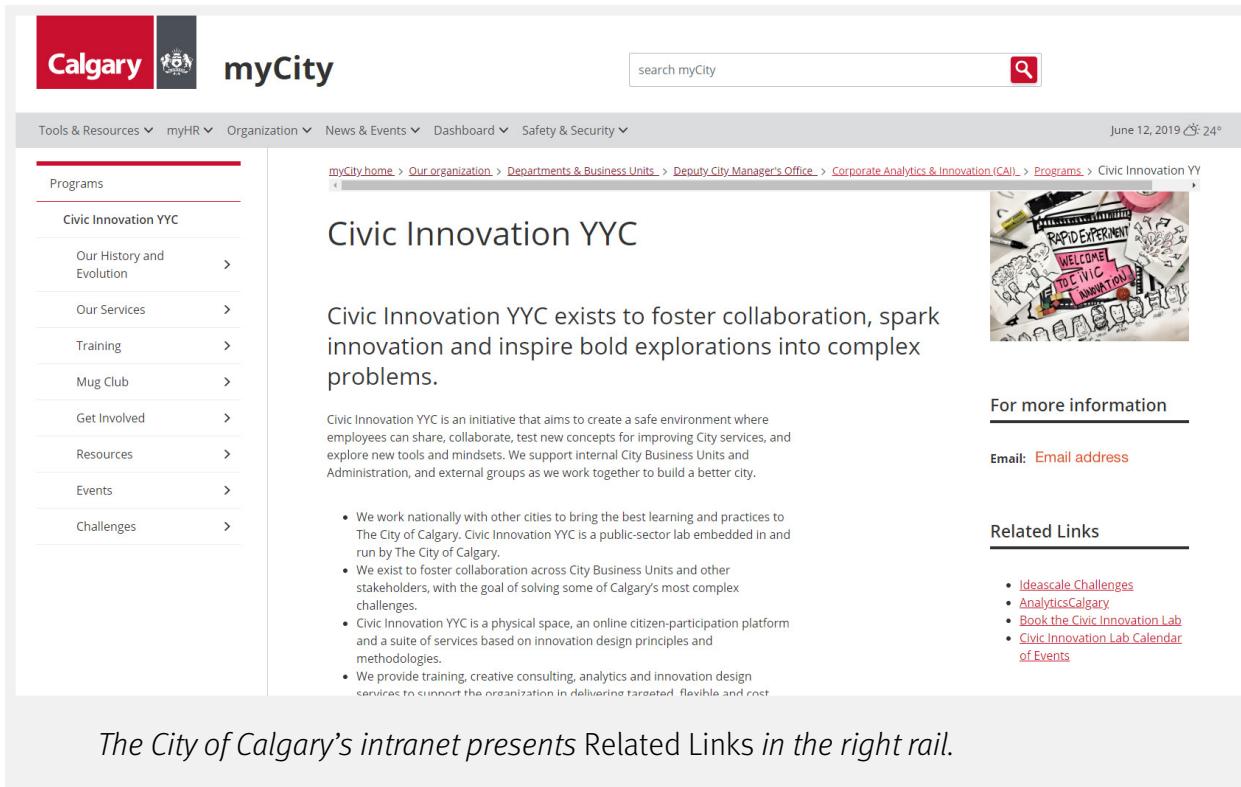
The screenshot shows the MacCENTRAL intranet homepage. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links for 'BENEFITS', 'MY STUFF', 'OUR COMPANY', 'RESOURCES', and 'HR HUB'. Below the navigation is a search bar and a 'Share site' button. The main content area features a large banner with two people smiling, followed by a grid of six cards: 'Explore Your Health Benefits' (with a 'LEARN MORE' button), 'Retirement Plans', 'Leaves of Absence and Time Off Work', 'Wellness Programs and Events', and 'FAQ's'. Below this is a section titled 'News' with three items: 'Learning Opportunity: Nearing Retirement', 'Business Travel Medical Plan', and 'ESOP Cash Update'. Further down are sections for 'Quick Links' and 'Key Contacts', each listing several employee names and roles.

*Burns & McDonnell had related links at the bottom of the page, which makes sense on an overview page. However, they were named “Quick Links,” which wasn’t descriptive.*

It can be easy for the related links to become cluttered with content that is hardly related. If content creators oversee adding their own related links, then **provide guidelines on how to choose helpful related content** for those links.

## 42. Place related links on the right side of the main content area or just underneath it.

Related links are often placed on the right side of the page's main content area or sometimes just below. Both placements can be helpful, depending on the page design. Top-right placement can be helpful for those who quickly realize that the page doesn't quite offer the information they need. Related links at the bottom of the page work well if users are likely to read or scan the entire page, which is common on articles.



The screenshot shows the City of Calgary's myCity intranet. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for Tools & Resources, myHR, Organization, News & Events, Dashboard, and Safety & Security. On the far right of the header, it says "June 12, 2019 ⌂ 24°". Below the header, the main content area has a breadcrumb trail: myCity.home > Our organization > Departments & Business Units > Deputy City Manager's Office > Corporate Analytics & Innovation (CAI) > Programs > Civic Innovation YYC. The main title "Civic Innovation YYC" is displayed. To the right of the title is a decorative graphic of a city skyline with the text "RAPID EXPERIMENT", "WELCOME", and "TO CIVIC INNOVATION". Below the title, there is a paragraph of text about the initiative. To the right of the text is a section titled "For more information" with an "Email" link. At the bottom of the main content area is a section titled "Related Links" with several hyperlinks.

*The City of Calgary's intranet presents Related Links in the right rail.*

Avoid placing related links on the left side of the main content area, as this is often reserved for local navigation.

## 43. Avoid generic inline links such as “click here.” Instead, use concise, distinct, and descriptive text.

An inline link is a hyperlink that appears within the body text. Users often rely on inline links to move around websites. They also use them to scan the page since links have a different visual treatment than body text. When inline links are generic, this stops users from getting a gist of the content on the page or from knowing where they can move off to.



## People scan for linked text.

### User Behaviors

When users are looking for a specific piece of information, they scan for links and bolded or bulleted words.

On some intranets we tested, link labels were generic. This not only made it harder to scan — as users needed to read more of the context to understand the link — but also makes it harder for employees using a screen reader to understand where those links might take them. Typically, a screen-reader user will open a links dialogue and have the links on the page be read out to them before listening to the content on the page. Listening to generic links such as “click here” provides no helpful information.



## Screen-reader users scan links, too.

### User Behaviors

Most screen-reader users explore links (as well as headings) on a page before listening to body text. This helps them audibly scan the page.

**Additional Benefits**

Atrium Health partners with you to take care of your physical, financial and personal health, including your unique individual and family need. In addition to your core benefits, (medical, dental, and vision) Atrium Health provides you with convenient access to cost effective group rates on a wide range of Additional Benefits. Pair these Additional Benefits with your core benefits to supplement income in the case of an accident or emergency, protect you and your family's financial future, and help balance the important areas of your life.

Additional Benefits details are available in the 2019 Benefits Guide. For more information, contact Atrium Health Benefits Administration at (704) 631-0263.

**New in 2019:** New Dependent Backup care options. [Learn more.](#)

**Income Protection Benefits**

- Short-Term Disability Buy-Up
- Universal Life Insurance
- Supplemental Life
- Accidental Death and Dismemberment
- Voluntary Short-Term Disability

**Benefits Offered at No Cost**

- [Charlotte Metro Credit Union](#)
- [Employee Assistance Program](#)
- [Maternity Benefit Program](#)
- [End of Life Support](#)

*On one of the benefits pages on Atrium Health's intranet, a couple of links (Learn More and Start Here) were generic.*

My Workplace > Leave > Annual leave > Annual leave – request and record

Article

## Annual leave – request and record

You should use the [eHR system](#) to request and record annual leave. You must not take annual leave without your manager's permission.

You should:

- make your request in advance
- give your manager as much notice as possible
- not make firm plans before your annual leave is approved

You must take annual leave in minimum blocks of half a day. Where your leave is shown in hours (i.e. part-time or non-standard working pattern), the minimum amount of annual leave is half of your contracted hours for the day of leave. Absence of less than half a day should be managed through the flexi system.

Managers approve and monitor their team members' annual leave. Wherever possible, manager may have to:

- restrict the amount of annual leave taken at any one time
- refuse annual leave at specific times of the year

If you transfer to a new post, your new manager must reauthorise any forthcoming annual leave that's been approved.

Find out about your [annual leave entitlement](#).

### Part-time colleagues

If you work part-time, you are also required to record your public and privilege holidays on a [public and privilege leave hours form](#).

### Employees without eHR access

You should record all your annual leave on an:

- [Annual leave sheet - full-time colleagues](#)
- [Annual leave sheet - part-time colleagues](#)

Your manager must update your annual leave sheet at the start of each new leave year. This is to confirm your entitlement, taking into account any carry-over or deficit from the previous leave year.

*Inline links on many of the Scottish Government's intranet pages used descriptive text, which made the links easy to scan.*



Share this page ▾



Print this page



Add to My Quick Links



Provide feedback on this page



### Related links

- Managing annual leave in eHR
- Contact HR Help for advice

### Tags

[annual leave](#) || [request leave](#)

Last updated 28/01/2019 12:31 PM

If you have a distributed content governance model (meaning there are multiple people across the organization creating and publishing content), then it's a good idea to provide guidance on how to write good inline text links.



### Train content editors on how to write inline links.

#### Process and Strategic Considerations

Train and provide guidance so content editors know how to write good inline links. Audit content to ensure editors are adhering to best practices.

## 44. Avoid adding the same inline links multiple times on the same page.

Link to a destination from a page only once. Otherwise, the page can become cluttered with the same links, and users will wonder which one to click. This would also be annoying for employees using screen readers as they would have to listen to the same link be repeated multiple times from the links dialogue.

The only exception to this rule is when the page is very long, but even then, it's best not to link every instance of a particular word or phrase. Instead, link a piece of text in a location where it makes the most sense for the user to choose to leave the page.

Saltire News My Workplace Our Organisation Staff Directory Help Quick Links Search Saltire

My Workplace > IT and information management > IT services > IT support and iFix Article

## IT support and iFix

If you have a fault with your phone, laptop or other IT systems and services, IT support can help. You can raise issues using [iFix](#) or by using the [iFix knowledge section](#).

**Fixing a fault using iFix knowledge**

You can resolve many issues without contacting ITECS by using the guidance in the [iFix knowledge](#) section. You'll find solutions to common problems, step by step guides, FAQs and useful tips.

Use the search box at the top of the [iFix](#) page to find help, or browse by category from the [iFix knowledge](#) menu item.

If your issue isn't covered, please log a fault through [iFix](#).

**Logging a fault**

If you can log on, use [iFix](#) to log faults or check the status of requests you've raised. It's available 24 hours a day.

To log a fault:

1. Go to [iFix](#).
2. Select 'Services' from the menu on the left of the page and then 'Faults'.
3. You will see options for different organisations or platforms like gov.scot or Saltire. Select the relevant organisation or platform or choose SCOTS IT for general faults.
4. A form will appear for you complete. If a field within the form has a search icon , select it to show the list of fault options, then choose the one that fits best.
5. Describe the details of your issue or ask a question in the text box.
6. You can add attachments like Word documents or images if they help to describe your issue.
7. Select 'Submit'.

If you can't log on, or can't log your fault using iFix, call the IT Service Desk on x48500 and choose option 1 (or 0131 244 8500 if calling from an external number).

Lines are open Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm.

**Requesting equipment, software and services**

You can request IT items like laptops, printers, software and telephones or services like SCOTS account access via [iFix](#).

Use the iFix search box or select 'Services' > 'Requests' > and select the appropriate category, or [browse through the catalogue](#).

If you need multiples of an item, please complete a separate request for each one.

**SCOTS account access**

If you're locked your SCOTS account or forgotten your password, find out [how to unlock your SCOTS account or reset your password](#).

If you know your SCOTS password but want to update it, find out [how to change your SCOTS password](#).

**Help using iFix**

Read the [iFix help pages](#) for general help on using iFix, logging faults and requests, and checking the status of your support or service requests.

**Sending iFix feedback**

ITECS are continually looking to improve [iFix](#), including the help content and fault/request forms.

You can leave comments on articles within the [iFix knowledge](#) section, or send your thoughts on the [iFix feedback form](#).

 Share this page  Print this page  Add to My Quick Links  Provide feedback on this page

 Related links

> Buying IT consumables

**Tags**

iFix services IT system PC iFix

Last updated 28/11/2018 03:15 PM

*On the Scottish Government's intranet, a page about IT support contained duplicate inline links for the same content. The IT service request system, iFix, was linked eight times.*

## 45. Ensure links to external websites or the company's public-facing site are marked as such.

Leaving the site without warning can be a stressful experience if users don't expect that to result from their actions. Whenever you link to an external site (whether that's your public-facing site or an HR tool), put "(external site)" in parentheses after the link, or better still, use a small icon to indicate the link will open a new site, as shown on Atrium Health and GSA's intranets below. When users know they'll be leaving the site, they can decide not to leave until ready or choose to open the link in a new tab.

The screenshot shows the Atrium Health intranet homepage with a navigation bar at the top. The main content area is titled "Community Matters". It features three main sections: "Community Engagement", "Commitment to Equity of Care", and "Community Health". Each section contains a bulleted list of links, many of which are preceded by an external site icon (a small blue square with a white arrow pointing right).

*Atrium Health's intranet indicated when links would take users to another site.*

When placing the external site icon, it's better if it is placed after the text so it doesn't impede scanning.

The Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) is a retirement savings plan that offers federal employees the same type of savings and tax benefits that many private corporations offer their employees under "401(k)" plans.

The TSP is a great way to supplement your retirement income. By contributing to the TSP, you can watch your nest egg grow through the course of your federal career. You pay no taxes on contributions [investments] or earnings until you withdraw the money from your account.

**The Roth TSP**

Federal employees have the opportunity to use a Roth TSP to contribute to their retirement. The Roth, in contrast to the traditional TSP contribution plan, requires that employees pay taxes on the money they add to their TSP. However, when they withdraw their money, unlike a traditional TSP, they owe no state or federal taxes on their contribution. However, it is important to note that unlike a traditional TSP, employees using a Roth get no tax deduction for their contributions.

**Restrictions and Conditions**

Because your TSP account is for your retirement, you should protect your nest egg by not withdrawing money from it until you leave federal service. If you withdraw your money prior to retirement be aware that you will be subject to an early withdrawal [penalty tax](#). You may apply for a [loan through your TSP account](#) providing certain conditions are met. And if you [leave federal service](#) before retirement age and have at least \$200 in your account, you may leave your money in the TSP until the [account withdrawal deadline](#). Consider all your options carefully because the decisions you make today will impact your financial future.

*The GSA's intranet also included icons to indicate when the user would leave the site, but the icons followed the text link so they would not disrupt the user's scanning.*

# Quick Links

*Quick Links* are a set of links that usually appear on the homepage. They help fast-track users to specific content. Unfortunately, the term “Quick Links” has come to be used to describe a broad set of features, and, in general, the term itself doesn’t convey how or why the links were chosen to be part of the “quick” list.

Some of the features that *Quick Links* could take are:

- Links users save themselves —a customized list of links
- Links that the intranet team thinks users should have quick access to
- Links that are generated automatically by popularity or views
- Links that the user in that role may need (e.g., a personalized list)

Using *Quick Links* on the homepage for a list of popular links is acceptable if such links are indeed common or if users can customize the links list. In this case, they can help users locate specific information quickly. However, in practice, sometimes *Quick Links* don’t reflect the site’s most important or popular areas. Also, it’s difficult to stop such lists from growing out of control. If everything is listed in the *Quick Links*, it may compete with the main navigation and cause confusion regarding the correct way to browse the site.

Sometimes intranets we tested relied on a *Quick Links* feature because the navigation structure wasn’t working. These lists often appeared because, if they didn’t, users would never find the information of interest to them. It would be better if intranet teams focused on fixing IA and navigation issues before implementing the feature.

## 46. Consider whether you need a *Quick Links* feature before adding one.

Not every intranet needs a *Quick Links* feature. If you have a strong, intuitive IA and easy-to-use navigation, then *Quick Links* adoption may be low and will only add redundancy and visual clutter.

At some organizations, we noticed content editors often had many links saved in their *Quick Links*. As such, this feature may be more popular among power users, who might need access to specific pages that others might not regularly access.

Atrium Health had a *Quick Link* feature called *Take me to...* in the global navigation area next to the search field. When clicked, a dropdown menu would appear with links to popular tools and some commonly accessed pages. Participants would often use the dropdown to access certain tools. One participant said, “If it wasn’t there, I’m not sure where else I would find it.”

Atrium Health's Quick Link feature, Take me to..., exposed popular tools and pages.

While participants liked the tool because it helped them find content in the site structure, the organization would be better off fixing its intranet's IA to help people find this content more quickly. For example, many of the tools listed could be moved to the *Tools* category in the main navigation.

Before implementing a *Quick Links* feature, address any obvious IA problems. Conduct research with your users to understand whether there are pages or tools that users regularly need to access quickly; if so, explore ways of exposing links to these tools and pages higher up in the site structure. After doing this, if feedback suggests that users could benefit from the inclusion of *Quick Links*, only then consider adding them.

## **47. Avoid using the term “Quick Links.” Use descriptive labels that clearly communicate why the links have been chosen and whether they are customizable.**

Many out-of-the-box products use the term “Quick Links,” and we find these links pervasive on many intranets, but the term itself isn’t the most intuitive and could mean many things; they could be links users add themselves, popular links chosen by the intranet team, or automatically generated links to pages with the most views. It’s better to find another term for *Quick Links* that more accurately describes what the links are to help avoid ambiguity.

For example, on The Mayo Clinic’s intranet, there was a section in the right rail of the homepage dedicated to *Quick Links*, but users couldn’t customize these links, and they also weren’t links personalized to the user. Instead, these were popular links that the intranet team had chosen to surface to users.

**MAYO CLINIC**

Home Practice Education Research HR Connect Groups Policy Library Video Library Calendar

Mayo Clinic Intranet Home

### Destinations

- Clinical Tools
- EHR/RCM
- Emergency Preparedness
- Health & Well-Being
- IT Connect
- Mayo Clinic Health System
- Quality
- Room Reservations
- Safety
- Security
- Travel

### News Center



London clinic is 'exciting new chapter,' Dr. Farrugia says at clinic's grand opening






Mayo leaders at London clinic opening   Finding new purpose driven by grief   Flashback: Gift from Mayo family   Spotlight on people: Oct. 9

[Catch up on Past News](#) | [Share a Story Idea](#) | [Submit a News Article](#)

### Status Panel

ARZ	FLA	RST
<b>HOSPITALS (ADMISSIONS: 255-2910)</b>		
RMC	○ ○	
SMC	○ ○	
ED	○ ○ ○	
<b>BLOOD DONOR PROGRAM</b>		
Whole Blood	○ ○ ○	
Plasma (coming soon)	○ ○ ○	
Platelets	○ ○ ○	

### Events Calendar

October 2019

Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		





### More Headlines



Are you ready for Mayo Clinic's digital transformation?



Inpatient dialysis unit on Saint Marys Campus to move to Joseph 2B



Parking, traffic flow changes on Phoenix campus to begin Oct. 14



Learn more about your medical plan options



Residents, fellows encouraged to attend Mayo Clinic Care Network Recruitment Fair



The final 3: Cast your vote for the 2019 Mayo Clinic Shared Value winner



Join the basket drive, fund bikes for the Children's Christmas Party of Jacksonville



Have you heard? Mayo Clinic in the news for Oct. 8

### News By Campus





### Sections

[Benefits](#) > [Around Mayo](#) >

### Quick Links

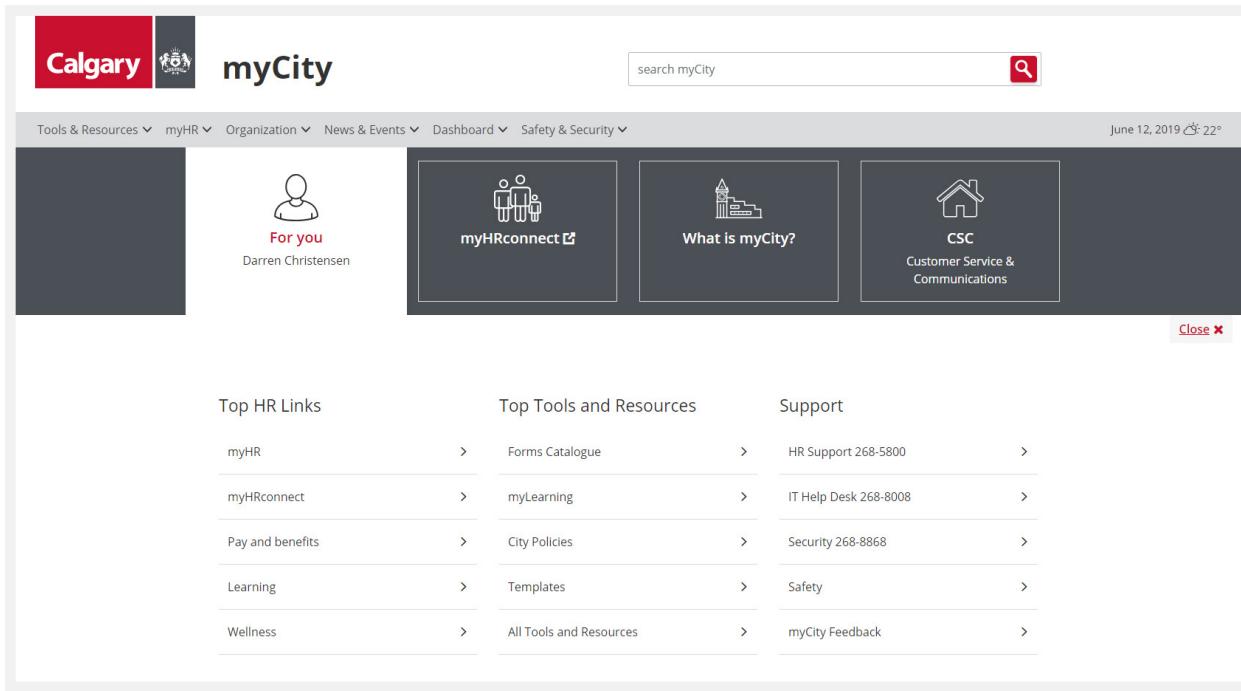
- [Aggressive/Violent Patient or Visitor Guide](#)
- [ARZ | FLA | RST](#)
- [Brand Resource Center](#)
- [Café Menus](#)
- [Change Management Tools](#)
- [Classifieds](#)
- [ARZ | FLA | MCHS | RST](#)
- [Committees](#)
- [Discounts](#)
- [Employee Job Search and Candidate Zone](#)
- [Employee Recognition](#)
- [Facilities Requests](#)
- [ARZ | FLA | RST](#)
- [Healthcare Technology Management Requests](#)
- [Help Desk](#)
- [Holy Days](#)
- [Incident Reporting \(Patient\)](#)
- [ARZ | FLA | MCHS | RST](#)
- [Incident Reporting \(Employee\)](#)
- [Timekeeping \(WTK\)](#)
- [Yammer](#)

*The Mayo Clinic's intranet had a section in the right rail of the homepage dedicated to Quick Links. This list was not customizable, and it was unclear whether these links were chosen by the intranet team or the most popular.*

To reduce confusion, it would be better if the Mayo Clinic team chose a more descriptive label for this type of content, such as *Popular Links*. This would help users understand what these links are, why they are there, and whether they can be customized.

