



**Customer Carewords®**

Top Task Management for Websites

# Increasing employee productivity in a networked world

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A revolution in efficiency and productivity is underway and it is being driven by the intranet; the internal workplace. However, most organizations are only operating at 60 percent efficiency. This huge efficiency gap is not primarily because of technology but rather because internal work systems are poorly designed and managed. For those organizations that truly make the intranet work there is major competitive advantage to be gained. These organizations will attract—and keep—the best and brightest employees who have come to expect an easy to use, socially connected online world.

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## Finding people: the intranet's top task

The modern organization is increasingly physically distributed; fluid and connected. Some years ago we did a top task identification project for the BBC. Find people was the top task. "That's an interesting problem," one of the managers said. "Years ago it would have been relatively easy; you just made sure the employee directory was up-to-date. But today, half of the people don't even work for the BBC. They're contractors or independent film makers."

Your challenge as a modern manager is to create a network of people. The right person for the right job is the person who is available right now. The right person with the right answer to this problem that is keeping you from making the sale or solving the query your customer has with your product. Finding people is the foundation of the modern, networked, connected organization.

I've done to work a lot with Microsoft over the years. On one of my trips to the Redmond campus I visited a building that had recently been refurbished. The old building had lots of individual offices; the new one had lots of open space. I was informed that twenty years ago it was everyone's dream to have an office of their own but that the newer, younger employees preferred the more open collaborative spaces.

I have also done a lot of work with Cisco. Most of this work is virtual; shared screens and audio. There can be 15-20 people in conference and they can be from all over the United States, from Canada, from Ireland, wherever. It is amazing how productive these meetings are and how little the physical location matters. This is the irony of the modern organization. Employees are often physically dispersed but highly connected. The young workforce is social and connected. A great intranet allows people to connect and work together in the most productive manner. The organizations that enable their employees to quickly and easily find the right people will have a major competitive advantage.

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## Achieve 40% efficiency improvement

I was at a conference in 2010 where a speaker asked the audience of some 600 intranet professionals how many of their organizations used SAP. About 70 percent of the audience put

their hands up. Then the speaker asked the audience: “How many of you like using SAP?” Not a single hand went up. Not one. Over the years I have been struck by how incredibly badly designed internal systems are. Most internal tools I come across are more like instruments of torture than the drivers of efficiency they are supposed to be.

I once had problems with my online banking. After lots of frustration from technical support, I rang my bank manager. Whenever in the past I had a problem he had been extremely helpful and made sure it was resolved immediately. This time around was different. “I’m not technical,” he told me. He began to talk about his bank’s online banking service as if it were a foreign country he had rarely visited. He was behaving like many senior managers do when it came to IT-related issues. It was not his domain.

It’s time management got serious about all this IT stuff. We are increasingly living and working in the world that IT has created. The online world—both the intranet and the public Web—must be top of the agenda for all senior managers who are thinking in a genuinely strategic fashion.

“Most senior executives have assessed that their workforce is operating at only 60% to 65% of their potential,” a 2009 white paper entitled *The High Cost of Doing Nothing*, from The Ken Blanchard Companies states. “As surprisingly low as this may sound, it is very similar to the results of a large survey of 1,300 private-sector companies conducted by Proudfoot Consulting in 2002. In that survey, conducted with companies from seven of the world’s leading economies, Proudfoot found that, on average, only 59% of work time is productive.”

“Although most people are working very hard these days, we have found that each individual in an organization can still increase productivity by at least 30%,” productivity expert Tor Dahl states. “How can that be? The answer lies in the fact that most workers, often of no fault of their own, are not working on the right things in the right way. The culprits are a variety of organizational ‘ills,’ including lack of clear directions and goals, sub-optimized processes, excessive paperwork and reporting requirements, unproductive meetings, inappropriate systems and tools, etc.”

When you make life harder for your employees you reduce efficiency and affect morale. Employees hate these clunky, horrible processes that make their worklife a drudge. There is a direct correlation between employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction. There is clear evidence that increasing customer satisfaction increases profitability, particularly over the long term. It has been found that for a typical organization, moving from average to exceptional customer satisfaction levels translates into a 3.8% increase in revenue growth.

