

Title:

Extranets For Advertising Agencies

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Summary:

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Article Body:

Ideally, clients and agencies have aligned interests, and they usually do. Today there are real challenges to that important alignment, forcing clients and agencies to look for new and better ways to collaborate. Enter easy-to-use, web based extranets.

What is an extranet?

Specifically, an extranet is a private web site that provides a secure environment for a select group of users to share documents and information.

Although it is accessed through a web browser, such as Internet Explorer, it differs from a public web site in that it can be used only by an audience that has permission to access it through the use of IDs and passwords.

Agencies use extranets as a client service tool to share documents with clients and vendors, to organize projects, and to archive previous work for direct client access. There is no limit on the size of files that can be posted, allowing agencies to share text documents, graphics, audio, video, message

boards, and data.

Often, extranets are used to replace email as a means to communicate within and across work groups. Unlike email, all communication is secure and any size document can be exchanged. Plus, an extranet provides a system for filing all the documents into project-related folders as part of the exchange process.

An extranet increases agency efficiency and makes a client's life easier by saving time and frustration. An extranet facilitates faster and easier access to materials. Essentially, it is a web-based filing cabinet shared by the agency and its client.

Controlled by the agency, it puts both current projects and past work within easy reach at any time, resulting in significant time savings for both you and your client.

It provides instant client feedback and a permanent record of all comments and activity. Input and decisions are fully documented, and the work-flow moves faster in a more informed environment.

In addition to supporting day-to-day client service, extranets can be used in a variety of ways. Agencies with retail clients use them to service retail locations throughout the country, or to support clients with multiple offices that need a single source for the agency's work.

Choosing an extranet

As with all ad agency software, when choosing an extranet there are a variety of choices, each with its own strengths and weaknesses. Here are some questions to ask yourself as you examine the alternatives:

Does it support the way you work now? If you have to change the way you work, it's possible that your staff will be reluctant to use it. The extranet design should allow you to move forward without upsetting the way you and your clients currently work together.

Will your staff and client want to use it? The more complex the extranet, the less it will be used. Consider carefully the features that you really need, and choose an extranet that offers only those features. That will assure that it's easy to learn, and easy to use.

Does it have the tools your agency needs? Make sure that the extranet supports all the applications used in agency/client collaboration. For instance, assure

that it will stream audio and video. And look for tools that allow you to create folder structures that mimic your current approach to communicating, filing work, etc.

Today, clients have less and less time. Projects are moving faster and faster, and there is less administrative support available to both client and agency.

An extranet addresses these issues directly, and offers the advantage of having all pertinent information available 24/7 from literally anyplace on the globe, within a highly secure environment.

Ultimately, the case for an extranet is driven by everyone's desire to be more efficient and effective, with less frustration and aggravation.