When deciding on a name for these links, it's important to choose a fitting descriptor so users know whether they can add links themselves. The City of Calgary's intranet, myCity, had a *Quick Links* feature at the top of the homepage. These links displayed links the intranet team thought users wanted quick access to. Instead of using the term "Quick Links," the team chose "For You." However, the *For you* label caused confusion, as users expected they would be able to customize links in this section. When one test participant was exploring the *For you* section, he said:

"Is there a way to add anything to it? . . . Can I customize it to say these are the things that I go into right away?"



The screenshot shows the myCity intranet homepage. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links: Tools & Resources, myHR, Organization, News & Events, Dashboard, and Safety & Security. To the right of the navigation is a search bar with the placeholder "search myCity" and a magnifying glass icon. On the far right, it shows the date "June 12, 2019" and time "22°". Below the navigation is a dark grey header area. On the left, there is a large dark grey box labeled "For you" with a user icon and the name "Darren Christensen". To the right of this are three smaller boxes: "myHRconnect" with a person icon, "What is myCity?" with a city skyline icon, and "CSC Customer Service & Communications" with a house icon. Below this header is a "Close" button with a red X. The main content area is divided into three columns: "Top HR Links" (myHR, myHRconnect, Pay and benefits, Learning, Wellness), "Top Tools and Resources" (Forms Catalogue, myLearning, City Policies, Templates, All Tools and Resources), and "Support" (HR Support 268-5800, IT Help Desk 268-8008, Security 268-8868, Safety, myCity Feedback). A note below the content area states: "The City of Calgary's intranet, myCity, had a section with popular links called For you on the homepage. Users expected that this list could be customized. In addition to the label, the For you feature opened a mega menu so large it almost replicated and competed with the main navigation."

Labels like "For you" or "My" links should be reserved for links that users can add themselves. The table below shows more usable alternatives for designing a *Quick Link* feature. Naming links by what they are will increase comprehension and use.

Links added by users	Links chosen because of popularity	Links to related content
My Favorites	Popular Links	Related Links
My Links	Popular Pages	Related Resources
My Saved Links	Popular Tools Popular Resources Most Viewed Pages Most Shared Most Clicked Links Most Liked Most Linked To	Additional Resources

Bracknell Forest called its Quick Link feature, *My Saved Content*, which made it clear that these were links the user save themselves. Unfortunately, test participants weren't aware that this feature existed because of its non-prominent placement.

The screenshot shows the DORIS intranet homepage. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links for 'People & Teams', 'Get involved', 'Search' (with a magnifying glass icon), and 'Rachel Krause'. Below the navigation is the DORIS logo and a horizontal menu with 'Home', 'How do I?', 'Your council', 'News', and 'Public website'. To the right of the menu is a 'Save' button with a clipboard icon. The main content area is titled 'Home' and features three promotional banners:

- November Forest Views now available**: A thumbnail image of a forest with yellow autumn leaves. Below it, text says "November's edition of Forest Views is now available".
- Christmas in Bracknell town centre**: A thumbnail image of a magical Wishing Tree store at night. Below it, text says "Festivities will begin with the opening of LapLandUK's magical Wishing Tree store on 13 November."
- #OurDay is your day**: A purple banner with the text "#OurDay 19 NOV OURDAY Celebrate local government". Below it, text says "Share your photos that demonstrate how the council services you deliver improves the quality of life for residents."

Below the banners are three news items:

- News** (11 November 2019 - 09:47 • 0 comments)
- News** (07 November 2019 - 13:31 • 0 comments)
- News** (07 November 2019 - 10:44 • 0 comments)

A 'Read more news' link is located below the third news item. At the bottom left, there's a 'Browse by category' section with links like 'Communications', 'Data protection and information governance', 'Facilities and travel', 'Finance and procurement', 'Government, democracy and community', 'Health and safety', 'HR guidance and policy', 'IT, computers and telephones', 'Learning, benefits and opportunities', and 'Your pay'. At the bottom right, a 'Your saved content' section says "There are no items to display."

*Bracknell Forest Council's intranet, DORIS, provided users with a place to find their saved links and pages. It was called "Your saved content," a much better descriptor for this type of space. Unfortunately, the feature wasn't highly visible, so our test participants didn't realize the feature existed.*

## 48. Make *Quick Links* easy to find.

The best place to locate *Quick Links* is in the upper section of the page near the main navigation. Don't hide the feature in the utility navigation, in a submenu of the main navigation, or below the fold, as users are less likely to find or discover it.

The Scottish Government's intranet, Saltire, presented the *Quick Links* feature in an easy-to-find location within the global navigation area. The link was contained within a dark blue button, making it highly visible and distinguishing it from items in the main navigation.

The screenshot shows the Saltire intranet homepage. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links for News, My Workplace, Our Organisation, Staff Directory, and Help. To the right is a search bar and a blue circular icon. A yellow "Quick Links" button is located in the top right corner of the page. A tooltip-like callout labeled "My Quick Links" appears over the button, containing a list of items like "Yammer" and "View all". Below the navigation, a breadcrumb trail shows the user is at "My Workplace > Buildings and environment > Catering > Lunch menu – Glasgow and Edinburgh". The main content area features a section titled "Lunch menu – Glasgow and Edinburgh" with a table of soup options for Monday through Friday. To the right of the table are buttons for "Remove from My Quick Links" and "Provide feedback on this page". A "Related links" section is also visible.

*The Scottish Government presented its Quick Links feature in the global navigation area of its intranet. The Quick Links button has a distinct visual treatment, making it easy to notice.*

NAIT placed the *Quick Links* feature in a left, vertical utility navigation bar. The feature was easy to spot. Additionally, when users first launched the intranet for the first time, a tour introduced the feature to users and helped them understand what it could do.

The screenshot shows the NAIT intranet homepage. On the left, a vertical navigation bar includes icons for "HELENA", "QUICK LINKS" (which is highlighted in yellow), "APPS & TOOLS", "EMPLOYEE DIRECTORY", "LOCATIONS", and "EMERGENCY RESOURCES". The main content area features a banner with the text "HERE'S TO A SUMMER OF PLAY!" and a photo of ice hockey players. At the top of the page is a "QUICK LINKS" section with a sub-instruction: "Customize a menu of your most-used pages within the Intranet by clicking "Add to Quick Links" on any page." Below this are buttons for "« PREV", "NEXT »", and "END TOUR". The top navigation bar includes links for "ACHING ESSENTIALS", "INDUSTRY SOLUTIONS", "DEPARTMENTS & SCHOOLS", "INSTITUTIONAL PRIORITIES", "ABOUT NAIT", "NEWS & EVENTS", a "Search" bar, and a "EXPLORE THE SITE" button. To the right, there's a "EVENTS & DEADLINES" section with a calendar showing events for June 10, 11, and 12, along with descriptions like "Wayne Tellier is Retiring" and "Lunchtime Makerspace Tour". A note at the bottom right says "14 Current and upcoming closures or".

*NAIT's intranet had a Quick Links feature located in a vertical utility navigation bar. The feature was well-labeled and was introduced in a tour when users opened the intranet for the first time.*

On Burns & McDonnell's intranet, employees can also save links to their favorites. However, the favorites could only be viewed after two clicks (first: *My Stuff*; second: *My Favorites*). It would be much better if the navigational item was renamed *My Favorites* and was made visually distinct from the other main navigational items, for example, perhaps moving it to the right or above in the top black bar. The links users had saved should then be displayed straight away. This would ensure it was easy and efficient for users to find.

The screenshot shows the MacCENTRAL intranet homepage. At the top, there is a black navigation bar with icons for home, quick links, search, and user profile. Below the navigation bar is a white header with the MacCENTRAL logo and a search bar. The main content area has a blue background. On the left, there are three columns: 'MY FAVORITES' (Captains Community Home, Captains Conversation, Captains Doc Library, Captains List, Captain Site Pages, Captains Videos Stream Channel, Classifieds Moderation), 'MacCentral Help' (MacCentral Saved Pages, MacCentral Help Videos Stream Channel, MC Help Conversation, MC Help Site Pages, My PTO Report), and 'Google' (Google 2, Google 3, Google 4, Google 5, Google 6, Google 7, Google 9). On the right, there is a link to 'Manage My Favorites'. At the bottom of the page, there is a footer with the text 'Blue Kev CRM | August'.

*A user's favorites could be found two levels deep in the navigation on Burns & McDonnell's intranet, MacCentral. A user needed to perform two clicks to see their favorites.*

At Bracknell Forest Council and RNLI, the discoverability of the *Quick Links* feature was low because, on both sites, it lacked visual contrast from the page and appeared too low down the page. When RNLI employees in our usability tests were asked to save a link to their homepage, the reaction was often surprise, as employees didn't realize this functionality existed:

“On your compass homepage? Oh God! How on earth do I do that?”

“I would have no idea how to save that to my homepage, especially on my phone. I don’t know. I probably wouldn’t bother either. I wouldn’t even know where to start.”

On RNLI’s intranet, the *Quick Links* feature was small and lacked contrast to bolder images and text occupying the same space. As such, users often missed it and only noticed it when actively searching for it.

The screenshot shows the RNLI COMPASS SharePoint intranet homepage. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links like 'Our charity', 'Working at the RNLI', 'Find people and places', 'News and events', 'Find a document', and 'Glossary'. Below the navigation is a grid of icons for various services: Email, IT Self Service, Horizon, Learning Zone, Stars Recognition, Picture Library, SHSE Incident Reporting, Risk Assessment, LSAR, Maintenance Requests, RNLI Pension Site, and My Expenses. To the right of the grid is a large image of a RNLI building with the text 'Changes to RNLI College bookings'. Below the grid, there is a section titled 'My quick links' containing a single link to 'GOOGLE', which is highlighted with a red box. Further down, there are sections for 'News for everyone' and 'Events'. The 'Events' section includes a thumbnail for the 'Round the Island Race' on 29 JUNE 2019.

*On RNLI's intranet, the Quick Links feature was so small and lacked contrast from the page, so users didn't realize it existed.*

On Eyeo's intranet, the *Quick Links* feature was hidden in a list of icons and lacked a text label. As a result, it was harder to notice that this feature existed.

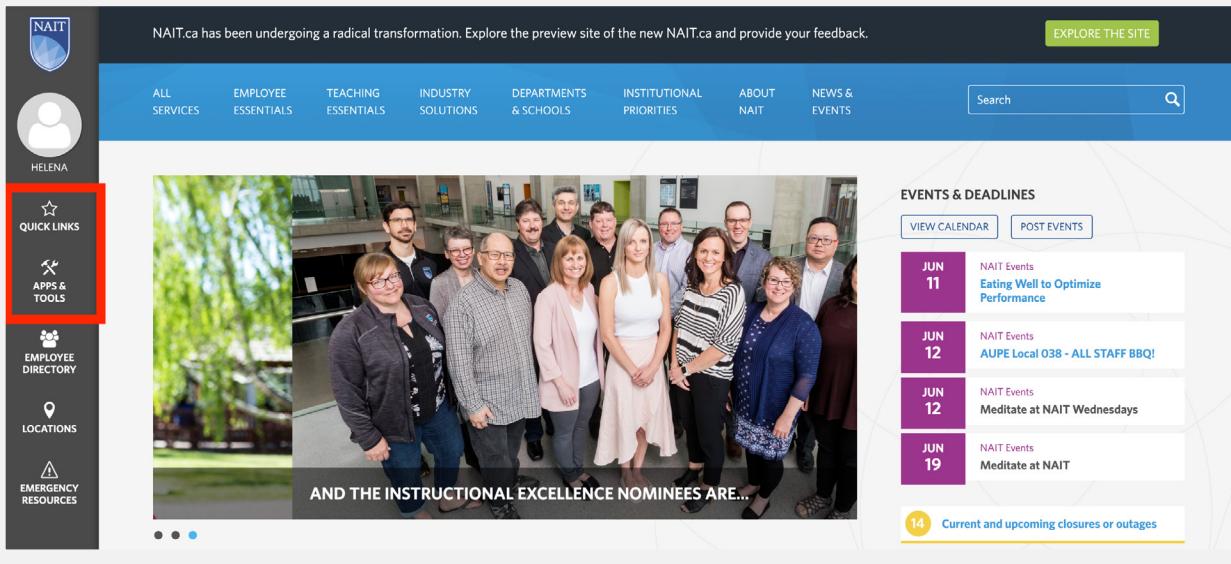
The screenshot shows the Eyeo intranet homepage. At the top, there is a header with a logo, the text 'The Intranet', and several user icons. Below the header is a blue navigation bar with dropdown menus for 'Internal Support', 'Collaboration', and 'Community'. The main content area has two main sections: 'News & Announcements' and 'Upcoming Events'. The 'News & Announcements' section features a large black box with a white circular logo containing the word 'INTRA'. The 'Upcoming Events' section lists three events: 'Adblocker Dev Summit 2...', 'Acceptable Ads Commit...', and 'Easter Egg no.4'. To the right of the 'Upcoming Events' list is a vertical column of five icons, with the top icon being a star, all of which are highlighted with a red box.

*Eyeo's intranet had a Quick Links feature, but it lacked a text label and was hidden among many icons.*

## 49. Avoid having multiple *Quick Links* features for different types of content. Provide one place for users to save content or tools and group links if needed.

On several intranets in our studies, there were separate places where certain links were saved depending on whether they were a tool or a page. This was confusing and made it hard for users to understand where their links would be saved.

On NAIT's intranet, there was a separate link for *Quick Links* — where users could save intranet pages and *Apps & Tools* — where users could save links to commonly accessed workplace tools. We noticed users looking in the wrong menu item for a link they had saved.



NAIT.ca has been undergoing a radical transformation. Explore the preview site of the new NAIT.ca and provide your feedback. EXPLORE THE SITE

ALL SERVICES   EMPLOYEE ESSENTIALS   TEACHING ESSENTIALS   INDUSTRY SOLUTIONS   DEPARTMENTS & SCHOOLS   INSTITUTIONAL PRIORITIES   ABOUT NAIT   NEWS & EVENTS

Search

HELENA

QUICK LINKS

APPS & TOOLS

EMPLOYEE DIRECTORY

LOCATIONS

EMERGENCY RESOURCES

EVENTS & DEADLINES

VIEW CALENDAR   POST EVENTS

JUN 11   NAIT Events  
Eating Well to Optimize Performance

JUN 12   NAIT Events  
AUPE Local 038 - ALL STAFF BBQ!

JUN 12   NAIT Events  
Meditate at NAIT Wednesdays

JUN 19   NAIT Events  
Meditate at NAIT

14 Current and upcoming closures or outages

*NAIT's intranet had separate places for saved tools (Apps & Tools) and saved pages (Quick Links).*

Eyeo also had a similar arrangement on its intranet with a launchpad icon for saved apps and a star icon for favorited pages.

*Eyeo had separate icons and places for users to find their saved apps and favorited pages.*

It would be much better to have only one *Quick Links* feature and have links grouped by type, as opposed to having two different places to find links and two different ways to add links.

As an illustration of how this could work, one of our 2021 Intranet Design Annual winners, Snam S.p.A, separated favorited links by content type. (Unfortunately, they also had a separate link for tools.) However, this design choice could work well to separate apps from pages under one link.

The screenshot shows the Snam Easy intranet homepage. On the left, there's a sidebar with icons for Home, Cerca (Search), Le tue app (Your apps), Preferiti (Favorites), and Guida (Help). The main content area has a dark background with a large, abstract teal wave graphic. At the top, it says "I tuoi preferiti (4)" and "Aggiungi un link". Below this, there are four items listed under "Link": "Il post" (6 ago 2020) with a star icon, "Notizie" (Progetti e iniziative, Benvenuta nuova Easy, 16 lug 2020) with a star icon, "Media" (Helpy nuovo portale servizi) with a star icon, and "Il video messaggio dell'AD" with a star icon. To the right, there are several cards: one about COVID-19 protocols, another about the new print media review, and a "Vecchia Easy" button. At the bottom, there are buttons for "Contattaci" (Contact us) and "Assistenza Tecnica" (Technical support).

*Snam S.p.A., one of our 2021 Intranet Design Annual winners, had a favorites feature where users could see content organized by content type.*

## 50. Make it easy to add *Quick Links*.

Ideally, users should be able to add *Quick Links* from any content page and from the *Quick Links* feature itself. Users should be able to save pages and links to tools linked from the intranet.

On NAIT's intranet, links to save pages could be found in a high-contrast button with a clear text label at the top of the main content area.

NAIT.ca has been undergoing a radical transformation. Explore the preview site of the new NAIT.ca and provide your feedback.

**EXPLOR THE SITE**

ALL SERVICES EMPLOYEE ESSENTIALS TEACHING ESSENTIALS INDUSTRY SOLUTIONS DEPARTMENTS & SCHOOLS INSTITUTIONAL PRIORITIES ABOUT NAIT NEWS & EVENTS

Search

HOME • LOCATIONS • MAIN CAMPUS • AMENITIES

MAIN CAMPUS ▾  
AMENITIES  
SERVICES  
CENTRE FOR APPLIED TECHNOLOGY ▾  
HEAVY EQUIPMENT TECHNOLOGY

nait.ca | Provide Feedback | Contact Support | Privacy Policy | Credit Card Payments

**AMENITIES**

The following amenities can be found on Main Campus.

**Recreation & Fitness**

Arena	Hours
Field and Track	Hours
Fitness Weight Centre (FWC)	Hours
Gymnasium	Hours
Pool	Hours

*When users visited pages on NAIT's intranet, they could easily add a page to their Quick Links via a well-labeled, high-contrast button located at the top of the page.*

On Eyeo's intranet, a *save for later* link was found at the top of each page alongside other social features, making it easily locatable. However, the contrast could be improved as the text and icons were faint.

**I The Intranet**

Internal Support ▾ Collaboration ▾ Community ▾

Procurement

Pages Blog Calendars

SPACE SHORTCUTS Procurement Services Contact & Members Calendar & Events Meeting Notes

Dashboard

Save for later Watch Talk Share ...

**Procurement Home**  
Created by Employee Name last modified on Sep 21, 2019

About Procurement

Enter a brief intro to your project.

**Coming**

Important Links Unknown Attachment

Procurement Calendar

*Users could save a page to their favorites on the NAIT intranet by selecting the Save for later link that appeared alongside the star icon on each intranet page.*

On the Scottish Government's intranet, Saltire, adding a link to a user's *Quick Links* was also easy. An icon with a plus and link sign appeared alongside a clear text label, *Add to my Quick Links*, at the top of the page alongside the share and print icons.

Saltire News My Workplace Our Organisation Staff Directory Help Quick Links Search Saltire

My Workplace > Leave > Annual leave > Annual leave - request and record Article

## Annual leave - request and record

You should use the [eHR system](#) to request and record annual leave. You must not take annual leave without your manager's permission.

You should:

- make your request in advance
- give your manager as much notice as possible
- not make firm plans before your annual leave is approved

You must take annual leave in minimum blocks of half a day. Where your leave is shown in hours (i.e. part-time or non-standard working pattern), the minimum amount of annual leave is half of your contracted hours for the day of leave. Absence of less than half a day should be managed through the flexi system.

Managers approve and monitor their team members' annual leave. Wherever possible,

*On Saltire, the Scottish Government's intranet, adding any page to the user's Quick Links was easy. The button could be found on the right of every page, alongside other utility actions such as print and share.*

Saltire users could also add a link from within the *Quick Links* page. The team even provided a link to help information in the right rail. Additionally, users could choose which items appeared in the flyout by selecting *Add* from the list of saved links.

Saltire News My Workplace Our Organisation Staff Directory Help Quick Links Search Saltire

Manage Quick Links

Type	Link	Add to home?	Delete
> Internal Link	Lunch menu – Glasgow and Edinburgh	<input type="button" value="Add"/>	<input type="button" value="X"/>
> External Link	People Survey	<input type="button" value="Add"/>	<input type="button" value="X"/>
> Staff Member	Yammer	<input type="button" value="Remove"/>	<input type="button" value="X"/>
> Promoted	Appeals - attendance	<input type="button" value="Add"/>	<input type="button" value="X"/>

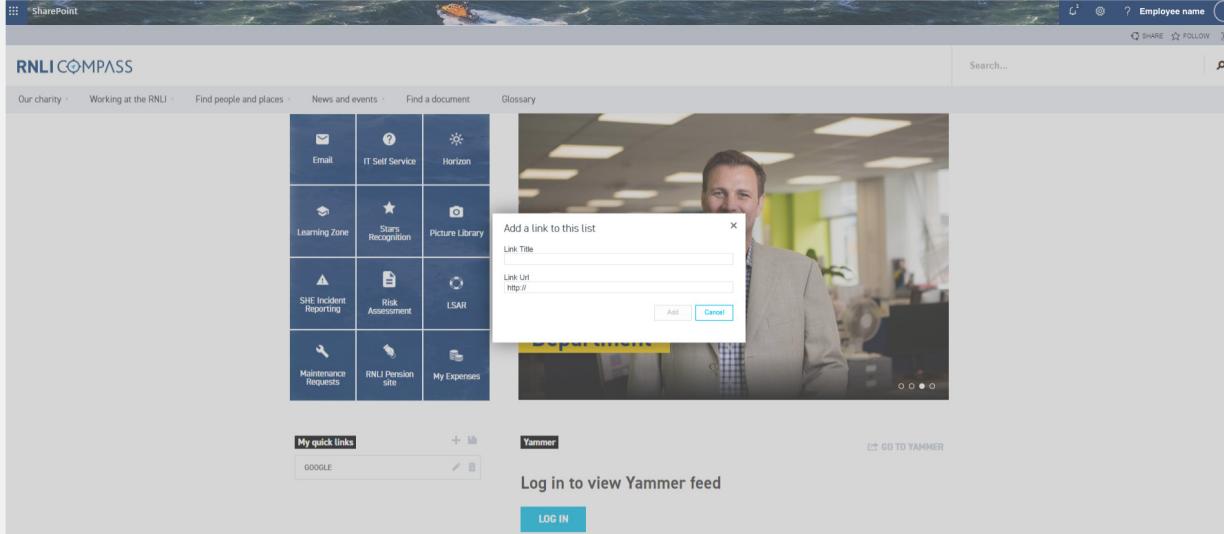
**Related links**

- > How to manage your quick links

Last updated 13/07/2017 11:07 AM

*On the Scottish Government's intranet, users could use the Quick Links button to view all links they had added and remove links they no longer needed. Relevant help information was also available in the right rail.*

On RNLI's intranet, Compass, employees had difficulty adding a link to their *Quick Links*. This was because it was only possible to do this on the homepage and required users to copy and paste a URL. Additionally, the URL field contained a URL starter (`http://`). When users pasted their link, it appended to the URL starter, making the link invalid.



The screenshot shows the RNLI COMPASS SharePoint homepage. A modal dialog box is open in the center, titled "Add a link to this list". It contains two input fields: "Link Title" and "Link Url". The "Link Url" field contains the URL "http://". Below the fields are "Add" and "Cancel" buttons. In the background, there is a large image of a man in an office setting. To the left of the dialog box is a navigation menu with various links like Email, IT Self Service, Horizon, Learning Zone, Stars Recognition, Picture Library, SHE Incident Reporting, Risk Assessment, LSAR, Maintenance Requests, RNLI Pension site, and My Expenses. At the bottom of the page, there are sections for "My quick links" (with a Google link), "Yammer" (with a "LOG IN" button), and a search bar.