Anthony Rucci, Steven Kirn, and Richard Quinn first quantified this connection in the late 1990’s when they identified that every 1.3% increase in customer satisfaction scores corresponded with a subsequent 0.5% increase in revenue growth.

Such huge potential. Think about it. If you can make it easier and faster for your employees to do their jobs, everybody wins. Employees are more satisfied and productive. This results in better services and better customer care. Productivity rises and thus profitability rises. Customer satisfaction rises and thus profitability and customer loyalty (long-term profitability) rises. This is genuinely a non-zero sum game. The intranet has huge potential. You’re sitting on a goldmine, but you’re treating it like a coal mine.

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## Employee time is the most precious resource

A couple of years ago I met a manager who had been specifically appointed by the CEO to improve employee morale. I gave him data that showed that his intranet had the lowest employee satisfaction ratings that we had found so far. He shrugged. "That's an IT challenge," he said. "It's not my area of responsibility."

I recently talked to employee in one of the world's largest and most prestigious organizations. "We have invested an incredible amount of money in a Knowledge Base," he stated. "But nobody can find anything in it. It's a joke among employees but senior managers seem to think it's a great success. They never use it, of course."

I recently visited the office of a large organization as a customer. I asked a particular question that my contact there didn't have the answer to. "Let me just check that up," she said. And there began an embarrassing and frustrating journey through her organization's intranet and one application in particular. She kept apologizing and I told her not to worry, that I worked as an intranet consultant and I came across these issues all the time. I asked her if she thought that senior managers cared about any of this. She raised her eye brows. "Absolutely not," she said. "It's not on their radar at all."

I read about a recent European tour that some Chinese businessmen carried out. As they were travelling through France, one said to his interpreter. "Do they really only work two days a week in France?" This Chinese businessman was dividing the 36 hour French working week by the number of hours per day he worked. How does Europe or America compete with China, India or Brazil? Do we have lower wages? Are we prepared to work longer hours?

The secret, of course, lies in productivity. We have to do a lot more with less time. In Hernando De Soto's groundbreaking book, *The Mystery of Capital*, he explains that there is a direct relationship between time management and prosperity. The less sophisticated, the less advanced, the less prosperous a society is, the less important time is. De Soto gives a number of examples.

- To create a legal business for a small garment shop in Lima, Peru, took 6 hours a day for 289 days.
- To obtain legal authorization to build a house on state-owned land in Peru took almost 7 years - requiring 207 administrative steps in 52 government offices.
- In Egypt the person who wants to acquire and legally register a lot on state-owned desert land must wend his way through at least 77 bureaucratic procedures and at least 31 public and private agencies. This can take anywhere from 5 to 14 years.

Booking a meeting room, finding an expert, assembling a new team, finding the right training, purchasing something; on a typical intranet is a Kafkaesque experience worthy of another book by De Soto.

I once explained to a manager at a large and prestigious organization that we could save 5 minutes every time an employee searched for a an office location by simplifying the process and making

sure all maps were up to date. "They could be out smoking a cigarette," was his reply. Yes, they could. Or they could be using that 5 minutes to think up a new product idea, to help a customer on a support call, to clinch a sale. It is of management's job to ensure that the five minutes saved is well used. But if the process is not fixed then the 5 minutes is definitely lost productivity.

Less than 50% of the time spent by employees is on activities that add value to the end product or service, according to Saved Time, Saved Value, a study published in 2010 by Celerant Consulting. "As American companies slashed jobs during the downturn, something interesting happened," Business Insider wrote in May 2010. "Their output didn't fall by nearly as much as their workforce size. Many companies found all kinds of ways to use the same number of people to do more. This has shown up in the U.S. macro data -- U.S. worker productivity has surged over the last four quarters."

"Are Americans being forced to work their tails off like never before?" Business Insider asked. "For many that may be the case, but surging productivity represents higher output per hour, so it's not simply people working longer. Could it be that Americans are working smarter? We all may like to think this is the case on an individual basis, but higher productivity could also be the result of workers and managers simply wasting less time than they used to."