*When RNLI employees wanted to add Quick Links from their homepage, a dialogue opened, and they needed to paste the URL for the link into the field. But the URL field contained a starter (`http://`) they needed to delete before pasting their copied URL. Otherwise, the link would not work.*

Additionally, the site did not tell users whether the URL was valid. Instead, users had to try it and see if it returned an error, which happened for one participant as they did not notice the starter in the field. “Ugh. How annoying,” they said after clicking the link and getting a 404 error.

Making users find URLs and then copy and paste them for every *Quick Link* they want to add is arduous. While offering this functionality so users can add links outside the intranet site structure is great, this shouldn't be how users must add the links.

## 51. Allow users to change the name of any links they add to their *Quick Links*.

While it's important to have short page titles that adequately describe the content contained within, sometimes users will want to refer to that content by a different name than the page title provided. To assist users in scanning their saved links quickly and efficiently, allow users the option to set their own name for the link. However, **don't make it a required step**, as some users will be happy with the page's title, and you don't want to make users have to work harder to add links.

RNLI and Burns & McDonnell's intranets, which used SharePoint, required users to add a link title and a URL. This extra work means that it's unlikely that users will expend the effort to save links using the *Quick Links* tool; users are more likely to save links in their browser's bookmarks since that is easier to do.

The screenshot shows the MacCENTRAL intranet homepage. At the top, there are navigation links: MY STUFF, OUR COMPANY, RESOURCES, and HR HUB. Below this is a sidebar with sections for MY FAVORITES, MY COMMUNITIES, and MOST POPULAR. The MY FAVORITES section lists various links with their titles and Google search counts. A modal window titled "Add or Edit Favorites" is open on the right, prompting the user to enter a link title and URL. At the bottom of the page, there are four news cards: "9450 Roof Anchor Testing Today", "Labor Day Safety Tips", "Nuclear Department", and "Blue Key CRM | August 2019 Release Demonstration". The footer includes social media icons and a copyright notice: "© 2019, Burns & McDonnell. All rights reserved."

*On MacCentral, users were required to add a URL and a link title, which requires too much user effort.*

## 52. Ensure saved links appear immediately. Don't make users log out to see links they have saved.

When users at NAIT saved pages to their *Quick Links*, the links did not appear immediately. Users had to close the browser and come back to see it. New users did not understand this.

Some users had learned this and explained that they needed to log out and log back in or refresh the page, but a new employee was baffled by it.

"Where did my Quick Link go? Has that gone now? Yeah, so it must have added that somewhere else . . . and also, I don't like how these are finicky and don't show stuff unless I'm on the main page. I have to go to the homepage in order for the app to show up [in the *Apps & Tools* flyout]. I have to shut down and reopen, and then the new app will show up. Sometimes I'll be on another computer, and nothing will appear here, and then you have to go to the NAIT main page for it to appear."

On NAIT's site, a saved link did not appear in the flyout until users closed the session by closing the browser and returning. Users in our test did not know this process was required to see the saved link, so they assumed the *Quick Links* feature did not work.

The screenshot shows the NAIT intranet homepage. On the left, there is a dark sidebar with icons for NAIT, HELENA, QUICK LINKS, APPS & TOOLS, EMPLOYEE DIRECTORY, LOCATIONS, and EMERGENCY RESOURCES. The main content area features a large image of a hockey team celebrating. Below it is a banner with the text "HERE'S TO A SUMMER OF PLAY!". To the right, there is a section titled "EVENTS & DEADLINES" with a calendar view. The calendar shows events for June 10, 11, and 12, each with a purple header and white text. There is also a yellow callout for "14 Current and upcoming closures or outages". At the bottom right, there are buttons for "techlife today" and "WHO'S GREAT AT NAIT?".

*When users added a link to their favorites on the NAIT intranet, it only appeared in the flyout if the user had started a new intranet session by leaving and returning to the intranet.*

If technical limitations mean it's impossible to have a link appear immediately in the user's *Quick Links*, provide users with a message that says their link has been saved but won't be visible until the user closes the browser and reopens it. Ensure that any messages are visible and occur when the user has taken the action, for example, through a warning dialogue box.

## 53. Don't lose users' saved links once they have been added.

On two sites we tested, users reported links that they had saved had disappeared when they had logged out. Both occurred with SharePoint sites, so this could have been a bug on the platform or after a release, but an interface should never lose a user's work! Users said they stopped using the *Quick Links* feature when their links weren't saved.

One user at Burns & MacDonnell said,

"You put in a lot of effort to make your job easier to fill this out and for it to one day just go away is frustrating. I gave up on putting them in there [the *favorites* area]."

Another user at RNLI was asked to save a page to their homepage and said they would try, but they weren't sure it would work, as they had found their *Quick Links* had disappeared in the past.

"I don't think it's working. [User begins to try to add a quick link] It's very nice, but it vanishes." [Upon refreshing the page, the quick link has been added.]

This RNLI employee wondered if they came back in tomorrow whether the link would still be there.



### Users ignore unproductive features.

#### User Behaviors

When users experience a feature that doesn't work (such as an ineffective site search), they often don't try it again, fearing it will be unproductive.

When launching a new intranet, it's common for users to find bugs. When bugs are fixed, it's a good idea to communicate such fixes to users so they know that features on the intranet aren't permanently broken. A simple notification to the user on login, an email round-up from the development team each week of the new launch, or even a news story on updates and fixes can reach users and help set their expectations.

# Utility and Footer Navigation

Utility and footer navigation are supplementary navigation that provide functionality and resource links on every page the user visits while using the intranet.

Utility navigation is the set of navigational options that help employees to use the intranet. In general, these links provide easy access to administrative-type functions and information that is not part of the main navigation but should appear on each page. The specific links in the utility navigation vary depending on the intranet; however, examples of utility functions include:

- Login button
- Profile
- Notifications
- Accessibility features (e.g., functions to increase font size)
- Help and settings
- Country or language selectors

Footer navigation is the set of links found at the bottom of the page. Like utility navigation, links to pages contained in the footer are typically standalone pages or tools not found in the site structure. Examples of items found in footer navigation include:

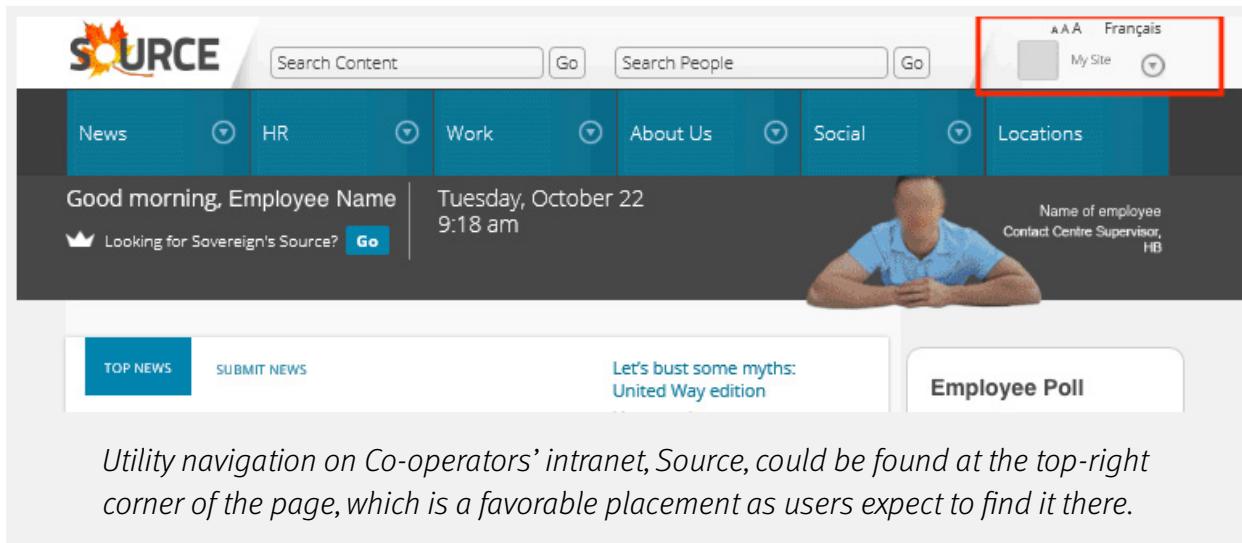
- Contact details for the intranet team
- Link to a feedback form (to provide feedback about the intranet)
- Office address or links to various office locations (for global or distributed companies)
- Links to the public site and any social media channels
- Key phone numbers (e.g., reception, HR, or IT help desks)
- Links to key policies or mission statements
- Legal information, such as copyright

Not every intranet needs a footer. Five of the 15 organizations in our last study did not have a footer, and the absence of a footer was not a barrier to user success in navigating the site. Since the footer is at the bottom of the page, it's often not visited unless users hope to find specific information they can't find elsewhere using the main navigation; in that case, it is usually the last port of call for users.

## 54. Place utility navigation in the upper right, usually above the search field.

Users expect that any icons and links in the top-right corner of the site are related to utility functions. This is typically the best place to position them so that they will be found.

On The Co-operators' intranet, Source, users could find links to change the text size, language and access their profile in the utility navigation, located in the top-right corner of the page, which is favorable.



The screenshot shows the Source intranet homepage. At the top, there are two search fields: "Search Content" and "Search People", each with a "Go" button. To the right of these is a utility navigation bar with icons for text size (AAA), French (Français), and "My Site". Below this is a navigation menu with categories: News, HR, Work, About Us, Social, and Locations. A user profile placeholder shows "Good morning, Employee Name" and the date/timestamp "Tuesday, October 22 9:18 am". A banner at the bottom features a photo of a person and text about looking for the "Sovereign's Source". Buttons for "TOP NEWS" and "SUBMIT NEWS" are on the left, and "Employee Poll" is on the right. A callout box contains the text: "Utility navigation on Co-operators' intranet, Source, could be found at the top-right corner of the page, which is a favorable placement as users expect to find it there."

## 55. Use utility navigation only for intranet-related admin functions. Don't include links to pages that sit in the site hierarchy.

Users expect that any icons and links in the top-right corner of the site are related to utility functions and features, as opposed to content that sits in the site structure. As such, they rarely look there unless they want to find a way to change the intranet environment. Only placing utility functions in that location will make it easier for users to find utility features and content.

On Eyeo's intranet, links to several important pages and resources, such as the events and news page, the people directory, and vacation requests, were located in the traditional place for the utility navigation. They were also hidden behind unlabeled icons, which we don't recommend. This meant users were unable to find a lot of important pages.

While trying to find an upcoming training event, one Eyeo user remarked, "I thought that maybe there would be an event calendar there with all things happening at the office." There was one behind the compass icon in the intranet's utility navigation, but users did not find it because of its placement. None of the five usability test participants who tested Eyeo's intranet interacted with the compass icon unless prompted. This is likely because they did not know what it stood for and

didn't expect to find these important pages and tools there. When trying to complete the tasks we administered, we noticed that participants explored only the main navigation.

*When selecting the compass icon on the Eyeo intranet, a menu appeared to expose the people directory, news page, and event calendar alongside other pages. Participants did not find these features in our usability tests.*

To avoid cluttering the utility navigation and ensure users can find important content, all content located under the compass icon on this intranet should be incorporated within the main navigational structure.

## 56. Don't rely only on icons for functions. Always include text labels along with the icons on desktop.

Users have come to expect that the utility navigation contains icons (such as the settings cog). However, few icons are universal. Except for settings, print, save, and the magnifying glass for search, most icons carry some level of ambiguity for users. To reduce confusion and to ensure users can find and use utility features, include a text label to clarify its meaning in that context. Even if you're using a standard icon, including a label is often safer, especially if you slightly altered the icon to match your aesthetic preferences or constraints.

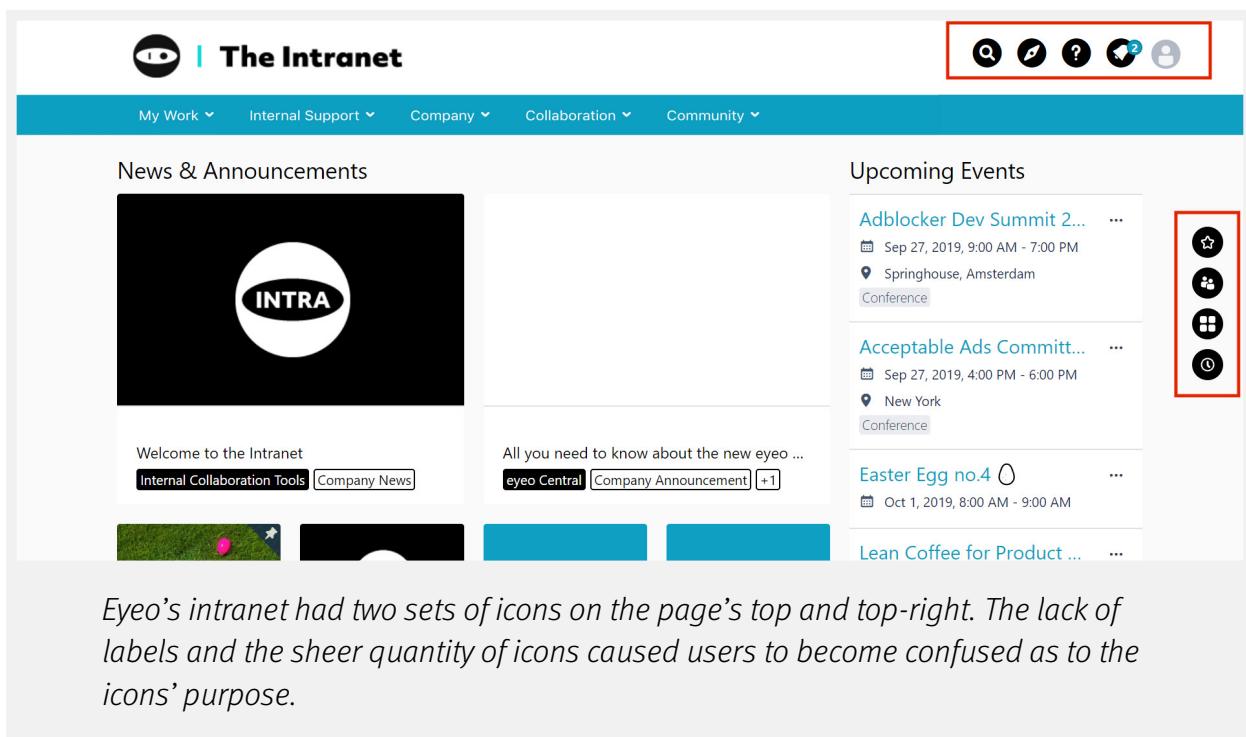
**Icon labels should always be visible** without any interaction from the user. For navigation icons, labels are particularly critical. Don't rely on hover to reveal text labels: not only does it increase the interaction cost, but it also fails to translate well on mobile.

## Icons should include labels.

### Timeless Design Tips

Icons shouldn't stand alone. Clear labels should always accompany them to denote their purpose. This helps users distinguish icons from each other and is a best practice for accessibility.

As mentioned in the previous guideline, Eyeo used icons for its utility navigation, resulting in confusion. One test participant thought the magnifying glass would make the page content larger and assumed that the question mark icon triggered the search. When they did not, the user was confused. To find out what each icon did, users needed to click on them, which we noticed participants were reluctant to do.



The screenshot shows the Eyeo intranet homepage. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for "My Work", "Internal Support", "Company", "Collaboration", and "Community". Below the navigation, there is a section titled "News & Announcements" featuring a large black square with a white circle containing the word "INTRA". To the right of this, there is a "Upcoming Events" section listing three events: "Adblocker Dev Summit 2...", "Acceptable Ads Commit...", and "Easter Egg no.4". Each event entry includes a small icon, a date and time, a location, and a "Conference" tag. In the top right corner of the page, there is a red-bordered box containing several small, unlabeled icons, including a magnifying glass, a gear, a question mark, a refresh symbol, and a person icon. At the bottom of the page, there is a footer section with some text and small images.

*Eyeo's intranet had two sets of icons on the page's top and top-right. The lack of labels and the sheer quantity of icons caused users to become confused as to the icons' purpose.*

*Only when Eyeo's users clicked on one of the icons did the name of that icon appear in the lightbox modal.*

In addition to exposing the search field (which would remove the need for one icon), Eyeo could have improved its icons by adding the following labels to help users understand what they do:

Magnifying glass: **Search**

Compass: **Essential Links**

Question mark: **Get Help**

Bell: **Notifications**

User: **My Profile**

If space is a constraint (which it isn't in the example above), then incorporate ever-present tooltip labels. On rollover, use the tooltips to provide users with a quick statement about what each item in the navigation does instead of just presenting its label. This will help alleviate confusion, especially between similar functionality such as *Save for later* and *My Apps*.

Burns & McDonnell's intranet, MacCentral, built using SharePoint, also used unlabeled icons. Although there were fewer icons, these icons could still have benefited from text labels.

The screenshot shows the MacCENTRAL intranet homepage. At the top, there's a navigation bar with icons for Home, My Stuff, Our Company, Resources, and HR Hub. Below the navigation is a search bar and a 'Published 8/27/2019' timestamp. A large blue banner features an image of a control tower at McConnell Air Force Base with a 'VIEW NOW' button. Below the banner, a text box contains the following text:

*Burns & McDonnell's intranet, MacCentral, had four utility functions in the space users typically expect the utility navigation to be; however, they were missing text labels.*

NAIT also used icons for its utility navigation; however, they were accompanied by helpful labels. NAIT's utility navigation was in a left rail rather than the usual top-right location, but they were readily found despite this.

The screenshot shows the NAIT intranet homepage. On the left, there's a vertical sidebar with icons and labels: NAIT (blue shield), HELENA (user profile), QUICK LINKS (star), APPS & TOOLS (key), EMPLOYEE DIRECTORY (paw print), LOCATIONS (location pin), and EMERGENCY RESOURCES (triangle). The main content area has a blue header with navigation links: ALL SERVICES, EMPLOYEE ESSENTIALS, TEACHING ESSENTIALS, INDUSTRY SOLUTIONS, DEPARTMENTS & SCHOOLS, INSTITUTIONAL PRIORITIES, ABOUT NAIT, and NEWS & EVENTS. There's also a search bar. The main content area features a graphic of sticky notes on a chalkboard with the words 'WORK', 'BALANCE', and 'LIFE' on them, and a hand writing 'HOW OUR EFAP CAN SUPPORT YOU AND YOUR FAMILY'. To the right, there's a section titled 'EVENTS & DEADLINES' with a calendar view showing events for June 11, 12, 12, and 19. A callout box highlights an event on June 14: 'Current and upcoming closures or outages'. At the bottom, there are links for TOP RESOURCES and EXECUTIVE HUB, and a 'VIEW ALL' button.

*NAIT's intranet uses recognizable icons for utility functions alongside text labels.*

## 57. Ensure utility and footer navigation are present on every page, not just the homepage.

Like the main navigation, utility and footer navigation should always be present on every page, as users may need them wherever they are on the site. Don't force users to return to the homepage to find them.

For some intranets that were a collection of separate intranet sites, utility or footer navigation did not appear on every page within the intranet. For example, on Dell Technologies' intranet, the main footer available from the homepage would disappear on some pages a user visited; sometimes, the footer was replaced with new footer navigation with entirely different items. This is not helpful for users to feel they are visiting the same site and stops them from finding the necessary links.

The screenshot shows a dark-themed header with the Dell logo and a search bar. Below the header is a large, light-colored search bar. The main content area has a white background with several sections: 'About Dell' (News, My IT, My HR, Dell Technologies Code of Conduct, Social Impact, Inspire, Chatter, Brand Elements), 'Policies' (Privacy Policy, Terms of Use, Copyright, Content Standards), 'Follow Dell' (Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram), 'Follow Dell EMC' (Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn), and 'Follow Dell Technologies' (Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram). A small 'FEEDBACK' button is in the top right corner. At the bottom, there's a copyright notice: '© DELL Inc. All Rights Reserved'.

*The full footer from InsideDellTechnologies was only available on certain pages, not others.*

The screenshot shows a dark-themed header with the Dell logo and a search bar. Below the header is a light-colored search bar. The main content area has a white background with four columns of links: 'Resources for My Job' (Personal and Work Information, Rewards and Benefits, Career and Development, Pay and Timesheet, Leave and Time Off, Workplace and Community, Tools for the Job), 'About Dell' (Inside Dell, Social Impact Community, One Dell Way, People Search, Purpose & Strategy, Salesforce/Chatter), 'About HR' (About My HR, HR Team, HR Leadership Team, HR Policies, HR COE Portals and Sites, HR4U Country Sites), and 'Getting Help' (Travel & Expenses, Security, Ethics & Compliance, Facilities, Help a Customer, IT Service Desk). At the bottom, there's a blue footer bar with the text 'Inside Dell | Dell Internal Use'.

*A new footer appeared on the My HR section of the InsideDellTechnologies intranet.*

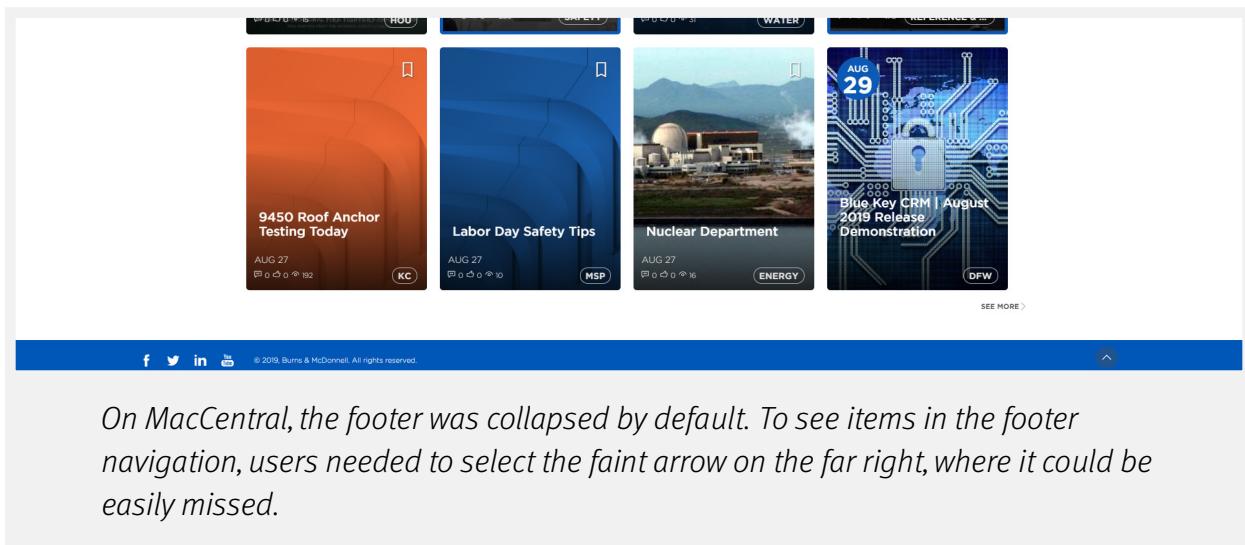
The screenshot shows a dark-themed header with the Dell logo and a search bar. Below the header is a light-colored search bar. The main content area has a white background with two sections: 'My IT' (Inside Dell, My HR) and the Dell logo.

*On the My IT section of the InsideDellTechnologies intranet site, another new footer appeared with only two links.*

## 58. Don't hide utility functions or footer navigation behind menus or progressive reveals.

Don't make it difficult for users to find utility functions or footer navigation. Avoid hiding them or making users perform an extra click to see them.

On Burns and McDonnell's intranet, MacCentral, the footer navigation was sticky and collapsed behind a progressive reveal. Users are familiar with where the footer navigation can be found, so there's no need to make footer navigation sticky. Since the footer is at the bottom of the page, there's no need to hide it behind a progressive reveal, as this just requires the user to perform an extra click to view it.



The screenshot shows a portion of the MacCENTRAL intranet. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links like 'OUR COMPANY', 'MY STUFF', 'RESOURCES', and 'HR HUB'. Below this is a toolbar with options like 'New', 'Send by email', 'Promote', 'Page details', and a search icon. A message bar indicates the page was 'Published 8/28/2019' and has an 'Edit' button. The main content area displays several circular icons, each containing an employee name and title. Below this is a blue footer section containing links to various tools: BLUE KEY CRM, ECOSYS, NEOPOST ENTERPRISE SHIPPING; BLUEMAPS, EXPENSE REPORT, PROJECT GATEWAY; BMU, IT NOW PORTAL, QTS; CONCUR TRAVEL, MIS, TIME CARD ENTRY. On the right side of the footer is the Burns & McDonnell logo. At the very bottom, there are social media icons for Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube, along with a copyright notice: '© 2019, Burns & McDonnell. All rights reserved.'

*Only when the MacCentral footer was opened could links to frequently accessed tools be found.*

## 59. Keep footer navigation organized; don't let it be a dumping ground for content.

Although the footer is at the bottom of the page, it's not an excuse to fill it with too many links, which will increase page length.

The footer on the GSA's intranet was large and took up much of the scrollable page. There were many links, which made it difficult to scan. Links in the main navigation were also repeated here, such as those found in the *Employee Resources* group. While the footer does contain useful links and information (such as the guest WI-FI password), it would be better if the lists of links were prioritized and only links to standalone tools, sites, and pages were included here.

Last updated: Feb 28, 2019  

**Is this information helpful? [Yes](#) [No](#)**

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Tools and Systems	Websites	About Us	Employee Resources	Services and Offices	Locations
BookIT	Acquisition.gov	Organization Chart	Acquisition and Purchases	FAS	Region 1
CFO Portal	Acquisition Gateway	Agency Initiatives	Book Space and Meetings	PBS	Region 2
Chatter	Acquisition Portal	Agency News	Buildings and Real Estate	OAS	Region 3
Concur	D2D	Agency Reform Plan	Communications	OCAO	Region 4
Corporate Applications	eBuy	Correspondence Symbols	Directives, Forms and Regs	OCE	Region 5
Employee Express	eLibrary		Financial Management	OCFO	Region 6
eSignLive	FBO.gov		HR, Pay and Leave	OCIA	Region 7
Event Tracker	Fleet Drive-Thru	Board of Contract Appeals	Information Technology (IT)	OCIO	Region 8
GCIMS (Update Contact Info)	GSA.gov	Inspector General (OIG)	Performance	OCR	Region 9
Hangouts Meet	GSAAdvantage.gov	Labor Union: AFGE	Safety and Security	OGC	Region 10
HR Links	GSAxcess	Labor Union: NFFE	Telework	OPG	National Capital Region
Online University (GSA OLU)	GSA Federal Credit Union		Training and Development	OHRM	Central Office (CO) / (HQ)
PBS Portal	Login.gov		Travel and Events	OMA	
Pegasys	SAM.gov	GSA Jobs (on USAJobs)		OSBU	
Salesforce	TSP.gov	OMB.gov		OSC	
Staff Directory	USA.gov	OPM.gov			
More Tools and Systems >	More Websites >	WhiteHouse.gov			

**Independent Orgs**

**Other Govt Websites**

[Accessibility Statement](#) [Privacy and Security](#) [InSite Notifications](#) [Sitemap](#) [A-Z Index](#)

**GSA Guest Wifi**  
**SSID: GSA-Guest Password: zf8#EPY7**

 U.S. General Services Administration

[!\[\]\(9976aa2d8925fbf20d987b7aec619e2d\_img.jpg\)](#) [!\[\]\(13b7d5889270b66b53caaf307ac1f1af\_img.jpg\)](#) [!\[\]\(7db3180e1f476ff32cd61c9b5a1a024e\_img.jpg\)](#) [!\[\]\(e155a9872b837cdf050592b2ae70e14b\_img.jpg\)](#) [!\[\]\(bc3251a56765f25dbcc69c276c077034\_img.jpg\)](#) [!\[\]\(0290f86062ade4d11a9fbb50601bc8aa\_img.jpg\)](#)

Join the Conversation

*The footer on the GSA's intranet, InSite, was large and hard to scan. Some of the content located in the footer (such as the Employee Resources group) could be found from the main navigation, so it was duplicated by showing it here.*

If you have a lot of tools or external sites you want to link users to, prioritize the links that get the most traffic or the most needed ones.

First Solar's footer was well organized, with top links presented in easy-to-scan and well-labeled categories. Categories were small, and all the links contained within them related clearly to the headings, which were descriptive. The only thing that could be improved is the color contrast of the text links.



*First Solar's footer contained only essential links and contact details for the IT service desk.*

The City of Calgary's intranet footer was also well organized but had better contrast for text links than First Solar's. The City of Calgary's intranet also had contact numbers for the *IT Help Desk*, *Security*, and *HR Support*. These were prominent and accompanied by meaningful icons making them easy to notice, remember, and find.

The footer features three main service sections:

- IT Help Desk** (Icon: Computer monitor)
- HR Support** (Icon: Person wearing a headset)
- Security (24hr)** (Icon: Shield)

Below these are five columns of links:

Support	HR Links	Our Organization	City Websites	Social
311 Service Request	HR Contacts	Our Culture	Calgary Newsroom	Twitter
	myHRconnect	Internal Corporate Dashboards	Calgary.ca	Facebook
		Organization Chart		YouTube
		Locations		LinkedIn
				Instagram
				Flickr

At the bottom, there are links for Terms of Use, Feedback, Help, Contact Us, and a copyright notice: © 2018 All rights reserved. The City of Calgary | ISC: Unrestricted

*The City of Calgary's intranet had a well-designed footer that highlighted the phone numbers for common employee services.*

# Breadcrumbs

Breadcrumbs are a secondary form of navigation that complement the main navigation. They are a trail of links representing the current page and its “ancestors” (parent page, grandparent page, and so on), typically going all the way back to the site homepage. Breadcrumbs support wayfinding — making users aware of their current location within the hierarchical structure of a website — and come at almost no cost to the UI.

Breadcrumbs are typically found at the top of the page, usually just below the main navigation. The homepage is the first link, and the links are usually separated by the symbols “>” or “/”. We recommend the “>” character, though there is no functional difference, and either is acceptable.

Breadcrumbs are useful because they:

- Help users understand where they are in the site structure when they have arrived at a page via an external link or the site’s search
- Allow users to move up the site structure without needing to click the browser back button multiple times.

Eleven out of the 15 intranets in our latest study had breadcrumbs. On the four intranets that did not, users were likely to forget where the content was that they had previously found or remark that they felt lost using the site.

## 60. Communicate to users where they are in the intranet site structure through breadcrumbs.

If your intranet has several layers and a search function, it will benefit from a well-designed breadcrumb trail.

The Burns & McDonnell’s intranet, MacCentral, did not have any traditional breadcrumbs. Instead, the intranet design had an unorthodox approach to signaling location, whereby the category that housed the content being viewed appeared in the main navigation in a blue box alongside a home icon link. The problem with this design is that it did not communicate how deep in the site’s structure a user was or how the category they were in related to the site’s top-level categories. This made it difficult for users to learn or understand the navigation.

*On Burns & McDonnell's intranet, MacCentral, traditional breadcrumbs are missing, making it difficult to understand where and how deep a user is in the site's information architecture. The surfacing of the content category (in this case, Education & Training) at the top-left of the main navigation bar confused users because they didn't have information to help them understand which top-level type of the surfaced category belonged to.*

In the example above, the category *Education & Training* belonged to the *HR Hub* top-level category, but there is no indication to the user that this is where the page belongs. If MacCentral had breadcrumbs, they would look like this:

*Home > HR Hub > Education & Training > About Education & Training*

Saltire, the Scottish Government's intranet, had breadcrumbs on every page.

The screenshot shows a web page from the Saltire intranet. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links for News, My Workplace, Our Organisation, Staff Directory, and Help. To the right of the navigation is a 'Quick Links' button, a search bar with the placeholder 'Search Saltire', and a magnifying glass icon. Below the navigation, a breadcrumb trail reads: My Workplace > Leave > Annual leave > Annual leave - request and record. The main content area has a dark blue header with the title 'Annual leave - request and record'. Below the title, a sub-header says 'Article'. The main text states: 'You should use the eHR system to request and record annual leave. You must not take annual leave without your manager's permission.' Underneath, a section titled 'You should:' lists three points: 'make your request in advance', 'give your manager as much notice as possible', and 'not make firm plans before your annual leave is approved'. Another text block explains: 'You must take annual leave in minimum blocks of half a day. Where your leave is shown in hours (i.e. part-time or non-standard working pattern), the minimum amount of annual leave is half of your contracted hours for the day of leave. Absence of less than half a day should be managed through the flexi system.' A note below states: 'Managers approve and monitor their team members' annual leave. Wherever possible,' followed by a quote: 'Wherever a user was on Saltire, the Scottish Government's intranet, they could understand where they were because of the well-designed breadcrumbs.'

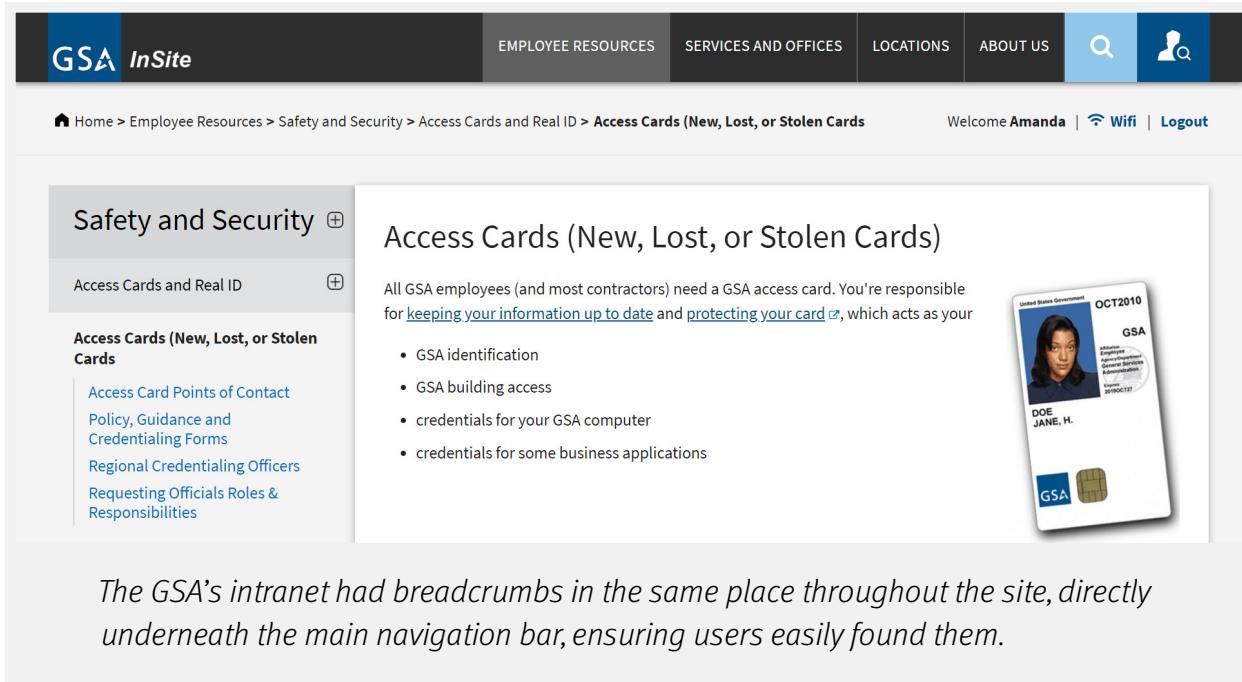
Although The Scottish Government's breadcrumbs were clear and useful, they could be improved by including a link to *Home* at the beginning of the breadcrumb and removing the link for the current page.

## 61. Present breadcrumbs at the top-left of the page.

Users look for breadcrumbs at the top-left of the page. When breadcrumbs are placed somewhere else, they become harder to notice. For example, on Atrium Health's intranet, PeopleConnect, pages that used a section overview template had a large hero image, and the breadcrumbs were forced below it. This meant they were far removed from the usual spot and, therefore, harder to notice.

*On certain pages on Atrium Health's intranet, such as this one, the breadcrumbs are harder to notice because they are distanced from the expected location at the top of the page by the hero image.*

It would be better if the breadcrumbs on PeopleConnect were moved above the hero image and aligned with the body text.



The screenshot shows the GSA InSite intranet homepage. At the top is a dark navigation bar with the GSA InSite logo, followed by a light-colored header bar with links for Employee Resources, Services and Offices, Locations, About Us, a search icon, and a user profile icon. Below the header, a breadcrumb trail is visible: Home > Employee Resources > Safety and Security > Access Cards and Real ID > Access Cards (New, Lost, or Stolen Cards). To the right of the breadcrumb trail are links for Welcome Amanda, WiFi, and Logout. The main content area has a sidebar titled "Safety and Security" with a plus sign icon. Under this, there's a section for "Access Cards and Real ID" with a plus sign icon. A link "Access Cards (New, Lost, or Stolen Cards)" is expanded, showing sub-links: Access Card Points of Contact, Policy, Guidance and Credentialing Forms, Regional Credentialing Officers, Requesting Officials Roles & Responsibilities. The main content area title is "Access Cards (New, Lost, or Stolen Cards)". Below the title, a text block says: "All GSA employees (and most contractors) need a GSA access card. You're responsible for [keeping your information up to date](#) and [protecting your card](#), which acts as your". A bulleted list follows: • GSA identification • GSA building access • credentials for your GSA computer • credentials for some business applications. To the right of the text is an image of a GSA access card featuring a photo of a woman, the text "United States Government OCT2010 GSA", "Doe Jane, H.", and "GSA".

*The GSA's intranet had breadcrumbs in the same place throughout the site, directly underneath the main navigation bar, ensuring users easily found them.*

## 62. Display the page's location using breadcrumbs, not the user's navigational path.

One misunderstanding about breadcrumbs is that they display the route the user used to arrive on a particular page; however, this is incorrect; breadcrumbs should list the page's hierarchical location, not the series of links users likely followed to get to the page. For instance, if a user arrives at a page with information about vacation benefits via a search, the breadcrumbs should not read *Home > Search Results > Time Off*, but instead *Home > Employee Information > Policies > Time Off*.

Displaying the user's path doesn't help users understand the site structure and where they are, which is what breadcrumbs are designed to do.

If there are multiple paths to the same content, define and display the canonical path to the content rather than having different paths depending on how the user reached the page. For example, when users visit the announcement page, they should see where the page sits in the site structure, not that they found it by clicking on a link on the homepage. Employees were featured in short news stories on the City of Calgary's intranet. When users visited the story, they could see where it belonged (in a subcategory of the *News and Events* category).

The screenshot shows a web browser window for the 'Calgary myCity' intranet. At the top, there's a red header bar with the 'Calgary' logo and a black sidebar with the 'myCity' logo. The main navigation menu includes 'Tools & Resources', 'myHR', 'Organization', 'News & Events' (which is expanded to show 'All myCity News Stories'), 'Dashboard', and 'Safety & Security'. A search bar is at the top right. The date 'June 12, 2019' and temperature '24°' are also displayed. The breadcrumb trail on the page reads: 'myCity.home > News & Events > All myCity News Stories > Employee Profile - Employee Name'. Below the breadcrumb is a green button labeled 'People & Projects' and the date 'June 10, 2019'. The main content area has a dark grey header with the text 'Your ideas wanted' and a subtext asking for nominations. It features a large light grey placeholder image. Below this, there are sections for 'Position at The City:' (labeled 'Codes Officer, Calgary Building Services (CBS)') and 'How long have you worked for The City?' (with a descriptive paragraph about being with the city for 21 years). The entire screenshot is framed by a light grey border.

*Although users found the employee profile story by clicking on a link from the homepage, the breadcrumbs show where the story “lives” in the site structure (in this case, in All myCity News Stories, which is a child page of the News and Events category).*

### 63. Where possible, avoid including categories in breadcrumbs that don't have section overview pages.

Because users use breadcrumbs to navigate higher up in the site structure, try to avoid including categories that don't have any pages because, when linked, they won't take the user anywhere.

The top-level category listed in the navigation didn't have a section overview page on some intranets we studied. RNLI's intranet, Compass, was one such intranet. For example, in the screenshot below, the user can see that the *Travel season ticket loans* page lives in the *Benefits* section, and the *Benefits* section page can be found underneath the navigational item, *Working at the RNLI*. *Working at the RNLI* is not hyperlinked, which is a good solution to avoid including a link to a page that doesn't exist; however, some users may wonder why only the middle link is hyperlinked.

The screenshot shows a SharePoint-based intranet site for RNLI COMPASS. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links like 'Our charity', 'Working at the RNLI', 'Find people and places', 'News and events', 'Find a document', and 'Glossary'. On the right side of the header, there are user profile icons for 'Employee Name', 'SHARE', 'FOLLOW', and a search bar. Below the header, the main content area has a breadcrumb trail: 'WORKING AT THE RNLI / BENEFITS / TRAVEL SEASON TICKET LOANS'. The main title is 'Travel season ticket loans'. To the left of the main content, there's a sidebar with a list of benefits: Benefits, Childcare, Discounts, Cycle to work, Dental cashplan, Eye tests, Health cashplan, Pension, and Life cover. A 'Travel season ticket loans' button is highlighted with a gray box. The main content area contains two sections: 'Employee Name' (with a placeholder 'Author') and a text block about travel support. There's also a link to the 'Travel Season Ticket Loan Policy'. A large, empty image placeholder is visible on the right.

*RNLI's intranet, Compass, uses breadcrumbs to orient users. Only pages that take the user somewhere should have links in the breadcrumb trail.*

Another solution that Atrium Health and other intranets opted for was to create a section overview page that sat inside the top-level category. This avoided the problem of having a top-level item in the breadcrumb trail, which wouldn't lead anywhere.

The Education dropdown has an Education item inside that acts as the section overview page. This avoids the issue of having an unclickable item in the breadcrumb trail.

If opting for this solution, ensure section overview pages have worthwhile content to present.

## 64. Ensure breadcrumbs match the main navigation and any local navigation.

If there's a discrepancy between the breadcrumb and any main or local navigation, it can cause users to feel less confident in their orientation of the site. As such, it's important that they reflect the user's position on the site.

On First Solar's intranet, the top-level items in the main navigation did not have section overview pages, so they were omitted from the breadcrumb trail. However, this made the breadcrumbs less useful because if users came across a page through site search, it wasn't clear which top-level category the page lived in.

The screenshot shows a SharePoint site with a dark blue header. The top navigation bar includes links for APPS & TOOLS, WORK RESOURCES, TEAMS & DEPTS, HR, OUR COMPANY, and a SEARCH bar. Below the header, the breadcrumb trail is displayed as: POWER > Corporate Communications > Locations > Perrysburg. The main content area features a large image of a restaurant kitchen or cafeteria. A sidebar on the right is titled "ESSENTIAL LINKS" and contains three items: Catering Request, Step by Step to Request Catering, and PBG Café Online Ordering.

*The breadcrumbs on Power are missing the top-level category. In this case, the parent page (Corporate Communications) sits within Teams & Depts, so this should have been listed after Power in the breadcrumb trail. This category should have been unlinked because Teams & Depts does not have a page.*

In the example above, the breadcrumb trail should have been the following to ensure it matched the main navigation. (Notice the underlined items designate links.)

Power > Teams & Depts > Corporate Communications > Locations > Perrysburg

## 65. Make breadcrumb elements clickable, except for the current page or top-level categories with no pages.

Making pages in the breadcrumb path clickable allows users to easily navigate higher up in the site structure. Each page should be linked except for the current page and any categories in the navigation that don't have pages because these links won't do anything since they won't be taking users to a new page.

 Never implement links that don't do anything.

### Timeless Design Tips

A link should always take users to a new page or a new place on a page. It's best not to have active links set to the same page a user is currently on, as it sends the wrong message and can cause confusion.

Atrium Health's breadcrumbs had clickable links; however, sometimes, the links did not work and didn't take the user anywhere.

*While Atrium Health's intranet included nicely designed breadcrumbs, sometimes the breadcrumb links did not work.*

The Scottish Government also had clickable links, which was favorable. However, the current page was also linked. Clicking the link for the current page would not do anything. As such, the breadcrumbs could be improved by removing this link.

*Saltire's breadcrumbs could be improved by simply removing the link to the current page at the end of the breadcrumb trail.*

Bracknell Forest Council implemented breadcrumbs properly on its intranet, DORIS. All pages in the breadcrumb were linked except for the current page.

The screenshot shows a navigation bar with 'People & Teams' and 'Get involved' on the left, followed by a search bar and user profile 'Rachel Krause'. Below the search bar is a purple magnifying glass icon. The main content area has a header 'DORIS' with a dropdown menu. Underneath are links for 'Home', 'How do I?', 'Your council', 'News', and 'Public website'. A breadcrumb trail 'Home / How do I? / Facilities and travel / Catering and refreshments' is displayed below the header. The current page, 'Catering and refreshments', is bolded. A 'Save' button with a clipboard icon is visible. Below the title, text states: 'The Corporate Catering contract which includes buffet lunches for meetings and the staff sandwich delivery service is provided by 'Something Else To Eat''. It also mentions that menus, sandwich delivery price lists, and order forms can be found in documents below. A section titled 'Food orders' is shown.

*Bracknell Forest Council's intranet, DORIS, has workable breadcrumb links. The current page in the breadcrumb is not linked, following the correct convention.*

## 66. Avoid using icons in breadcrumbs; stick to text only.

The Royal National Lifeboats Institution (RNLI) uses a house icon as the breadcrumb link for *Home* on its intranet. While it's meant to stand for home, it is not as familiar as the word "*Home*." Some users could easily overlook the icon and its purpose, so we recommend using the word "*Home*."

The screenshot shows a breadcrumb trail: a house icon followed by '/ WORKING AT THE RNLI / BENEFITS / TRAVEL SEASON TICKET LOANS'. The house icon is highlighted with a blue border, indicating it is the active or current page in the breadcrumb.

*Compass, RNLI's intranet, uses a home icon to represent the word "Home" in the breadcrumb.*

GSA's intranet, InSite, also included a home icon in the breadcrumb, but a text label accompanied it.

The screenshot shows a breadcrumb trail: 'Home > Employee Resources > Information Technology > Do IT Yourself (Self Help) > BookIT!'. The house icon is highlighted with a blue border, indicating it is the active or current page in the breadcrumb.

*Insite had a house icon in the breadcrumb, but it was not problematic because a Home text label accompanied it.*

While including a home icon alongside the text label is not problematic per se, you should avoid doing this if you have another home icon in the global navigation to avoid cluttering the design.