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## Managing top tasks

Every intranet and every public website is essentially an amalgamation of tasks. We come to the Web to do things. When was the last time you went to a search engine and said: "I just don't know what to search for. Someone give me a word." Intranets are particularly task driven. You have a problem. You want to solve it as quickly as possible. The best definition of an intranet I ever heard was from an employee who when asked what her idea of a perfect intranet was, replied:

"A perfect intranet is a survivor's guide to a crappy week."

Customer Carewords has been working on intranets since 1997, including those of Tetra Pak, IKEA, Schlumberger, the US Internal Revenue Service, the BBC, Rolls Royce and others. We have never come across a good intranet whose core essence was not task-focused. Using a unique methodology, over 30,000 employees have voted on what their top tasks are. The top 10 are as follows:

1. Find people (phone directory/book, expert)
2. Procedures, policies, guidelines, standards
3. News
4. Training, learning, courses
5. Job Vacancies
6. Products, product support
7. Find a location

8. Employee benefits
9. Pay / salary details
10. Attendance and leave (holidays, maternity, sick, annual, special, overtime, etc.)

Our essential approach is called top task management. We seek to help organizations identify—with facts, not opinions—the top tasks, and then give them a management model to continuously improve these tasks.

‘Top’ is a very important word here. We have clear and unambiguous evidence that there are a relatively small set of top tasks in any intranet that are hugely important to efficiency and productivity. Equally, there are a huge number of tiny tasks that waste the intranet team’s time in launching or publishing them. Not alone that, they waste employees’ time because they clutter the search results and make the navigation more confusing—thus making it more difficult for employees to complete top tasks.

Great intranets are managed based on a philosophy of continuous improvement of the top tasks. Poor intranets exhibit an approach which is project-based and exhibits a launch and leave culture.

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## Tetra Pak’s focus on productivity

Tetra Pak has taken the concepts of top task management for an intranet further than any other organization we have worked with. Senior management established a clear vision:

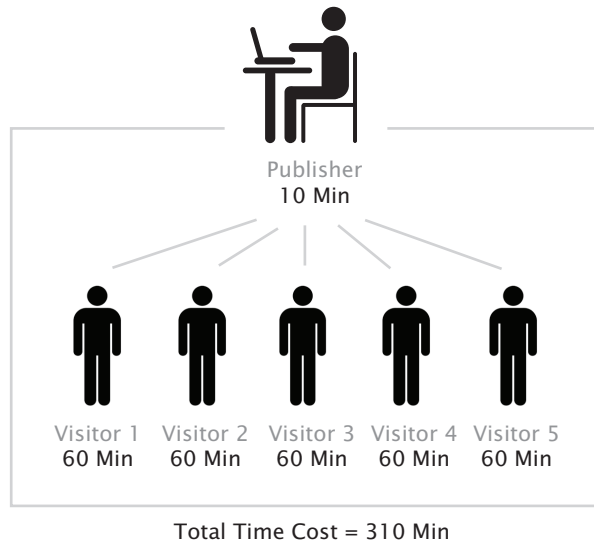
The intranet’s number one objective is to make staff more productive.

The top tasks were identified and then their performance was measured based on time and motion studies of typical employees trying to complete these tasks. As a result of measuring these top tasks it became clear that there were three underlying factors that were affecting task performance:

1. Confusing menus and links
2. Poor search results
3. Out-of-date information

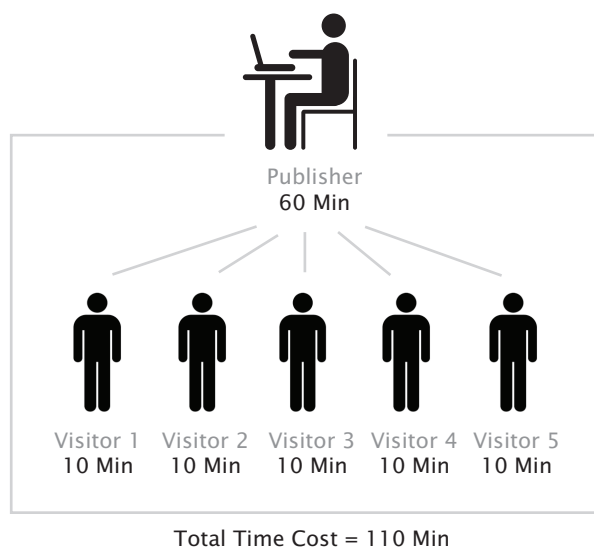
From all the data we have analyzed about why people are dissatisfied with their ability to complete tasks on websites, “confusing menus and links” is significantly ahead as the most important issue. “Poor search results” is also very significant, but confusing menus and links is the top issue for both intranets and public websites. It is the number one issue for government and commercial websites. It is the number one issue in the United States, Canada, UK, Sweden and Norway. Basically, everywhere we test, it’s the number one issue.