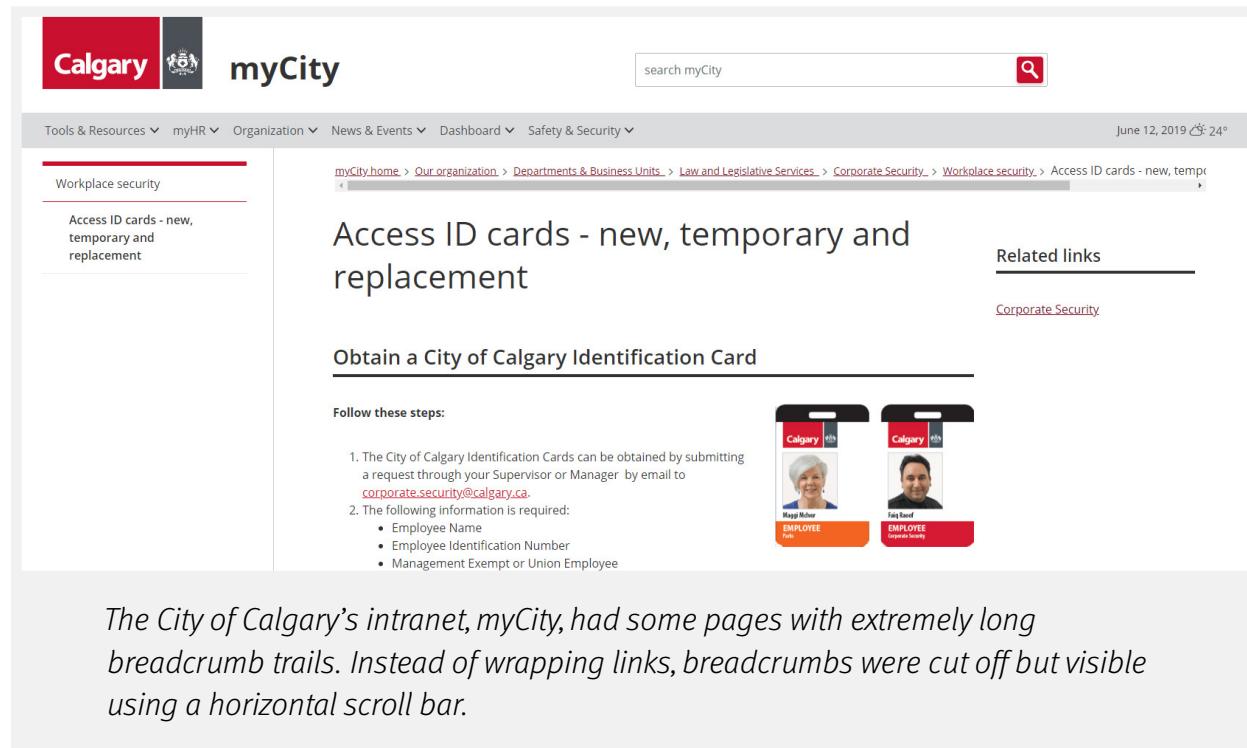
## 67. Avoid having long breadcrumb trails.

When breadcrumbs are long, they become difficult to read and wrap on the page, making scanning difficult.

If you have long breadcrumb trails, you can opt for the following strategies to try to shorten them:

- **Shorten page titles:** Having very long page titles can cause breadcrumbs to become too long and unwieldy. Shortening page titles will reduce the breadcrumbs' length and make scanning links easier.
- **Reduce the number of levels:** Consider if you need so many stories in the IA. Are there section overview pages that aren't required and only cause users to perform further clicks? Removing these can reduce the overall number of levels and the resulting length of your breadcrumbs.
- **Truncate breadcrumbs:** If the above two strategies do not help, then truncating breadcrumbs by hiding earlier links in the trail can reduce the length of the breadcrumb. However, this should be done as a last resort.

Some pages on the City of Calgary's intranet were found up to 11 levels deep in the IA, making for extremely long breadcrumb trails. A horizontal scroll bar would appear on these pages, forcing users to scroll to view the entire breadcrumb trail.



The screenshot shows a screenshot of the City of Calgary's myCity intranet. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for Tools & Resources, myHR, Organization, News & Events, Dashboard, and Safety & Security. The date June 12, 2019, is also at the top right. Below the navigation bar, the main content area has a breadcrumb trail: myCity.home > Our organization > Departments & Business Units > Law and Legislative Services > Corporate Security > Workplace security > Access ID cards - new, temporary and replacement. The title of the page is "Access ID cards - new, temporary and replacement". On the left, there is a sidebar with links for Workplace security and Access ID cards - new, temporary and replacement. On the right, there is a "Related links" section with a link to Corporate Security. Below the title, there is a section titled "Obtain a City of Calgary Identification Card" with a sub-section "Follow these steps:" containing two numbered steps. Step 1 describes the process of submitting a request through email to corporate.security@calgary.ca. Step 2 lists required information: Employee Name, Employee Identification Number, and Management Exempt or Union Employee. To the right of the steps, there are two sample identification card images for employees named Megh Miller and Sat Rand.

*The City of Calgary's intranet, myCity, had some pages with extremely long breadcrumb trails. Instead of wrapping links, breadcrumbs were cut off but visible using a horizontal scroll bar.*

While this solution on myCity prevents the breadcrumbs from wrapping, it means that part of the breadcrumb trail is not visible. The intranet team could remove some of the levels to help users access this information earlier and not have users click through certain departments and sub-departments to get there. Another thing they could do is make the title of the page shorter (to just Access ID cards).

## 68. Avoid truncating breadcrumb trails.

When breadcrumbs are long, they can get cut off or wrap on the page. One strategy is to truncate the breadcrumb by not showing the entire trail; however, if space allows, it's best to show the whole breadcrumb trail rather than truncate it. When breadcrumb trails are truncated, users lose some sense of how deep they are in the site structure and how they arrived at a given page. Sometimes there are simple design changes you can make to avoid having to truncate the trail, such as:

- Provide a larger area for the breadcrumbs
- Reduce the length of page titles
- Reduce the number of levels in the IA (For example, removing unnecessary section overview pages that cause extra clicks)

**Don't make the breadcrumb text so small** that it cannot be easily read or clicked on. To fit long breadcrumb trails, some designers make breadcrumb links small and pack them closely together. Unfortunately, this solution doesn't work well for touchscreen users or those with poor motor control, as they struggle to click the breadcrumb links. Making links even smaller than they already are makes them difficult to read.

On some pages of Eyeo's intranet, the breadcrumbs were truncated because they wouldn't fit alongside social icons, such as the save, watch, and share icons. However, these social icons could be moved underneath the page title to provide a better space allocation for the breadcrumbs.

The screenshot shows a navigation sidebar on the left with categories like 'Comings', 'Comourses & Guidelines', and 'Advertising, merch, and design'. The main content area has a title 'Advertising, merch, and design' and a sub-section 'Advertising material'. On the right side, there are several social media sharing icons.

*Eyeo's intranet had breadcrumbs that were occasionally truncated because of space restrictions. The social icons could be moved below the page title to avoid this problem and provide greater space for the breadcrumbs.*

The screenshot shows a top navigation bar with 'PeopleConnect' and search functions. Below it is the Atrium Health logo. The main content area shows a breadcrumb trail: 'Home > Tools > Business Tools > Concern and Incident Reporting'. The page title is 'Concern and Incident Reporting'. A callout box on the right says 'Good Catch Nominations Log in and choose "Good Catch Nomination"'.

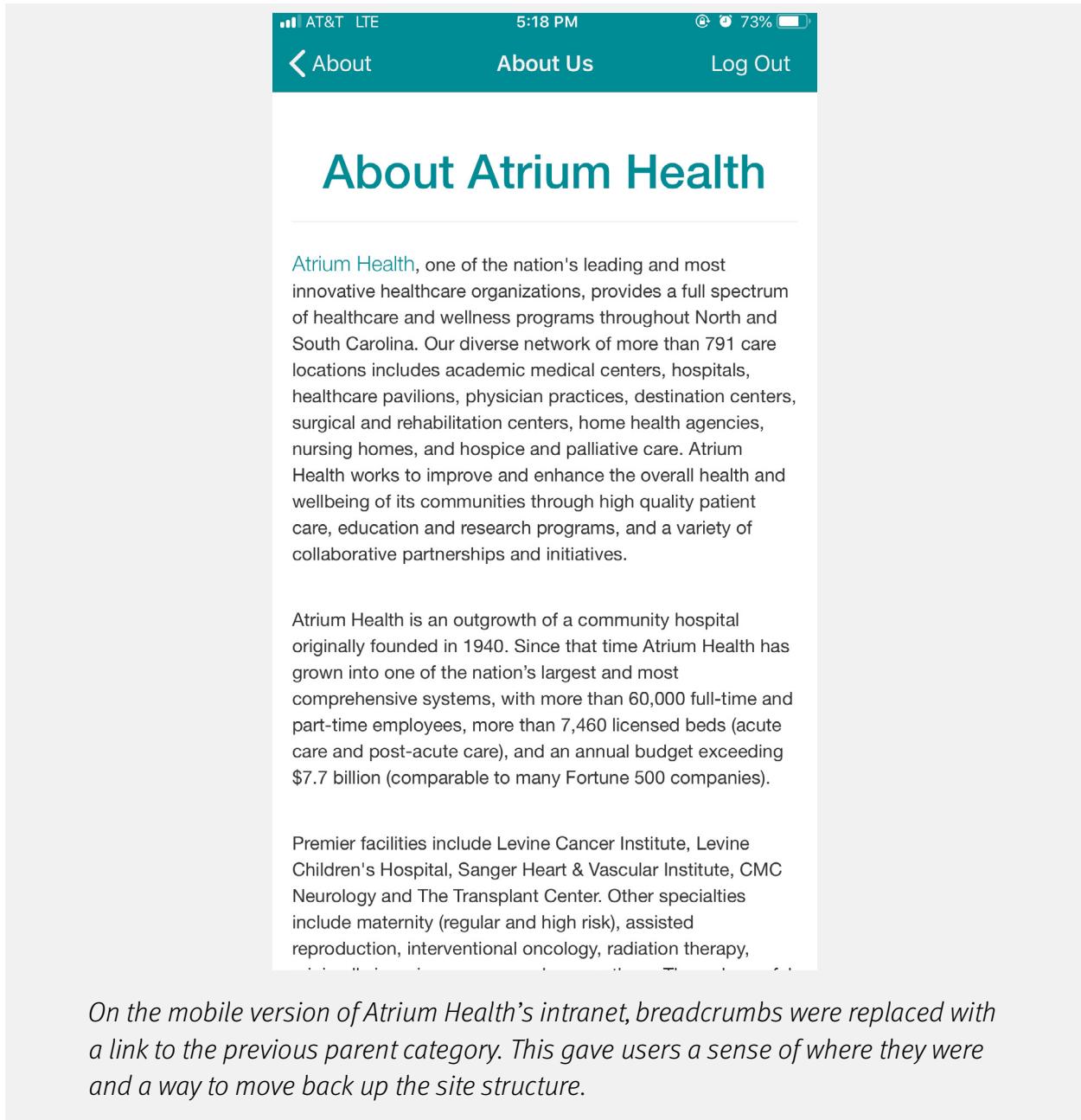
*Atrium Health's intranet, PeopleConnect, displayed the entire breadcrumb trails and allowed longer ones to span the full-page width. The full-page width was not required in most instances, thanks to short page titles.*

If you need to truncate breadcrumbs, it's best to show only the last level or couple of levels to help users move up to the last parent category. For example, the following breadcrumb is shown shortened below.

**Original:** Home > HR Hub > Education & Training > About Education & Training

**Shortened version:** ... > Education & Training > About Education & Training

On mobile, breadcrumbs will not fit — even if they are short. It's best to opt for either showing a back button or the previous page the user was on before reaching the current page.



The screenshot shows a mobile web browser displaying the Atrium Health intranet. At the top, there is a header bar with a teal background. From left to right, it contains: signal strength (3 bars), AT&T LTE, 5:18 PM, battery level (73%), and a power icon. Below the header, the main content area has a white background. On the left side of the content area, there is a teal navigation bar with white text. It includes a back arrow icon followed by the word "About", the text "About Us" in a larger font, and a "Log Out" link. The main title "About Atrium Health" is centered above a horizontal line. To the right of the title, there is a large amount of text describing Atrium Health's services and history. Below this, another section of text discusses premier facilities. At the bottom of the content area, there is a light gray footer bar containing a single line of text: "On the mobile version of Atrium Health's intranet, breadcrumbs were replaced with a link to the previous parent category. This gave users a sense of where they were and a way to move back up the site structure."

Atrium Health, one of the nation's leading and most innovative healthcare organizations, provides a full spectrum of healthcare and wellness programs throughout North and South Carolina. Our diverse network of more than 791 care locations includes academic medical centers, hospitals, healthcare pavilions, physician practices, destination centers, surgical and rehabilitation centers, home health agencies, nursing homes, and hospice and palliative care. Atrium Health works to improve and enhance the overall health and wellbeing of its communities through high quality patient care, education and research programs, and a variety of collaborative partnerships and initiatives.

Atrium Health is an outgrowth of a community hospital originally founded in 1940. Since that time Atrium Health has grown into one of the nation's largest and most comprehensive systems, with more than 60,000 full-time and part-time employees, more than 7,460 licensed beds (acute care and post-acute care), and an annual budget exceeding \$7.7 billion (comparable to many Fortune 500 companies).

Premier facilities include Levine Cancer Institute, Levine Children's Hospital, Sanger Heart & Vascular Institute, CMC Neurology and The Transplant Center. Other specialties include maternity (regular and high risk), assisted reproduction, interventional oncology, radiation therapy,

*On the mobile version of Atrium Health's intranet, breadcrumbs were replaced with a link to the previous parent category. This gave users a sense of where they were and a way to move back up the site structure.*

## 69. If breadcrumb links are automatically generated, clean up the backend structure so breadcrumbs match the page titles.

Eyeo GmbH designed an intranet using Confluence and third-party integration with Linchpin to make it appear as an intranet and provide intranet features. Unfortunately, the breadcrumbs didn't fully mirror the navigation designed using Linchpin; instead, they reflected the Confluence folder structure. This stopped them from being useful in helping users orient themselves within the site.

*Eyeo's intranet had breadcrumbs, but the breadcrumbs didn't fully match the navigation. For example, the breadcrumb does not show the homepage, top-level category, and current page.*

The *Meet the C's* page sits within *Eyeo Central*, which sits under *Company*, so the breadcrumbs should have been:

*Home > Company > Eyeo Central > Company Overview > Meet the C's*

If breadcrumbs are generated automatically, check that they include all relevant pages in the breadcrumb trail and that breadcrumb links match the page titles so that they can be helpful for users.

# Designing Menus and Links

Teams often overlook the importance of good menu and link design. While it's important that your navigation includes sensible groupings and understandable labels, it's also important that the navigation itself is easy to see, find, and click on.

## 70. Design links and buttons so that they appear clickable.

With the advent of flat design, many designers have opted for cleaner aesthetics with fewer signifiers. Websites now boast ghost buttons and text links that look like static text and are no longer colored or underlined. This poses problems for users who experience click uncertainty.



### Flat design

#### Definitions, Principles, and Methods

Flat design is a popular design style defined by the absence of glossy or three-dimensional visual effects in the graphical elements of a web page.

On Burns & McDonnell's intranet, MacCentral, inline links were colored blue, which was helpful to users; however, other links had no distinct visual treatment. For example, the links in the right panel look just like the body text. Users had to hover their mouse over items (such as those under the *Reference Center*) to see whether they were links, which is impossible to do on mobile.

The Reference Center has links to all our standards, codes, e-books, and other engineering and technical subscriptions. Explore our digital collections, ask us a question, or come visit the library where we maintain a small collection of engineering books and journals.

**Reference Center**

- [Library Catalog](#)
- [Ask A Researcher](#)
- [Standards](#)
- [Codes](#)
- [eBooks](#)
- [Journals](#)
- [Market Intelligence](#)
- [Research Tools](#)
- [Corporate Memberships](#)

**Contacts**

- Employee Name  
Section Manager
- Employee Name  
Librarian
- Employee Name  
Library Assistant

**Quick Links**

- [BMcD History](#)
- [Bulk Purchases of Books](#)
- [Copyright Quick Reference](#)
- [FileOpen Plug-In](#)
- [Mexican Design Resources](#)

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This institution reserves the right to refuse to accept a copying order if, in its judgment, fulfillment of the order would involve violation of copyright law.

*The links on Burns & McDonnell's intranet, MacCentral, were not visually distinct from the body text. For example, the list of links underneath the Quick Links header looks like body text. Not only does this make the page harder to scan, but it also makes links to further content less discoverable.*

Links on The Co-operators' intranet, Source, were clearly distinguished because they were consistently colored blue. This made it easy for users to know what was clickable and what wasn't.

The screenshot shows the homepage of the Source intranet. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links for News, HR, Work, About Us, Social, and Locations. Below the navigation is a header bar with a greeting "Good morning, Employee Name", the date and time "Tuesday, October 22 9:18 am", and a search bar for "Looking for Sovereign's Source?". To the right of the header is a placeholder for a user profile picture with the text "Name of employee, Contact Centre Supervisor, HB". The main content area features a large article titled "Article Title: Redacted News Article" with a "TOP NEWS" button and a "SUBMIT NEWS" button. To the right of the article are two sidebar sections: "Let's bust some myths: United Way edition" and "Employee Poll". The sidebar also includes a "Tech Tip Tuesday" section and a "UltiPro" section. At the bottom, there are "HR QUICK LINKS" and "WORK QUICK LINKS" sections.

**Article Title:**  
Redacted News Article

October 22 2019 | 1 6

**Let's bust some myths:  
United Way edition**

Have you lost your *way* or are you *united* in your knowledge about the United Way? Find out now.

October 21 2019 | 3 21

**Expand your knowledge  
about our members  
and co-operatives**

The learning doesn't stop with Co-op week! Here's how you can continue your co-operative education all year long.

October 21 2019 | 0 12

**Employee Poll**

Redacted question

Redacted option

Redacted option

Redacted option

Redacted option

**Vote** View Results

Missed an episode of our audio series? Listen here.

**Tech Tip Tuesday**  
OneNote Video

**UltiPro**  
Time & Attendance questions?  
Get answers now! >

**HR QUICK LINKS**

- Achieve
- Benefits

**WORK QUICK LINKS**

- 2019-2022 Strategy
- AdvisorSource

**OUR PERFORMANCE**

*On the Co-operators' intranet, Source, it was easy for users to understand what was clickable and what wasn't.*

If you make it easy for users to know where to click, they'll be able to discover content quicker.

## 71. Make links, buttons, menus, and other navigational elements easy to read.

For link and button text to be legible, it should be large enough and have good contrast from the background. Follow WCAG guidelines and use a color-contrast checker to ensure text will be legible for all your users.

Also, avoid problematic color combinations. Some color combinations are not accessible; employees with color blindness could struggle to read text when the text is a certain color against a certain color background (such as red on green). There are plenty of online accessibility checker tools to help you pick colors if you're not sure.

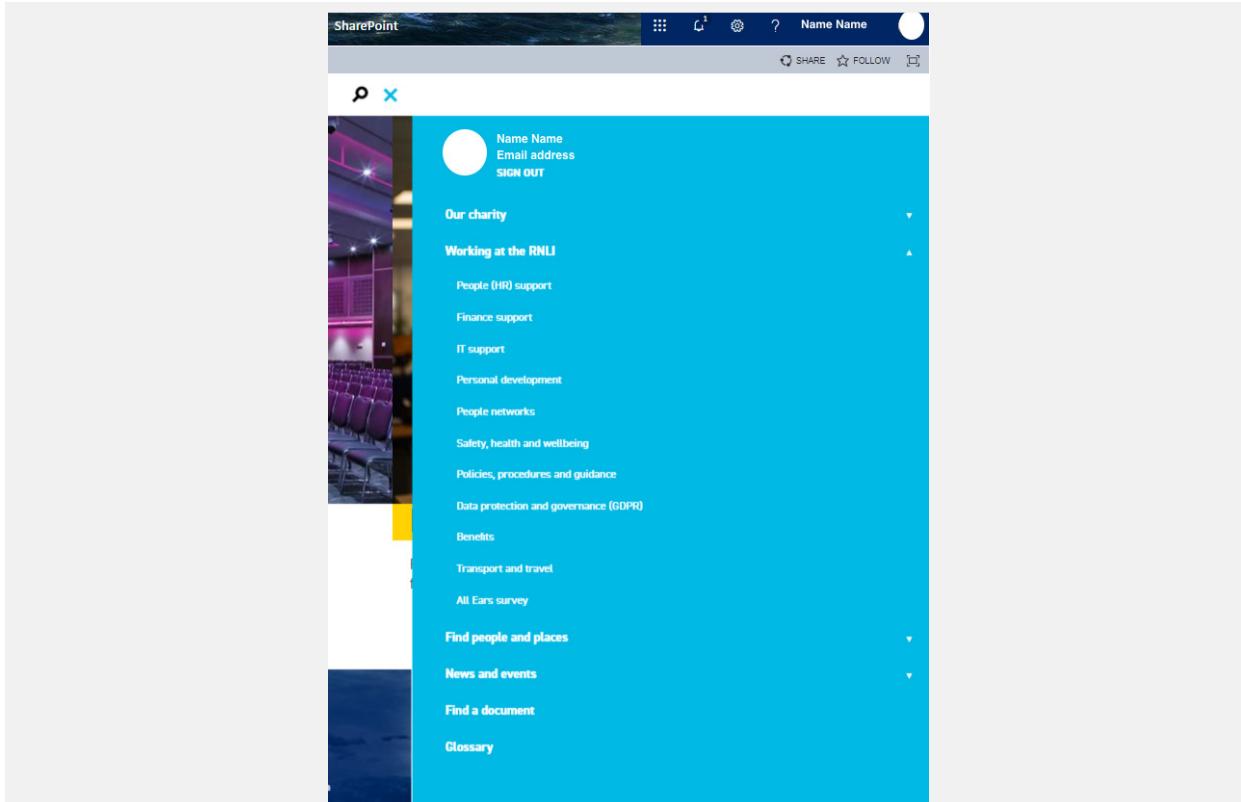


### Conduct accessibility testing.

#### Process and Strategic Considerations

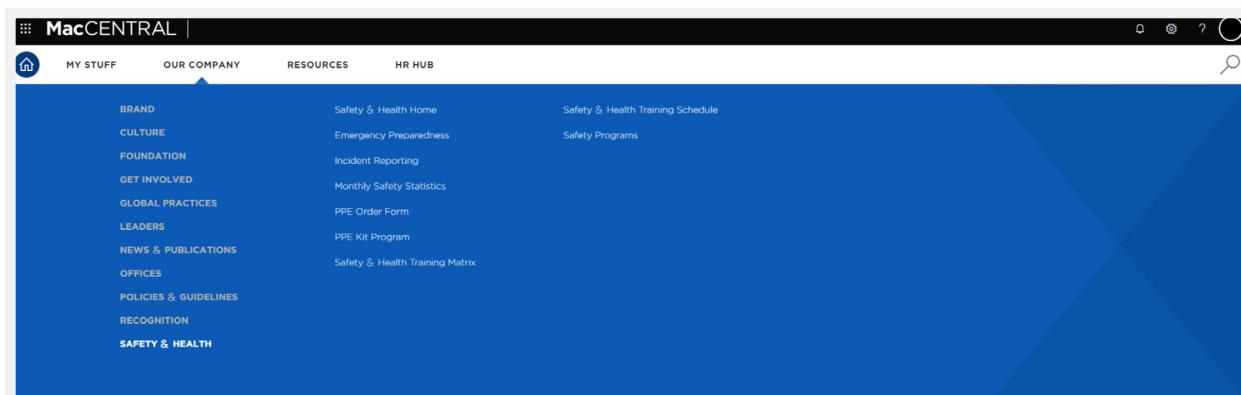
Recruit employees with declared disabilities who may use assistive technology to test your intranet. Involving these users in usability test sessions can reveal accessibility issues that need to be rectified.

When users interacted with the navigation on the mobile version of RNLI's intranet, they struggled to read the text because the menu was bright, light blue with white text. To make matters worse, the text was tiny.



*RNLI's intranet on mobile featured this blue dropdown with white text, which is hardly legible because of the poor contrast and the small font size.*

The links in MacCentral's mega menu were also difficult to read because of the gray text on a blue background. Additionally, the white text was too faint, which made it challenging to read.



*Burns & McDonnell's intranet, MacCentral, had a menu containing off-white and gray text on a blue background. The color contrast between gray and blue is not accessible, and the capitalization also makes the list more difficult to scan.*

First Solar had a more accessible menu on its intranet, with the top level offering strong contrast between a dark-blue background and white, bolded text and the dropdowns offering dark-blue text on a white backdrop.

FEATURED CONTENT	FUNCTIONAL AREAS	POLICIES & DOCUMENTS	SYSTEMS
HR Home	General HR	Associate Handbook	Fieldglass
Development Planning	Benefits	Bonus Plan	Kronos
GlobeSmart	Pay	Corporate Policies	Kronos SEA
Holidays	Performance	Job Descriptions	<a href="#">My Learning</a>
Recognition	Talent Acquisition	Workday Job Aids	Org Chart Suite
Referral Program	Talent Management		Workday
	Training		YOUshine

*First Solar's intranet presented a more accessible menu with good contrast between the background and the text. The only thing that could be done to improve the headings in the mega menu would be to convert the headings to title case would make them easier to read.*

Opting for sans serif fonts and using capitalization sparingly can help users with dyslexia to read your navigation and links more easily. On MacCentral, links in the first level of the dropdown (shown above) were in ALL CAPS, making them harder to scan. Only the section headings were ALL CAPS in First Solar's mega menu. Still, the headings would be easier to read if they were in title case; bolding is enough to distinguish the heading from the links beneath them.

It's also important to remove repeated words to make link text easier to read. Some intranets had long lists of links where the first word was identical. This makes scanning the list difficult, as the eye needs to jump to the part of the link which differentiates it from others.

The screenshot shows a GSA InSite intranet page. At the top, there's a dark header bar with the "GSA InSite" logo. Below it is a light-colored sidebar containing various links under sections like "Employee Resources", "Acquisition, Purchases and Payments", "Book Space and Meetings", "Buildings and Real Estate", "Communications", "Directives, Forms and Regulations", and "Financial Management". To the right of the sidebar is a large, dark vertical navigation menu listing "REGION 1 (NEW ENGLAND)" through "REGION 11 (NATIONAL CAPITAL REGION)", each with a right-pointing arrow. Below this is a section for "CENTRAL OFFICE (CO)" with a link to "Training and Development". At the bottom of the sidebar, there's a link to "All Tools, Systems and Sites >". The main content area of the page is currently empty.

*On the GSA intranet, the list of regions is hard to read because of the repeated word “Region.” Users needed to skip over this word as they scanned the list to find the link they needed.*

## 72. Ensure that the visual styling of menus makes them easy to notice.

The main navigation should be easy to notice so that users can find the navigation and feel inclined to use it. Sometimes intranet design teams hide or deemphasize their navigation — and promote site search instead — because of underlying problems with the site’s IA. However, this strategy can backfire as users feel less confident navigating the site without good cues about the site structure and the available content. It’s much better to fix any underlying issues with the IA than to make the navigation less visible.

When designing your navigation, ensure that it is placed prominently on the screen and that the text has high contrast to the background. Links should be large enough so that they are legible and easily selected.

The Mayo Clinic’s intranet had many subsites for different departments. Each subsite had its own horizontal navigation bar, which competed with the main navigation. Also, the main navigation was given a fainter treatment (from white text on black to white text on gray), making it harder to notice than the second navigation bar.

**MAYO CLINIC**

Home | Practice | Education | Research | HR Connect | Groups | Policy Library | Video | Library | Calendar

**Mayo Clinic Health System - Administration**

People Intranet Forms Drugs AskMayoExpert Advanced Search

MCHS Intranet login | feedback

MCHS Sites Practice EHR HR Connect Depts/Groups Forms Policies Tools Resources

**MCHS Initiatives**

- MPAC (Mayo Post Acute Care)
- Outreach
- Population Health

**Quality**

- Outcomes
- Patient Safety
- Scorecard
- Patient Experience

Administration Office  
MCHS Web Teams (Internet/Intranet)

**MCHS Chat Time**

Wednesday mornings, 8-8:15 a.m.  
201 Building, Room 1-20

**Locations: MCHS REGIONAL MAP & Leadership information**

Hospitals & Accreditation  
Locations on Google map

**People:** Search for MCHS Employees by campus | Search MCHS Medical Staff  
We have over 1000 physicians, and 14,000 allied health staff in three states.

**Looking for Services?** MCHS Medical Services A-Z

**Looking for Directions?** Driving Directions to MCHS Sites

**Heading for Rochester?** Please call the Card Access office for information at

**Driving Directions to MCHS Sites**

MedSpeed

MCHS Addresses & Phone Numbers

MCHS Administration Staff

MCHS Conference Room Directory

Patient Online Services Resource Center

Ready Access (formerly Level 3)

More Resources... 152

- Impaired 1
- Unavailable 0
- Planned 0

**Click for downtime resources**

**Days Since Last Preventable Harm**

263 days since last incident in NWWI: Management-anticoagulation related

331 days since last incident in SEMN: Major fall-witnessed, unassisted

68 days since last incident in SWMN: Major fall-unwitnessed, found by staff

mayoclinichealthsystem.org

*On subsites of the Mayo Clinic's intranet, the main navigation was deemphasized in favor of a second bright blue navigation bar. The white text on gray bar treatment meant the main navigation was more difficult to notice.*

Another factor that can affect the visibility of the navigation is visual clutter. The navigation won't be as noticeable if the navigational area contains many elements. For example, on InsideDELLTechnologies, the main navigation took backstage to an announcement and sat on top of a stylized image. This made it harder to notice, as the eye was naturally drawn lower down.

The screenshot shows the InsideDELLTechnologies intranet homepage. At the top, there is a dark blue header bar with the company logo 'InsideDELLTechnologies' on the left. To its right is a search bar containing 'Search Inside Dell Technologies' and a magnifying glass icon. Further right are links for 'News', 'My Communities', 'My HR', 'My IT', 'Learning', and a menu icon. Below the header, a large banner features the text 'Coming Soon: Quarterly Review' and a countdown timer showing '0 : 19 : 56 : 41' (Days, Hours, Minutes, Seconds). On the left side of the banner, it says 'Welcome Paul'. At the bottom of the banner, there are links for 'Top Headlines', 'More News', and 'Expand the Conversation'. On the far right, there are two circular icons: one for 'My HR Cases' (0) and another for 'My IT Tickets' (2). A small 'FEEDBACK' button is located on the far right edge of the page.

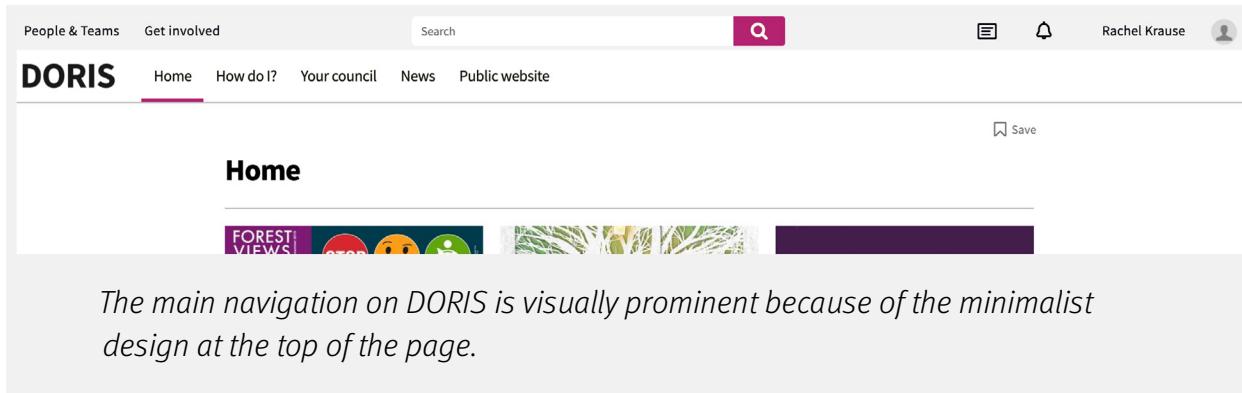
*On InsideDELLTechnologies' intranet, the main navigation was not very visible because it was in the top-right of the global navigation area, where utility navigation is traditionally found. It is also small compared to the welcome message and quarterly review announcement.*

The Scottish Government's intranet had a prominent, blue main navigation bar which contrasted with the white of the main content area. This made it easy to notice, and users relied on it in most tasks.

The screenshot shows the Saltire (Scottish Government) intranet homepage. The top navigation bar is a solid blue color, containing links for 'News', 'My Workplace', 'Our Organisation', 'Staff Directory', and 'Help'. To the right of these are 'Quick Links', a search bar, and a user profile icon. The main content area has a white background. On the left, there is a news section titled 'News / Must Read' featuring a photo of a woman and the handle '@PermSecScot'. Below this is a 'Catch up with Perm Sec' section with a photo and the handle '@PermSecScot'. Further down are sections for 'News in Brief' (Monday 08 April 2019) and 'Diversity in action'. On the right, there is a 'Welcome Checklist' section with a list of items: 'Scottish Government structure', 'Learning and development', 'Health and safety in the workplace', 'Flexi system', 'Security - your responsibilities', 'Top tips for new staff', 'Staff networks', 'Mandatory training', 'Sign up for Yammer', and 'Take the Saltire tour'. A 'Learn more >' button is located at the bottom of this section. A note at the top of the checklist says: 'Welcome to the Scottish Government. Here's a few things for you to read to get you started in your new role. You can find more information and policies in [My Workplace](#)'.

*The Scottish Government's intranet had a prominent main navigation bar. The blue bar contrasted nicely with the white of the main content area.*

Bracknell Forest Council also had a visually prominent navigation bar on its intranet, DORIS. Although the main navigation bar is the same color as the main content area, the visible selection cues and lack of visual clutter in the area ensure the navigation is visible.



## 73. Ensure that menus look like menus and won't be mistaken for banners or advertisements.

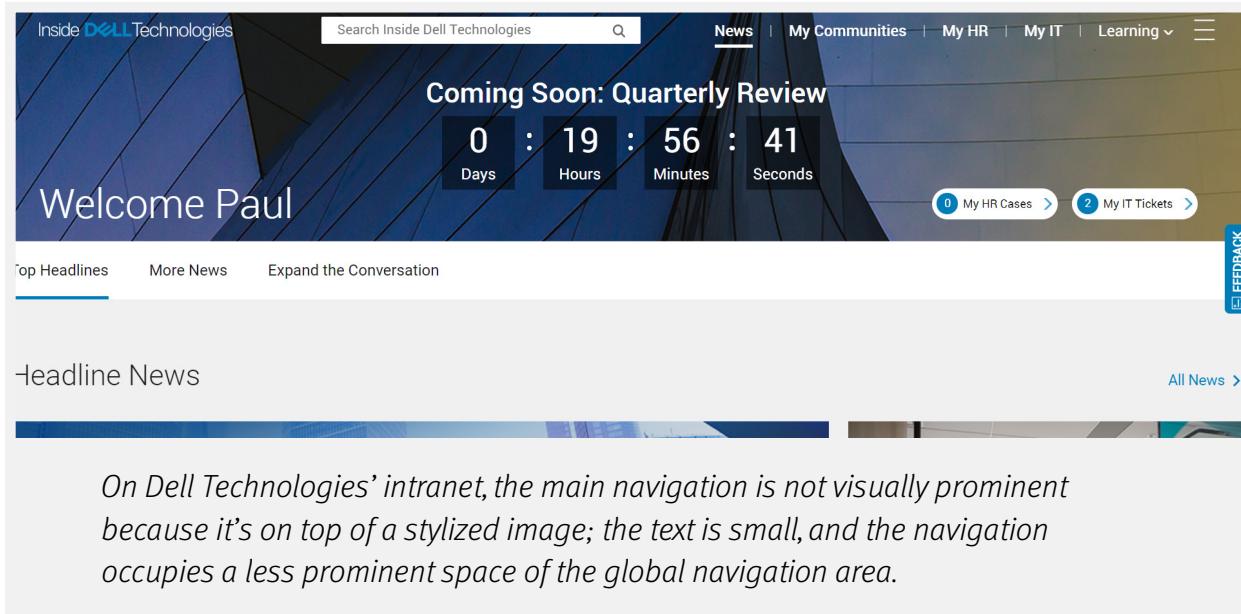
Be wary of using text within a graphic for your navigation. Users often ignore such treatments because they resemble website advertisements, which people have learned to ignore.

### Banner blindness

User Behaviors

Banner blindness is people's tendency to ignore page elements they perceive (correctly or incorrectly) to be ads. We have observed this consistently in eyetracking research. Anything that looks like stylized text on an image background or any element that appears in a location where ads are typically found can be assumed to be an ad by users and, thus, ignored.

On Dell's intranet, the main navigation was not highly visible, not only because of its location and small size but to the fact that it was positioned on top of a stylized image, making it easy to ignore. For better visibility, it should be moved outside the banner image and provided with more space.



The screenshot shows the Dell Technologies intranet homepage. At the top, there is a dark banner with a stylized blue and black geometric pattern. On the left of the banner, the text "Welcome Paul" is displayed. To the right of the banner, there is a search bar labeled "Search Inside Dell Technologies" and a magnifying glass icon. Above the search bar, there are several navigation links: "News" (underlined), "My Communities", "My HR", "My IT", and "Learning". To the right of these are three vertical dots. Below the banner, the text "Coming Soon: Quarterly Review" is centered. Underneath this, there is a timer displaying "0 : 19 : 56 : 41" with labels "Days", "Hours", "Minutes", and "Seconds" below each segment. Further down, there are two circular icons: one for "My HR Cases" (0) and another for "My IT Tickets" (2). At the bottom of the banner, there are three links: "Top Headlines" (underlined), "More News", and "Expand the Conversation". On the far right edge of the banner, there is a small blue "FEEDBACK" button with a speech bubble icon. Below the banner, the page content begins with a section titled "headline News" and a link "All News >". A large callout box is overlaid on the page content, containing the text: "On Dell Technologies' intranet, the main navigation is not visually prominent because it's on top of a stylized image; the text is small, and the navigation occupies a less prominent space of the global navigation area."

Users experience banner blindness more often in specific areas of the page, such as the right rail and sometimes the left rail. If you want users to notice important links in this area, it's best not to include images or stylized text, as these will often be ignored.

## 74. Ensure link targets are big enough to click and have sufficient space around them.

Adequately sized touch targets are critical for using an interface — let alone ease of use. We've all experienced frustration caused by small touch targets. They're often visible yet unresponsive to our taps — or worse, force us to trigger nearby links accidentally. These moments make us feel like gawky giants in a too-small world.

Often, this issue is described as a “fat finger” problem because users’ fingers are larger than the desired targets — clumsy cocktail sausages poking at screens. But the fat fingers are not the real culprit; the blame should be placed on the tiny targets. Designers who prioritize aesthetics over functionality too often forget to create targets that can be easily and accurately selected.

Small targets take longer to reach and increase the **chance of a slip**: accidentally tapping a wrong target placed too close to the desired one. Even when an error is avoided, just noticing that an element could be problematic to select adds to the perception that the interface is difficult to use.



## Slips versus mistakes

### Definitions, Principles, and Methods

In Human-Computer Interaction, users can commit two types of errors on an interface: slips and mistakes. **Slips** refer to unconscious errors made when users aren't paying close attention to the task; **mistakes** are conscious errors caused by a mismatch between the user's mental model and how the system actually works.

In addition to users perceiving the interface as difficult to use, small links slow users down. As Fitts's law describes, the smaller a target is, the longer it takes to select.



## Fitts's Law

### Definitions, Principles, and Methods

Fitts's law is a predictive model that describes how long it takes a user to hit a target in a graphical user interface (GUI) as a function of size and distance. The further the element is from us, and **the smaller it is**, the longer it will take to select the target successfully.

Lists of links in body text and stacked buttons often fall victim to touch-target errors because the spacing between the elements is too small.

On the Mayo Clinic's intranet homepage, links were often tightly packed, making them hard to select. For example, underneath the *Sites For* section, links were particularly packed. The small size of these links (because of the abbreviation of the office locations) and the lack of space between each link made selecting the correct link challenging. This page could benefit from increasing the text size and improving spacing between various UI elements.

The Mayo Clinic Intranet Home page features a top navigation bar with links to People, Intranet, Forms, Drugs, AskMayoExpert, and Advanced search. Below the header is a blue banner with the text "Mayo Clinic Intranet Home". The main content area includes:

- Destinations:** A sidebar with links to Clinical Tools, EHR/RCM, Emergency Preparedness, Health & Well-Being, IT Connect, Mayo Clinic Health System, Quality, Room Reservations, Safety, Security, and Travel.
- News Center:** A large image of a family with three children and a teddy bear. Below it is the headline: "Lillian's gift: Finding new purpose driven by grief". Below the headline are four smaller images with captions: "Mayo leaders at London clinic opening", "Finding new purpose driven by grief" (highlighted in red), "Flashback: Gift from Mayo family", and "Spotlight on people: Oct. 9".
- Status Panel:** Displays hospital admissions data for ARZ, FLA, and RST, and a blood donor program status for Whole Blood, Plasma (coming soon), and Platelets.
- Sites For:** A section with a red border containing links for various employee groups: Access Management, Administration, Desk Employees, My Nursing, Nurse Practitioners & Physician Assistants, Officers & Councilors, Physicians, Secretaries, and Supervisors/Managers.
- Events Calendar:** A calendar for October 2019 showing days from Su to Sa. Specific dates like October 9th are highlighted.
- More Headlines:** A grid of news items with images and titles: "Are you ready for Mayo Clinic's digital transformation?", "Inpatient dialysis unit on Saint Marys Campus to move to Joseph 2B", "Residents, fellows encouraged to attend Mayo Clinic Care Network Recruitment Fair", "Parking, traffic flow changes on Phoenix campus to begin Oct. 14", "Policy Update: Staff policy and procedure revisions", and "Learn more about your medical plan options".
- Quick Links:** A section with links to Aggressive/Violent Patient or Visitor Guide and other resources.

*The Mayo Clinic's intranet homepage had many small links packed closely together, particularly in the Sites For section.*

On the Co-operators' intranet, padding around text links in list formats was very small, which made it difficult for employees to select the correct link.

The screenshot shows the homepage of the Co-operators SOURCE intranet. At the top is a navigation bar with links for News, HR, Work (which is highlighted in green), About Us, Social, and Locations. There are also search fields, a user icon for 'My Site', and language options for AAA and Français. Below the navigation is a breadcrumb trail 'Home / Work' and a photograph of a workspace with a laptop, smartphone, and office supplies.

**PRODUCTS**

- Auto
- Commercial
- Community Guard
- Co-op Guard
- Edge Benefits
- Farm
- Federated Agencies/Unified Brokers
- Federated Agencies Wealth Management
- Group Benefits
- Home
- LIFE Pages
- Member Benefits Program
- Travel
- Wealth

**DEPARTMENTS**

- Business Continuity
- Business Intelligence
- Business Optimization
- Claims
- Client Service Solutions Property & Casualty
- Corporate Legal and Compliance
- Distribution Sales Support
- Enterprise Procurement and Contracts Management
- Enterprise Project Portfolio Office
- Enterprise Risk Management
- Finance and Accounting
- Government Relations
- Group Distribution
- Individual Operations CLIC
- IT Enterprise
- Manufacturing HB
- Marketing & Communications
- Member & Key Client Relations
- Ombuds Office
- Sustainability & Citizenship
- Underwriting Operations

**TOOLS & RESOURCES**

- Agency Training Calendar
- Brand guidelines
- Binding Restrictions
- Change management
- Client Review Program
- Co-op Analytics
- Corporate policies
- CRM and ECM
- Databases
- Forms
- Guidelines
- Lean
- Manuals
- Policy Wordings
- Templates

**Applications**

- BillingCenter
- CATS
- ClaimCenter
- Claims Mitchell Dashboard
- Claims Mitchell WorkCenter
- Commercial Express
- ECM
- Oracle Discoverer Plus

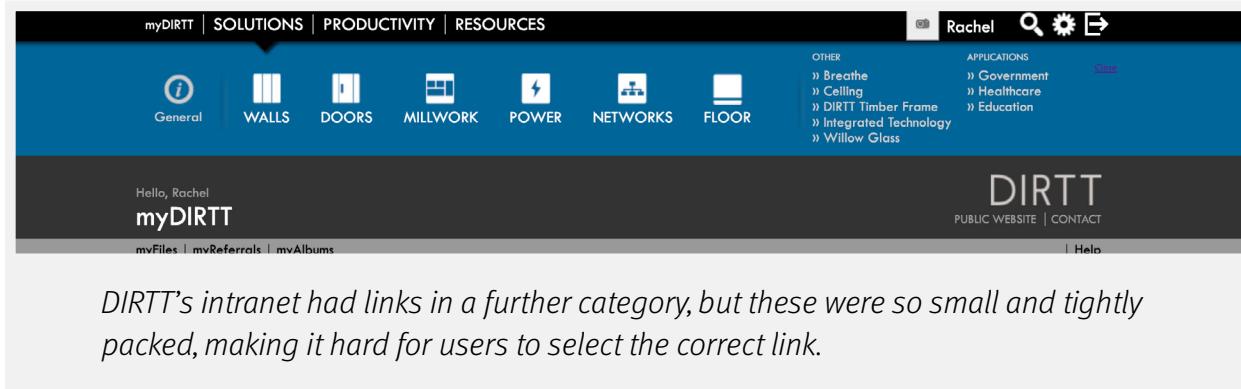
**SERVICES**

- Audit and Certification Services
- Co-op TV
- Corporate Archives
- Corporate Visa Card
- DATABASICS
- Enterprise Information Security
- Enterprise Practices
- Ergonomic Assessment
- Order Manuals/Forms from Xerox
- Records and Information Management
- Retirement Services Sign-in CUMIS
- ServiceFirst
- Service Requests CGL, CGIC, CLIC
- Translation

*The lists of links on the Co-operators' intranet could have benefitted from more space (padding) between them so employees could more precisely click on the links they needed.*

Increasing the padding and line spacing between links in bulleted lists can help employees achieve greater precision when navigating lists of links. Of course, if the targets are too small, adding space between them will likely not help. Targets must first be big enough and then also spaced well enough. This will help users avoid accidental taps.