Tetra Pak embraced the continuous improvement philosophy based on employee behavioral evidence. "Facts, not opinion" became a mantra. And that's the way the Web is going; towards making decisions based on behavior data. Tetra Pak began to improve the quality of the links, the search and the content, bit by bit, based on rigorous testing. And there was a strong focus on saving employees time.



The preceding image shows the publisher spending 10 minutes publishing a piece of content. It's a rushed job. The content is not written for the Web, nor is it optimized for search. Thus, employees spend 60 minutes trying to find and understand it.

The next image tells a different story.



Here the publisher spends 60 minutes. It's well written for the Web. It's optimized for search so it's very easy to find. Thus, employees now spend 10 minutes finding and understanding it. Tetra Pak wins big using the second approach, but the individual publisher loses 50 minutes. And here is the absolute heart of the problem. Here is the essential reason why intranets and internal applications fail to reach their potential.

The time of the people who create and publish content and internal applications is measured and managed, but the time of the employees who need to use these resources is not. This is the core challenge of modern management: to manage based on use, not production.

Tetra Pak is one of the few organizations I have found that is doing just that. In one small area of their business it has found that improving five tasks results in a time saving corresponding to more than €125,000 per year. As another example, in the Human Resource section for Sweden they needed less people for phone support after they introduced the task-based approach.

"Following the Task Based strategy has been the foundation of our work to successfully develop our intranet," Gabriel Olsson, Tetra Pak e-Communications Director states. "We have used the Customer Carewords real customer-centric approach to improve the ability of our employees to solve frequently performed tasks—in one area more than +50 % improvement was achieved."

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## Frederick Taylor and task management

Modern management owes more to Frederick Taylor than to any other single figure. In his book on Frederick Taylor, *The One Best Way*, Robert Kanigel describes a meeting of Philadelphia's Franklin Institute in April 1901. There, "Link-Belt's Charles Day noted that a cast-iron ring once taking fourteen hours to manufacture now took three and a half; what he called "the age of intensified production" had arrived, and in this new age the workman counted as much as the machine."

In knowledge work, the worker should count much more than the technology. The intranet—and all internal applications—are not an IT challenge; they are a management challenge. Intranets need the strategic insight and drive of senior management.

In a growing number of organizations, responsibility for the intranet has moved away from IT to Communications. There are many wonderful internal communicators out there who truly get the Web, but giving an intranet to a traditional, old school communicator is like giving a pub to an alcoholic. The desire of many communicators is to communicate, communicate, communicate and publish, publish, publish.

In an increasing number of intranets it is communicators who are contributing most to information overload. Instead of being productivity drivers for organizations intranets are thus becoming productivity drags. However, it is not just communications departments that are damaging the intranet's potential. Other departments often see their intranet pages as an opportunity for vanity publishing. ("Welcome to our department. Here's a nice picture of our boss.")

If Frederick Taylor were around today he would be truly shocked by the state of the typical intranet. In the late Nineteenth Century, Taylor often went against the common wisdom which was basically that the cheaper the raw materials were and the longer you made people work, the more money you made. Taylor focused on working smarter, not longer or harder. With smart work Taylor proved that you could reduce work hours while dramatically increasing productivity. We are in sore need of some smart work practices for the knowledge workers of today.

Peter Drucker said of Taylor: "Frederick W. Taylor was the first man in recorded history who deemed work deserving of systematic observation and study. On Taylor's 'scientific management' rests, above all, the tremendous surge of affluence in the last seventy-five years. Taylor ... laid only first foundations, however. Not much has been added to them since - even though he has been dead all of sixty years."