For example, on DIRT's intranet, secondary links in the main navigation were far too small and too closely packed together. Even if the padding were increased around these links, they would still be hard to select because they are so small.



The screenshot shows the myDIRT intranet homepage. At the top, there's a black header bar with the text "myDIRT | SOLUTIONS | PRODUCTIVITY | RESOURCES". Below this is a blue navigation bar containing icons for General, WALLS, DOORS, MILLWORK, POWER, NETWORKS, and FLOOR. To the right of these are sections for OTHER (Breathe, Ceiling, DIRT Timber Frame, Integrated Technology, Willow Glass) and APPLICATIONS (Government, Healthcare, Education). The main content area has a dark background with white text. It includes a greeting "Hello, Rachel" and the myDIRT logo. At the bottom, there are links for mvFiles, mvReferrals, mvAlbums, PUBLIC WEBSITE, CONTACT, and Help. A callout box in the center states: "DIRTT's intranet had links in a further category, but these were so small and tightly packed, making it hard for users to select the correct link."

Touch targets need to be large enough to (1) discern what the target is, and (2) to accurately acquire them to avoid **view-tap asymmetry**. View–tap asymmetry is often caused by desktop intranet designs that are not well-adapted for touchscreen use.

### View-tap asymmetry

**Definitions, Principles, and Methods**

View–tap asymmetry occurs when elements are large enough to be seen (e.g., read the label text), but too small or densely packed to select without struggling.

Elements that are easily clicked using a mouse cursor are not always accessible by fingers. The minimum size for a tap target is 1cm (0.4in), and there are many cases where an interactive element on the intranet should be even larger. For example, primary calls to action often deserve great visual prominence and thus deserve a larger tap target.

The context of use may also demand tap targets larger than 1cm x 1cm: if an app or mobile site is to be used when the employee is on the go, targets will be harder to hit and should be bigger to allow for more room for error. Controls requiring precise manipulation will be difficult, if not impossible, to use when driving or walking.

As an intranet designer, it's important to consider the different ages of people making up your workforce. Older individuals or those with reduced motor coordination may benefit from larger

controls that are more forgiving. Limiting the number of elements on the screen can allow key touch targets to be larger and spaced further apart, thus making it easier to tap. The screen size can also influence the size of the touch targets. Large touchscreens often require larger targets to be noticeable and to minimize the time to reach them.

Ensure that all interactive elements are at least 1cm × 1cm (0.4in × 0.4in) in physical, rendered size and positioned with enough space from other competing touch targets to be easily and accurately acquired. Too small targets lead to longer acquisition times and errors and are bound to cause employee frustration.

Some of the local navigation or secondary-level menus in the main navigation featured small, compact text, which made selection difficult with a cursor.



### Touch targets should be at least 1cm x 1cm.

#### Timeless Design Tips

Researchers have found that the minimum physical size a touch target should be is 1cm × 1cm (0.4in × 0.4in) for it to be clicked accurately by most users. However, even then, links may be too small for some users. A study from MIT touch lab found that the average impact area of a user's fingertip is 1.6–2cm (0.6–0.8in).

Don't frustrate your users; ensure your links are large enough and have enough padding around them.

## 75. Consider eliminating icons that supplement text in navigation.

Including icons in your navigation can lead to clutter and hard-to-scan lists. In most cases, icons are not needed in the main navigation. Icons can be useful when used sparingly and when the icons carry meaning for users.

On DIRT's intranet, myDIRTT, the *Productivity* and *Solutions* categories of the main navigation contained icons with text labels. Unfortunately, these icons were sufficiently similar and did not help to distinguish icons. Moreover, introducing icons in the navigation reduced the space available for other links. As a result, the remaining links were forced into a small area, making viewing and selecting them difficult.

The screenshot shows the myDIRTT intranet homepage. At the top, there's a black header bar with the text "myDIRTT | SOLUTIONS | PRODUCTIVITY | RESOURCES". Below this is a blue navigation bar containing several items: "General" (with a person icon), "WALLS" (with a wall icon), "DOORS" (with a door icon), "MILLWORK" (with a cabinet icon), "POWER" (with a lightning bolt icon), "NETWORKS" (with a network icon), and "FLOOR" (with a floor icon). To the right of these are sections for "OTHER" (listing "Breathe", "Ceiling", "DIRTT Timber Frame", "Integrated Technology", and "Willow Glass") and "APPLICATIONS" (listing "Government", "Healthcare", and "Education"). Further right are links for "Logout", "Rachel", a search icon, a gear icon, and an envelope icon. Below the blue bar, the main content area has a dark header with "Hello, Rachel" and "myDIRTT". It includes links for "mvFiles", "mvReferrals", and "mvAlbums". On the right side of the content area, there's a "DIRTT" logo with "PUBLIC WEBSITE | CONTACT" below it, and a "Help" link at the bottom.

*On myDIRTT, the icons used in the navigation didn't help users and forced other items into cramped groupings on the right. The icons could have been removed, allowing the menu to take a simple dropdown or mega menu design.*

myDIRTT's navigation could have been drastically improved if the icons were removed and the main navigation utilized a simple dropdown instead.

Several intranets we saw during our sessions used icons in the main content area to visually distinguish links or groups of links. On InsideDELLTechnologies, the *My HR* category overview page used icons to visually distinguish groups of links. While the icons don't carry high information scent, the color-coding provides redundancy alongside the card boundaries, so as such, they don't pose problems by being there. However, the icons next to the secondary navigation (*Find Answers*, *Chat*, *Submit a Case*, etc.) could be removed to remove clutter as they provide no benefit.

The screenshot shows the Dell Technologies intranet homepage. At the top, there's a dark blue header with the "Inside DELL Technologies" logo, a search bar, and various navigation links like "News", "My Communities", "My HR", "My IT", "Learning", and "Resources for My Job". Below the header is a large banner with the text "Introducing My Time" and "Dell's New Global Time and Attendance Solution" with a "Learn More" button. The main content area is divided into several sections with icons:

- Personal and Work Information:** Includes links to My Team, My Address, My Family Dependents, and Letter Requests.
- Rewards and Benefits:** Includes links to My Well at Dell (Benefits Portal), My Dell WebMD (Wellbeing Programs and Resources), Inspire Recognition, and Dell 401(k) - Fidelity Net Benefits.
- New to Dell:** A section encouraging users to visit the New Hire site.
- Tools for the Job:** Includes links to My HR Profile (Workday), MyADP (Pay Statements), Request Time Off (Workday), and Enter Time/Hours Worked (Workday).
- Pay and Timesheet:** Includes links to HRIU US Pay and Timesheet, Pay Slips/Check Stubs, Payroll Calendar, and Time and Attendance Submission.
- Career and Development:** Includes links to Internal Job Search, Employee Referral Program (ERP), Mobility and Immigration, and Learning Studio.
- Leave and Time Off:** Includes links to Corporate/Public Holidays, Time Away, Sick/Medical Leave and Disability, and Jury Duty.
- Workplace and Community:** Includes links to Connected Workplace (Remote/Mobile Work), Culture Code Resources, Social Impact Community, and Employee Resource Groups (ERGs).
- My Cases:** A section for discussing career opportunities at Dell.
- My Approvals:** A section for managing application or service offerings.

At the bottom, there are footer links for "Resources for My Job", "About Dell", "About HR", "Getting Help", and "Directories". The footer also includes copyright information and a license notice.

*On the My HR section overview page of Dell Technologies' intranet, icons were used to visually distinguish groups of links. The icons in the secondary navigation bar only add clutter and could be removed.*

Bracknell Forest Council's intranet utilized a similar approach with icons accompanying text links in the main content area of the *How do I?* section overview page. In this case, however, the icons make scanning navigational items more difficult. The sheer quantity of icons and their different colors stopped users from focusing on the text labels or the icons themselves (which were faint on some colored backgrounds). In this case, it would be better to remove the icons since there are too many. Alternatively, if the icons were standardized in color and placed to the left of each link, they would be easier to scan.

*On Bracknell Forest Council's intranet, DORIS, the section overview page for the How do I? section contains many multi-colored icons. The quantity of icons and colors makes scanning the list of links difficult.*

## 76. When using icons for navigation, ensure icons are visually distinct and that users will know what they do.

If icons are needed in the navigation, ensure they are visually distinct and that users understand them. Perform usability testing with users to understand if they can easily find content when navigation items are reduced to icons.

If using some icons in the navigation, try to limit the number. Too many icons can be counterproductive, as users must compare and decide what each icon means, especially if there are no labels.

Eyeo's intranet had many icons as part of its navigation; some were not distinct. As a result, they were largely ignored in our sessions, even though sometimes the information participants were asked to find could be found behind an icon.

*On Eyeo's intranet, there were too many icons without text labels, and many of the icons were not distinct, such as the compass icon and the lower three icons in the vertical set.*

## 77. Provide an obvious indication of which navigational elements or intranet sections are currently selected.

When users arrive at a page by clicking on a search result, they might not know which area of the site they've landed in. Explicit navigational cues can help users quickly understand what page they're on and where it's located relative to the rest of the intranet.

For example, the Scottish Government underlined categories in the intranet's main navigation to show which category the user was in. Within its cascading menus, it used shading to indicate which menu item the user had opened. This is helpful for cascading menus with lots of items because users can easily get lost without it.

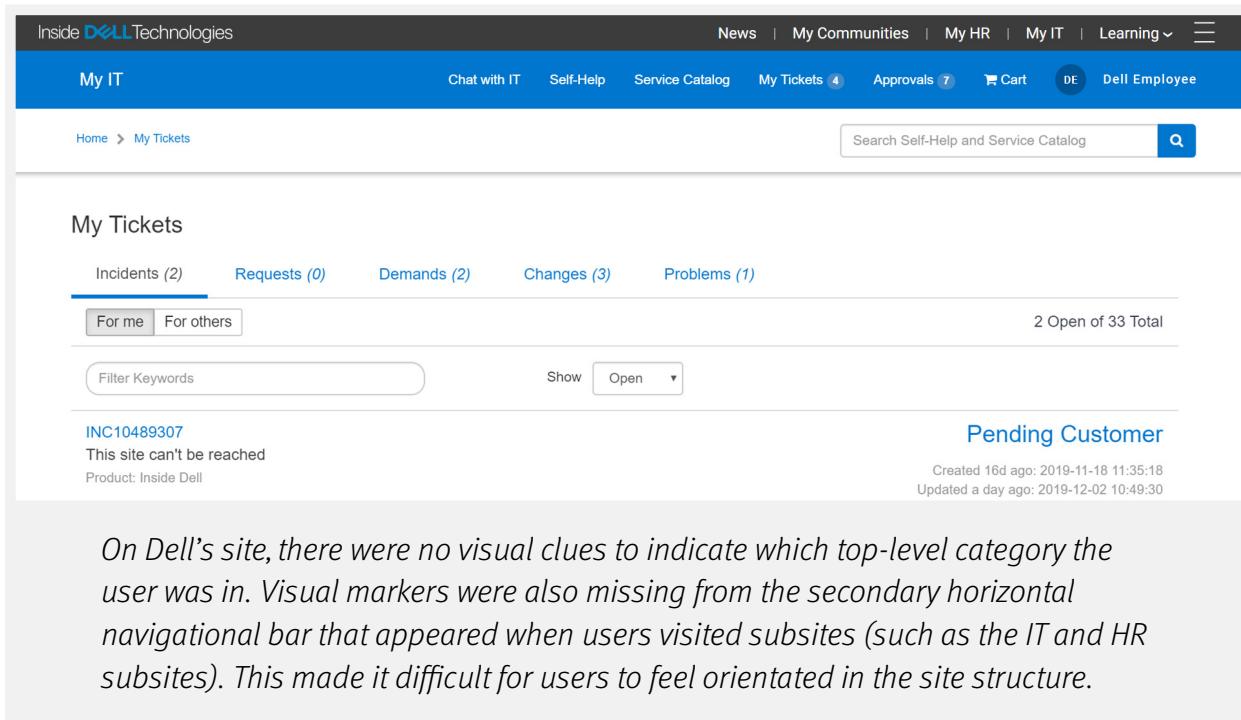
*On Saltire, the Scottish Government's intranet, the selected category in the main navigation is underlined, which is helpful since the menu spans the entire width of the main navigation bar. Additionally, each option selected in the cascading menu is highlighted in dark blue. Repetition of the categories labels makes it easy for users to understand what they are looking at.*

The GSA highlighted the top-level item in its intranet's main navigation to indicate which section of the site the user was in.

*On GSA's intranet, InSite, the top-level navigation category the user is in is highlighted in light gray. In addition, breadcrumbs and the local navigation ensure the user understands where they are in the site structure.*

When there are no visual indicators of which navigational items are selected, it can result in a somewhat confusing experience, as users try to scan the page and have to rely on other information-carrying elements to deduce where they are in the site structure.

On Dell Technologies' intranet, users often lost track of where they were because the top-level items in the main navigation were often not selected. Additionally, some of the top-level items were hidden behind a hamburger menu. When users were on one of the many subsites, a second navigational bar appeared, which also lacked visual selection cues, causing further confusion.

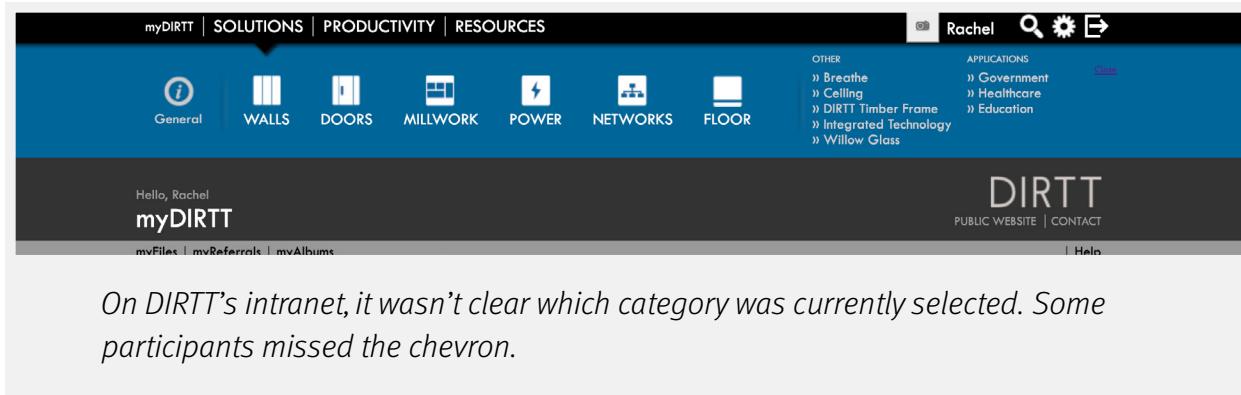


The screenshot shows the 'My Tickets' section of the Dell intranet. At the top, there's a header with the Dell logo, news links, and a 'Learning' dropdown. Below that is a blue navigation bar with 'My IT' selected. The main content area has a breadcrumb 'Home > My Tickets' and a search bar. The 'My Tickets' heading is followed by five categories: Incidents (2), Requests (0), Demands (2), Changes (3), and Problems (1). Below these are two buttons: 'For me' and 'For others'. To the right, it says '2 Open of 33 Total'. There's a 'Filter Keywords' input field and a 'Show' dropdown set to 'Open'. A specific ticket is highlighted: INC10489307, labeled 'Pending Customer'. It shows creation and update dates. A large callout box contains the following text:

*On Dell's site, there were no visual clues to indicate which top-level category the user was in. Visual markers were also missing from the secondary horizontal navigational bar that appeared when users visited subsites (such as the IT and HR subsites). This made it difficult for users to feel orientated in the site structure.*

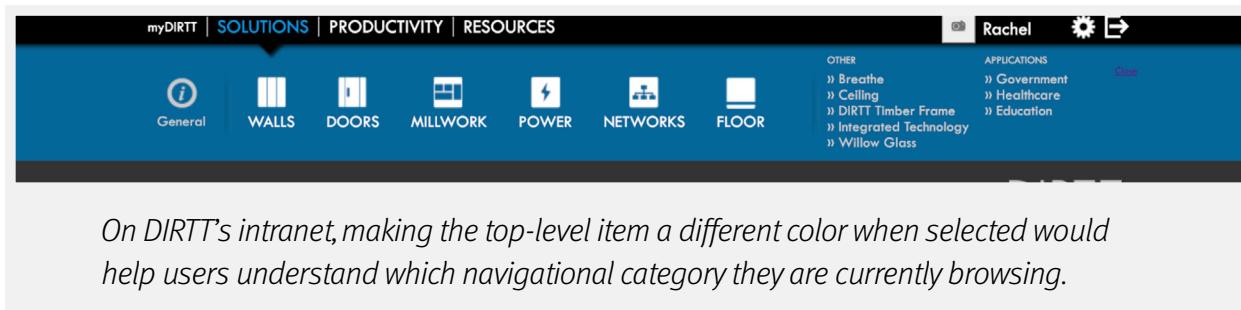
Dell's intranet could have been improved by introducing these visual selection cues and site-wide breadcrumbs. This would help users feel more orientated when using the site.

When DIRT employees were exploring the main navigation, they often lost track of which category they were in because the selection cues weren't very strong. When submenus cover the full width of the main navigation bar, strong selection cues are needed since users aren't seeing where the submenu originated from, unlike with a simple dropdown menu.



*On DIRT's intranet, it wasn't clear which category was currently selected. Some participants missed the chevron.*

To make it more obvious which category the secondary navigation items belong to, the link for the selected category could have been given an active link treatment, as shown below.



*On DIRT's intranet, making the top-level item a different color when selected would help users understand which navigational category they are currently browsing.*

## 78. Avoid making navigation sticky unless there's a proven need for it.

Sticky navigation is useful when pages are long, and users typically have to engage with content by scrolling a long way down a page; for example, news sites often have sticky navigation as users often spend time engaging with content down a long page. This means users don't need to scroll back up to find more content. However, sticky navigation takes up valuable screen real estate, reducing the overall space for content. This tradeoff is appropriate when pages are particularly long, but most pages on an intranet are not, and most require very little scrolling. As such, sticky navigation should be avoided.

Burns & McDonnell utilized sticky navigation on its intranet's desktop site. Unfortunately, the navigation took up over a quarter of the screen, blocking important information.

The screenshot shows a desktop view of an intranet site. At the top is a black header bar with the "MacCENTRAL |" logo. Below it is a blue navigation bar with links for "REFERENCE & RESEARCH", "MY STUFF", "OUR COMPANY", "RESOURCES", and "HR HUB". To the right of these are icons for notifications, settings, help, and a user profile labeled "GL". The main content area has a brown header with the word "Knovel". Below the header, there is descriptive text about Knovel's digital library, followed by a "New User to Knovel?" section. This section includes fields for "Username: work email" and "Password: create your own password", a note about cookie rememberance, and a tip about searching for document titles. To the right of this text are three user profile cards: "Employee Name (Section Manager)", "Employee Name (Librarian)", and "Employee Name (Library Assistant)". At the bottom of the page is a blue footer bar with social media icons for Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube, and a copyright notice: "© 2019, Burns & McDonnell. All rights reserved.".

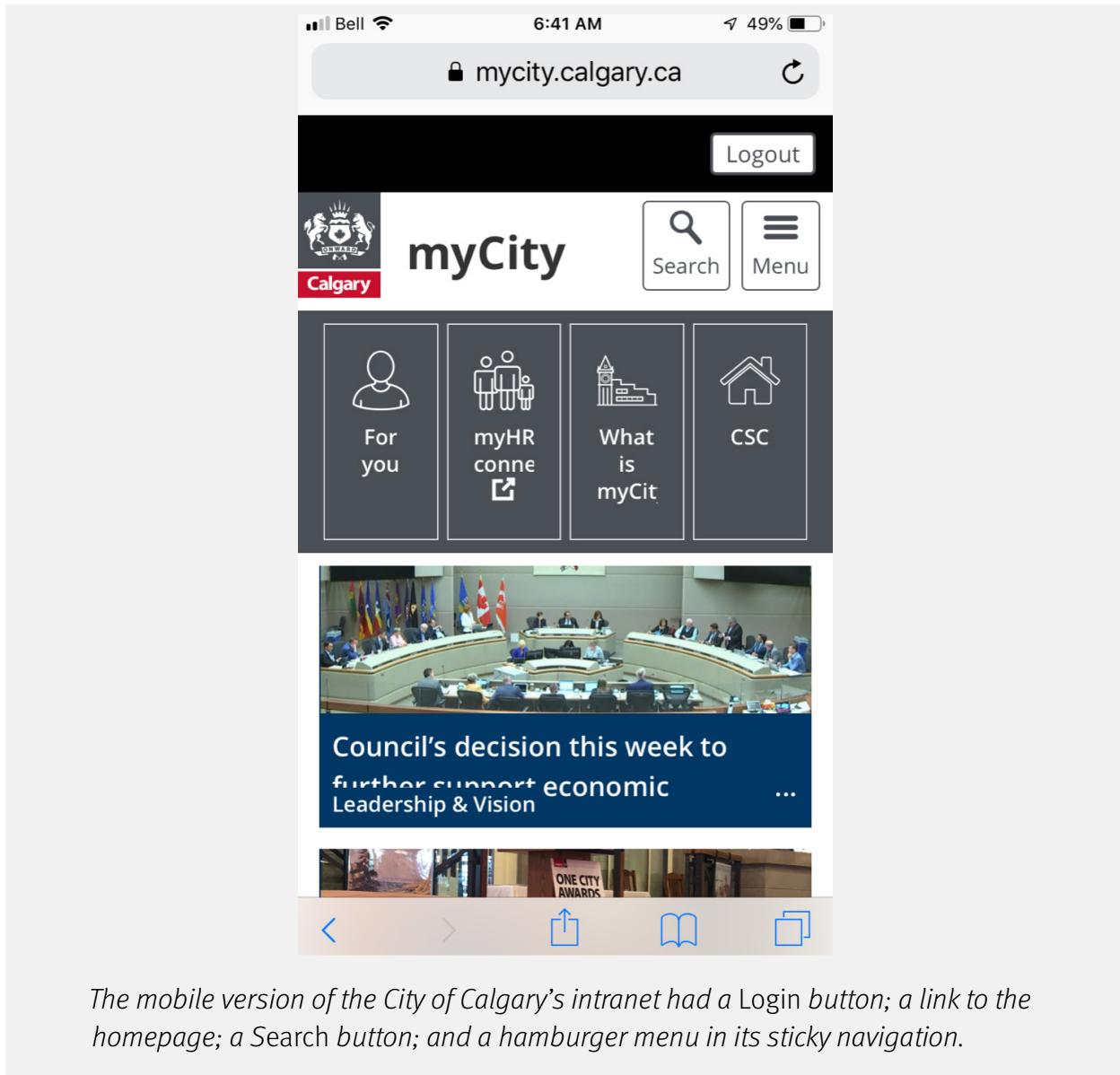
*On Burns & McDonnell's intranet, MacCentral, four sticky navigation bars — the MacCentral bar, the main navigation bar, the SharePoint bar, and the footer — take up valuable screen real estate.*

The only situation where sticky navigation may be useful on intranets is on a mobile version of your site. If you have a mobile app or users use the mobile browser routinely to perform tasks on the intranet, then there may be some benefits from providing sticky navigation. Still, the navigation should be small, especially since screen real estate is much more limited on mobile than on desktop.

On mobile, sticky navigation could include:

- A **login button** if users need to log in
- A **home link** if users often need to return to the intranet homepage
- A **hamburger menu** if users often use the navigation on mobile to find content
- A **back button** to take the user to the previous page they were on

User behavior and what your employees need should inform what you include in your navigation.



## 79. Design a consistent look and behavior for navigational elements across the intranet.

Utilizing a consistent design for navigational elements across your site will help users to form the right mental models and ensure that wherever a user is on the site, they can use the navigation effectively to find content. When navigational elements are styled differently or behave differently, users lose confidence and are more likely to make mistakes.



## Consistency and Standards

### Definitions, Principles, and Methods

The fourth of Jakob Nielsen's [ten usability heuristics](#) is [Consistency and Standards](#). Users shouldn't have to wonder whether UI items do the same thing as other similar ones. Being internally consistent with how you design navigational items can help users feel more confident when using your design.

For a consistent look, navigational elements should:

- Use the same fonts
- Use the same color treatment
- Apply the same visual design cues
- Be placed in a consistent location throughout the site

For consistent behavior, navigational elements should:

- Respond to a similar input method (e.g., hover, click, tap, etc.)
- Provide the same or similar responses (e.g., take the user to a new page, collapse or expand content, reveal a submenu, etc.)

Dell Technologies' intranet suffered from several consistency issues with its main navigation, as it appeared differently depending on whether the menu was open or partially closed behind a hamburger menu. There was also a lack of consistency in how items appeared when users interacted with certain menu items. For example, the *Learning* category opened a mega menu with descriptions of each link, while other categories with submenus had cascading menus. This contributed to the lack of confidence users had when they interacted with the navigation.

The screenshot shows the Inside Dell Technologies website's navigation bar. At the top, there are links for News, My Communities, My HR, My IT, Learning (with a dropdown arrow), Organizations (with a dropdown arrow), Offerings (underlined, indicating it's the current page), Tools & Resources (with a dropdown arrow), and a search icon. Below the main navigation, there are two main categories: 'Products' and 'Services'. 'Products' has a 'Solutions' link with a dropdown arrow, which is currently open, showing sub-items like Business Solutions, Financing and Payment, Industry Solutions, Infrastructure Solutions, Global Alliance Solutions, Premier Solutions, and (eCommerce). 'Services' has a 'Sales Knowledge Center' link with a dropdown arrow. On the right side of the page, there are 'FEEDBACK' and 'GLOBE' icons.

*Most of the InsideDELLTechnologies' main navigation items with submenus followed this cascading pattern. All items on the left have sub-items (although Products is missing a ">" and Solutions doesn't have one since this item is already open). Clicking on an item would present further options rather than take the user to a new page.*

The screenshot shows the Dell Learning category page. The main navigation bar at the top is identical to the one above. Below it, the 'Learning' link is underlined, indicating it's the current page. Under the 'Learning' link, there are five items: 'The Learning Studio', 'Dell Technologies Sales University', 'Dell Technologies Education Services', 'Educate Dell', and 'Product & Operations Academies'. Each of these items has a small description below it. On the right side of the page, there are 'FEEDBACK' and 'GLOBE' icons.

*Dell's Learning category had a completely different style for its submenu; each item led to a new page rather than exposing further options.*

To enforce consistency, a **style guide** or **pattern library** can help if you have multiple content editors controlling certain navigational items.



**Create style guides and pattern libraries to ensure consistency.**

#### Process and Strategic Considerations

If you have multiple content contributors across the organization and your intranet contains many components that content editors could use incorrectly, it's a good idea to craft a style guide or pattern library which contains examples of correct and incorrect implementations of navigational items.



## Style guide

### Definitions, Principles, and Methods

**Front-end style guides** are a modular collection of all the elements in your product's user interface, along with code snippets for developers to copy and paste as needed to implement those elements. They include common UI components like buttons, form-input elements, navigation menus, modal overlays, and icons.



## Pattern library

### Definitions, Principles, and Methods

**Pattern libraries** feature collections of UI-element groupings or layouts. They typically feature content structures, layouts, and/or templates. Like the components, the patterns are meant to be reused and adapted.

When performing a site audit, it's a good idea to document any inconsistencies in navigational treatments. These can then be tackled in any redesign efforts.

## 80. Don't make a menu option have two different interaction methods and two different outcomes.

Site navigation can become difficult to use when users can interact with the same menu item in different ways and trigger different outcomes. One common example of this problem is when hovering with a cursor over a navigational menu opens a dropdown but clicking on the same menu item takes the user to a new page. This can quickly become annoying when users — out of habit — accidentally click a menu item to open a menu and are taken to a new page instead. Additionally, this implementation is not accessible or accommodating for users on touch interfaces.

Although none of the intranets we studied in the last study had this exact problem, we did see examples where links in the local navigation led users to a new page, and a carrot next to the link exposed child pages.

**PAGES**

- Level 2 - Enterprise Digital Consumer Scorecard
  - Service To Sales Initiatives
  - Consumer Digital Consolidated Delivery View
  - Digital Team Ceremony Recomendation
  - Demo and QV Accounts
  - Digital Operational Support Matrix
- Digital Product Profiles
- Digital Top 5's
- Meeting notes

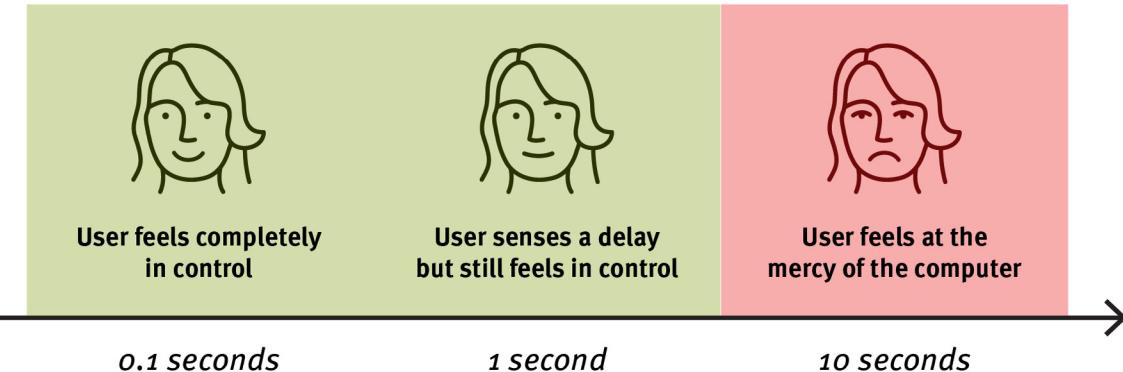
*On KeyBank's Confluence site, accordions in the left navigation provided a way to expose pages deeper in the site structure. Each link is a link to a page, but clicking the arrow also displays pages deeper in the site structure. When the users can interact with the same menu item in different ways and trigger different outcomes, it can make navigation difficult to use.*

If you need to implement an accordion link alongside a text link, ensure there is enough spacing between both elements so that it's clear to users that they are different links and, therefore, have different outcomes. This also makes it easy to select the right action.

## 81. Ensure dropdowns and cascading menus are quick to load.

When a user interacts with a navigational element (or any interactive element on a web page), the website shouldn't take longer than a few seconds to respond. When response times are longer than a second, users often feel like they're waiting for the system to "catch up." Typically, between 0.5 and one second is a good response time for navigational menus to respond to a user's selection.

## Website Response Times



*As the response time increases beyond one second, the user must wait for the system to catch up and feels a loss of control. This can result in an unsatisfactory user experience.*

Users sometimes experienced slow loading of its dropdown menus when interacting with The Co-operators' intranet. When users must wait for a system to respond, it slows down their process of finding information, and often, users will abandon using the navigation, especially when menus are cascading and require multiple clicks. "Now I'm thinking this is really slow," one user said when using the site.

If you find your menus are taking longer to load, investigate whether any changes to backend processes could speed up response times.

## 82. Change the color of visited inline links.

Having visited links change color helps users figure out where they've been before, and which link is a new one that they haven't tried yet. This means users don't have to remember which link they previously clicked on. Since people can only store so much information in their **working memory**, changing the color of visited links is an easy thing to do to support users so they can find information quickly and painlessly.



### Working memory is limited.

#### User Behaviors

Working memory can be thought of as a buffer or scratchpad in which the mind deposits information relevant to the current task. Unfortunately, Working memory is limited, so as more things are committed to memory, fewer earlier stored pieces of information can be retrieved successfully.

For many years, unvisited links have been colored blue, and links that have been visited are colored purple. We still recommend this as the easiest to understand, but you can certainly use a different color scheme if it fits better with your intranet design scheme. The key point is to **make unvisited links a brighter and more saturated color** than links to pages users have already visited, and you'll want to avoid problematic color combinations that color-blind users might not be able to distinguish.

The Co-operators' intranet, Source, displays visited links as purple, making it clear to users which page they have visited before.

While it's essential for inline links to have a visited status, it's not necessary to have breadcrumbs or items in the main or local navigation colored if users visit them.

# Methodology

# Intranet Guidelines Study Overview

In these studies, we used three methods — usability tests, contextual inquiries, and expert reviews — to gain a variety of insights into the usability and effectiveness of intranets as a whole.

## USABILITY STUDIES IN A LAB SETTING

We watched employees use their company's intranet in a lab setting at every company, typically a small conference room or an office. Employees used either a company computer or their own company-issued computer. Some participants also used their mobile phones. Researchers observed four to six employees at each study location in organizations that ranged from small companies to large enterprises across the United States, Canada, and Europe in the 2019 study.

We gave users tasks to perform and quietly observed them as they worked. Users were asked to think out loud as they completed their tasks. They were also told to carry out each task as far as they would if they were on their own. Following the completion of each task, the researcher presented users with a brief satisfaction survey and asked follow-up questions.

There were two types of tasks given to users: directed and exploratory.

- **Directed tasks** require the user to find a specific piece of information (e.g., Who is the CFO?) or perform a particular task, such as submitting a support ticket to the IT department. When a directed task is given, there is a clear endpoint: the user either finishes the task or gives up.
- **Exploratory tasks** allow for a more natural exploration of content. There is no right or wrong answer when an exploratory task is given. Administering these tasks reveals how discoverable and engaging the content is on the intranet. For example, users were asked to find a community group they might be interested in joining or to see if there were any news articles they'd like to read.

In each session, users performed the directed tasks first and then completed as many of the exploratory tasks as possible in the time remaining.

For directed tasks, we recorded how long each employee took to complete the task and whether the task had been completed successfully. Employees were unaware they were being timed, and we did not tell them they were being assessed on whether their answers were correct. None of these quantitative measures were used to assess the performance of participants included in our study. Instead, they helped us to evaluate the usability of many different intranet designs.

## Tasks

In each research study, we gave users similar types of tasks so that we could compare the performance of the same tasks across intranets, including those tested in previous studies. Although we tried to keep tasks consistent across organizations, the tasks administered varied slightly from one organization to another depending on what was offered on each intranet and what was realistic for employees to do. The table below shows the shell tasks (with an example) that were administered in many of the intranet studies.

TASK PREMISE	EXAMPLE	TYPE
Find a cafeteria menu	Use the intranet to find out what burger is being served in the cafeteria today. Tell the researcher your answer.	Directed
Find a colleague's office location	You've been told you need to speak to <name> from <a department>. Use the intranet to find where they are located. Tell the researcher your answer.	Directed
Sign up for training	Use the intranet to sign up for product owner training in October. Stop before signing up for the training but point to where you would click.	Directed
Find a specific piece of information	Your company offers tuition assistance. Use the intranet to find out how much money you can receive each year. Tell the researcher your answer.	Directed
Submit an IT request	Your office phone keeps dropping calls. Use the intranet to get it fixed. Go as far as you can without actually sending the request but point on the screen to where you would click.	Directed
Find the latest piece of news	Find the latest news article on the intranet. Tell the researcher your answer.	Directed
Find information about leadership	Use the intranet to find out when the Chief Operating Officer joined the company. Tell the researcher your answer.	Directed
Find a benefit	The company offers on-site childcare for employees. Use the intranet to find out how much it costs per month for a four-year-old child.	Directed
Request leave or vacation	Use the intranet to request a half-day off this coming Friday. Stop before submitting the request but point to where you would click.	Directed
Look for a job	A colleague mentioned there is a <certain job role> available. What level of education is needed to apply? Tell the researcher your answer.	Directed
Explore engagement with content types	Find a blog on the intranet that you'd be interested in reading. Say what you are thinking as you work on this activity.	Exploratory

Explore engagement with content types	Go to the intranet and see if there are any videos that interest you. Watch as many as you would like. Say what you are thinking as you work on this activity.	Exploratory
Explore engagement with content types	Read something interesting in Yammer. Say what you are thinking as you work on this activity.	Exploratory
Explore engagement with content types	Use the intranet to find a community you'd like to be a part of. Say what you are thinking as you work on this activity.	Exploratory
Explore engagement with content types	Use the intranet to find a piece of news you're interested in reading. Say what you are thinking as you work on this activity.	Exploratory

## CONTEXTUAL INQUIRY IN THE USER'S ENVIRONMENT

We carried out contextual inquiries with employees at several organizations in 2005, 2011, and 2019. During these sessions, we observed employees wherever they worked, usually at a desk but occasionally in less traditional spaces, such as the floor of a retail store, at the ticket gate of an airport, or even at a quarry!

In a contextual inquiry session, instead of giving users tasks (as in a usability test), we simply watch what users do in their everyday jobs. Doing so reveals more about how employees actually work (outside the artificial setting of a usability test). We were also able to observe more atypical aspects of use, for example, the experience of content editors using a content management system (CMS) to update content on the intranet.

To ensure contextual inquiry sessions were useful, employees were told to save work that involved using the intranet for the time they would spend being observed by a researcher. The sessions began with a short, semi-structured interview, followed by a period of uninterrupted observation. Follow-up questions were asked of participants after the observation period ended. Sessions lasted 90–120 minutes. We observed users interacting with other people, their computer, and the intranet. Watching users do their routine work gave us valuable insights into how well the intranet facilitated users' productivity, motivation, and information finding, as well as their everyday work.

## EXPERT REVIEWS

Based on watching hundreds of people use intranets over the years, combined with design and research experience and knowledge of design principles, researchers were able to make judgments about which designs might cause issues or help users as they reviewed the intranets on site. While watching actual users is far more important and telling, experts can provide insights about a design's potential effectiveness. Some of these thoughts are expressed in our reports.

## PARTICIPANTS

The intranet teams at each organization recruited employees for the usability tests and contextual inquiry sessions. We provided guidance for the recruitment, including stressing the need to recruit a representative sample (such as a mix of genders, ages, tenures, and roles).

All research participants knew their company had an intranet, and many of them said they used it every day or at least every week. Although one might assume daily users would be expert users, we found this was not the case. Our participants typically worked with only a small subset of features, such as looking up a phone number or reading company news.

## RECRUITING ORGANIZATIONS TO PARTICIPATE

To recruit for this study, we posted a call for participation on our website, on social media, and in our weekly email newsletter, asking organizations to allow us into their offices and give us access to both the intranet and its users. In return, the organizations received a usability study and an evaluation of their intranet's usability, plus they were promised a copy of these final NN/g research reports.

We selected a varied sample of intranets (custom-built versus commercial-off-the-shelf, tech stack, use of social features, etc.) and a varied set of organizations (industry type, size, country) to ensure our findings could be applied to many situations and intranet types.

Each intranet we studied had its own goals, lifespan, history, content, number of pages, and user types to support. They all had interesting qualities, whether it was a particular implementation approach or a design or organizational challenge. Our overarching goal was to study a widely diverse group of organizations and intranets. Our more specific research goals for this study differed somewhat from those of most design and development teams.

## RESEARCH GOALS

In carrying out our research, we had several research goals:

- **Observe how users use the intranet and digital workplace tools.** This insight informed our guidelines and recommendations.
- **Learn which design elements make intranets and digital workplace tools easy or difficult to use and why.** We used this information to describe real user scenarios and write the guidelines found in this report about intranet design and the various tools, applications, and separate websites that make up the digital workplace.
- **Observe how teams and individuals manage intranet content.** This information informed recommendations for how to organize and audit intranet content.

- **Collect metrics about basic intranet tasks.** We collected these numbers to get a benchmark of intranet usability today. We also wanted designers to be able to reproduce the study at their own organizations and compare results from their intranets to the ones in our study.

Some organizations house critical workplace functions **on the intranet**, while others **link to separate websites and applications**. The intranet, in concert with these external systems and tools, make up what we call the **digital workplace**. Simply put, it's all the online systems a person uses to do their job, communicate with coworkers, and manage their well-being as an employee. Throughout this report, We'll refer to the intranet and various digital workplace tools (separate websites and applications).



## Digital Workplace

### Definitions, Principles, and Methods

All the online systems a person uses to do their job, communicate with coworkers, and manage their well-being as an employee

# Intranet Guidelines Report Series

## NIELSEN NORMAN GROUP'S INTRANET REPORT SERIES

This is one of the report volumes generated from the findings gleaned from our intranet research studies. Based on these findings, we derived guidelines about many topics, each of which merited its own report.

The entire **Intranet Usability Guidelines** series is available for purchase and download from our website.

Volume 1: Intranet Content Strategy, Presentation, and Governance

Volume 2: Intranet Information Architecture, Navigation, and Menus

Volume 3: Intranet Search for Content, People, and Tools

Volume 4: Intranet Branding, Visual, and Interaction Design

The report series contains guidelines for good intranet design, along with descriptions and examples from the companies that formally participated in our studies. We also drew our recommendations from the intranet knowledge gained through our client work and from running our [Intranet Design Annual](#).

We hope that by studying the examples and guidelines in this report series, other designers will learn more about how to design usable intranets.

## About the Organizations in the Study

As the table below shows, we studied the usability of intranets at 57 different organizations from a wide variety of industries.

NAME	INDUSTRY	LOCATION
ABB	Power & automation technology	Zurich (Switzerland)
Allen & Gerritsen	Strategic marketing	Watertown, MA (US)
Amazon.com	Online retailer	Seattle, WA (US)
American Airlines	Airline	Fort Worth, TX (US)
Antigenics Corp.	Pharmaceutical	Lexington, MA (US)
Atrium Health	Healthcare group	Charlotte, NC (US)
Avery Dennison	Manufacturing	Headquarters in Pasadena, CA (US); study conducted in Brea, CA (US)
Bayer CropScience	Crop protection	Research Triangle Park, NC (US)
British Red Cross	Nonprofit/humanitarian aid	London (UK)
Burns & McDonnell	Engineering	Kansas City, MO (US)
Bracknell Forest Council	Local government	London (UK)
Cathay Pacific	Airline	Lantau, Hong Kong (China)
Chick-fil-A	Restaurant chain	Atlanta, GA (US)
CIT Group, Inc.	Financial services	Livingston, NJ (US)
City of Calgary	Local government	Calgary (Canada)
Consumers' Association	Nonprofit/publication	London (UK)
Co-operators	Insurance	Guelph (Canada)
Currie & Brown	Construction risk management	London (UK)
Dell	Technology	Round Rock, TX (US)
DIRTT	Design-build construction	Calgary (Canada)
Dispatch Printing Company	Four media outlets (network, cable, and two radio stations)	Columbus, OH (US)
Dubai Chamber of Commerce & Industry	Government	Dubai (UAE)
Easter Seals, Inc.	Nonprofit/health and human services	Chicago, IL (US)
Elsevier	Science, technical, and health publishing	Amsterdam (The Netherlands) and Philadelphia, PA (US)

Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University	Higher education	Daytona Beach, FL (US)
Eyeo GmbH	Software	Cologne (Germany)
First Solar	Energy	Perrysburg, OH (US)
Fortum	Energy	Espoo (Finland)
General Services Administration	Government agency	Washington D.C. (US)
HealthGrades	Technology/healthcare	Denver, CO (US)
Houses of Parliament	Government	London (UK)
Kaplan	Education and test preparation	New York, NY (US)
KeyBank	Bank	Cleveland, OH (US)
Kulicke & Soffa	Semiconductor	Willow Grove, PA (US)
Lower Colorado River Authority (LCRA)	Energy, water, parks, and community service	Austin, TX (US)
Luck Companies	Mining and stone retailing	Richmond, VA (US)
Mayo Clinic	Healthcare	Rochester, MN (US)
Millennium Pharmaceuticals	Biochem R&D	Cambridge, MA (US)
Nestlé Group	Food	Vevey (Switzerland)
New York Life Insurance	Life insurance	New York, NY (US)
Northern Alberta Institute of Technology	Technical school	Edmonton (Canada)
Microwave Data Systems (MDS)	Wireless networking	Rochester, NY (US)
NetApp	Computer storage	Sunnyvale, CA (US)
Rabobank International	Finance & banking	Utrecht (The Netherlands)
Royal National Lifeboat Institution	Charity	Poole (UK)
Salesforce.com	Customer relationship management	San Francisco, CA (US)
Scottish Government	Government agency	Edenborough (Scotland)
San Juan Unified School District	Public school district	Sacramento, CA (US)
Sharp HealthCare	Healthcare	San Diego, CA (US)
Shell UK (IT Intranet)	Energy, petrochemical oil	Study done in London (UK); but IT head office is in Houston, TX (US)
Sprint	Telecommunications	Overland Park, KS (US)
State of California Employment Development Department (EDD)	State government agency	Sacramento, CA (US)
Towers Perrin	Global professional services	Philadelphia, PA (US)

U-Haul International, Inc.	Moving, transportation, manufacturing, and retail	Phoenix, AZ (US)
University Health Network (UHN)	Healthcare	Toronto, Ontario (Canada)
Vytra Health Plans	Managed healthcare	Melville, NY (US)
Wildcard Systems, Inc.	Financial services	Maitland, FL (US)

# Authors & Acknowledgements

# Author Biographies

**Anna Kaley** is a Senior UX Specialist with Nielsen Norman Group. Before joining NN/g, Anna worked for more than 10 years in UX architecture and digital strategy. She has conducted complex user research and experience design for healthcare, agriculture, finance, tourism, retail, and engineering clients. Most recently, she worked at a large retailer where she was responsible for ecommerce UX in both B2C (business-to-consumer) and B2B (business-to-business) channels. Anna is skilled at using qualitative and quantitative research methodologies throughout the design process to drive conversion, increase revenue, and improve satisfaction. She also has expertise in digital media planning, search marketing, and graphic design.

Anna has held UX roles on internal product teams and in digital agencies of various sizes and understands the challenges that UX professionals face in both contexts. This familiarity helps her bring a well-rounded approach to her projects and instruction. Anna has a Bachelor of Journalism degree with an emphasis in strategic communication. She attended the University of Missouri, Columbia.

**Maria Rosala** is a Senior UX Specialist with Nielsen Norman Group. Maria has a decade of experience conducting UX research. At Nielsen Norman Group she provides research services and advice to clients across numerous industries including construction, fast-moving consumer goods, pharma, and education. Prior to joining NN/g, Maria worked as a UX researcher in the UK government, where she carried out research in the UK and internationally to improve numerous digital products and services, including internal casework systems, online visa applications, and public-facing websites.

Maria has conducted usability evaluations on a variety of intranets at public and private organizations in North America and Europe for the 4th edition of the *Intranet Guidelines Report*.

Maria has a BSc in Philosophy from the London School of Economics and Political Science and an MSc in Human-Computer Interaction and Ergonomics from University College London.

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