It's time to lay some more. Taylor focused on the physical factories, on the hands that shoveled coal, on the eyes that measured steel. He asked: What is the job? How can we do this better, faster, easier, more accurately, more cheaply? Today, we need to focus on the knowledge factories, the Web workplace, on the hands that type on keyboards, on the eyes that scan webpages.

The efficiency, the productivity, the growth in wealth and opportunity, the innovation and competitiveness of the future is online. Frederick Taylor was the world's first management consultant. His focus was on factories. If he was around today his focus would be on the Web, because the Web (intranet and public website) is where the future of the organization is at. And the future is right now.

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The High Cost of Doing Nothing

[http://www.kenblanchard.com/img/pub/Blanchard\\_The\\_High\\_Cost\\_of\\_Doing\\_Nothing.pdf](http://www.kenblanchard.com/img/pub/Blanchard_The_High_Cost_of_Doing_Nothing.pdf)

Saved Time, Saved Value

[http://www.celerantconsulting.com/Downloads/ResearchReviews/Saved%20Time%20Saved%20Value\\_Workforce%20Impactability%20Study.pdf](http://www.celerantconsulting.com/Downloads/ResearchReviews/Saved%20Time%20Saved%20Value_Workforce%20Impactability%20Study.pdf)

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## About Gerry McGovern

Gerry focuses on helping organizations create customer-centric websites. Since 1994, when he started his web career, he has published five books and consulted in 35 countries. His latest book is called *The Stranger's Long Neck* (A&C Black, 2010). He is CEO of Customer Carewords Ltd whose clients include the Microsoft, Cisco, Tetra Pak, and the OECD. In 2006, *The Irish Times* described him as one of five visionaries who had had a major impact on the development of the Web.

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## About Customer Carewords

Helping you to truly understand what the top tasks of your customers are when they come to your website and how well these tasks are performing is what we do. By continuously improving the performance of your customers' top tasks, you will maximize the performance of your website.

We have been developing customer centric strategies for websites since 1994, identifying the top tasks of thousands of customers and employees for organizations such as Microsoft, Cisco, Tetra Pak, US Internal Revenue Service, NHS Choices, Rolls-Royce, BBC, Innovation Norway, etc. We have partners in the UK, Holland, Sweden, Norway, Canada and United States.

The Customer Carewords approach is built around the following ideas:

- Customers come to your public website or intranet to complete tasks. (Staff are the intranet's customers.)
- Customers have a small set of top tasks (the Long Neck). These tasks are vital to the success of your website and you must seek to continuously improve the ability of your customers to complete them quickly and easily.
- Customers use a small set of words to describe their top tasks (carewords).
- The words that your customers use to describe their tasks are often very different from the words your organization uses.
- Organizational words (jargon, marketing waffle) are one of the key reasons for task failure on the Web.

Customer Carewords is a set of research tools and techniques that help you identify on an ongoing basis:

- Your customers' top tasks (and their related words).
- How well your customers are able to complete their top tasks on your website (completion rates, completion times, disaster rates).
- What specific factors on your website are causing problems as your customers seek to complete their tasks (the navigation, the content, the search, etc.).

The company was founded by Gerry McGovern, who started his web career in 1994. He has published five books on creating customer centric websites. He has appeared on CNN, the BBC, MSNBC, and has spoken on the subject of customer centric web management in 35 countries.

“Following the Task Based strategy has been the foundation of our work to successfully develop our intranet. We have used the Customer Carewords real customer-centric approach to improve the ability of our employees to solve frequently performed tasks—in one area more than +50 % improvement was achieved.”

**Gabriel Olsson, e-Communications Director, Tetra Pak**

“Our work with Customer Carewords increased understanding across our team of the specific tasks that our customers are trying to accomplish and how best to address their needs. The result is a significant improvement (+20%) in our customers’ ability to find what they need on Pinpoint.”

**Peter Horsman, Global Site Management Lead for Microsoft Pinpoint**

“The Customer Carewords customer-centric approach to website development has helped us re-shape and dramatically improve Cisco’s Partner Central by focusing on and addressing the needs of our global partner community.”

**Luanne Tierney, Vice President, Worldwide Partner Marketing, Cisco**

