

Anderson & Associates, Inc.

When web technology began to take off in the 1990s, Anderson & Associates was one of the first AEC firms to see the impact it could make on its business. The 200-person consulting engineering firm has developed a range of information technology (IT) services to its municipal client base that generate approximately \$1 million a year. The firm's IT services range from GIS and web site development to data storage. It's even an Internet service provider.

So it shouldn't be any surprise that Anderson & Associates has put web technology to good use on its intranet. The site, initially launched in the middle of 1997, has been an important tool for boosting the firm's productivity.

Anderson & Associates developed its intranet with in-house staff. The firm initially formed a cross-functional committee that met regularly to brainstorm ideas for the intranet. The committee included the firm's information technology manager, web designer, and other IT staff. It also included others outside the information technology department such as Ken Anderson, the firm's president

intranet details

Firm size: 200

Firm type: Consulting engineering

Launched: 1997

Start up cost: Approximately \$15,000

Maintenance cost: Approximately \$5,000 a year

Who led the launch? A cross-functional committee provided direction for the development of the site. A web designer implemented the web committee's ideas.

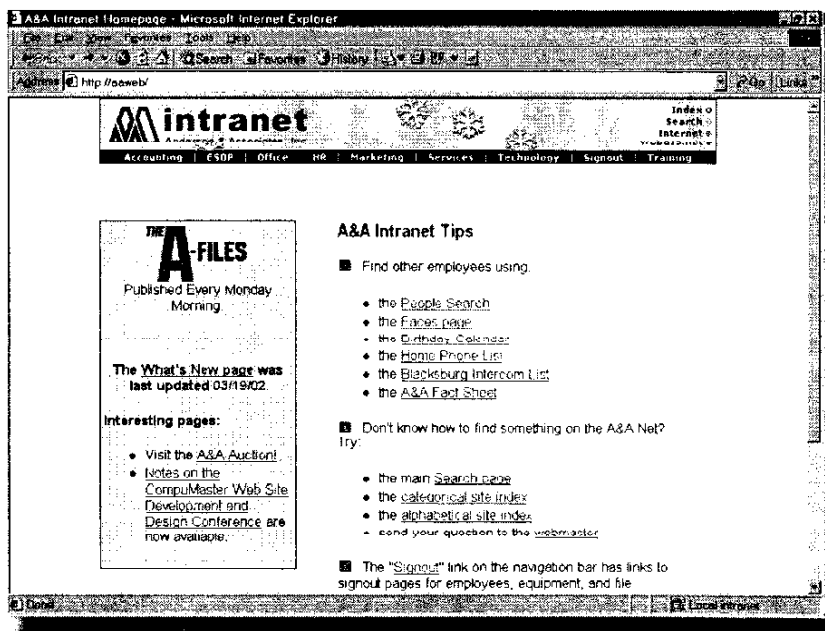
Who maintains the site? The web development team handles technical maintenance. The responsibility for posting content is spread among numerous employees.

Results: The intranet has improved productivity by placing information at employees' fingertips, minimizing interruptions from others looking for information, and reducing foot traffic.

Advice: "I think it's very important to start off with an initial committee and decide what content you want to have on your intranet.

Determine what's going to be beneficial to your employees. Secondly, it needs to be organized in a manner that things are easily accessed.

Organization is a very key part of the intranet."—
Kim Dickerson, Office manager



The home page of Anderson & Associates' intranet includes a taskbar menu, information on what's new, and quick links for some of the most popular features.



Anderson & Associates practices open-book management. The intranet's accounting page provides links to financial statistics and includes explanations of what they are and why they're important.

and CEO, the creative services project manager, and a marketing representative.

The committee provided an overall vision and direction for the intranet that the web developer used to design and build the site. The site was built with Active Server Pages to link to existing databases.

The site has evolved a number of times since its initial launch. Employee feedback has been a key driver of the site's evolution. "As the intranet developed and evolved, employees would make comments. They would tell us if things weren't working or give us suggestions for improvements," says Kim Dickerson, office manager for the firm's Blacksburg, Virginia, headquarters.

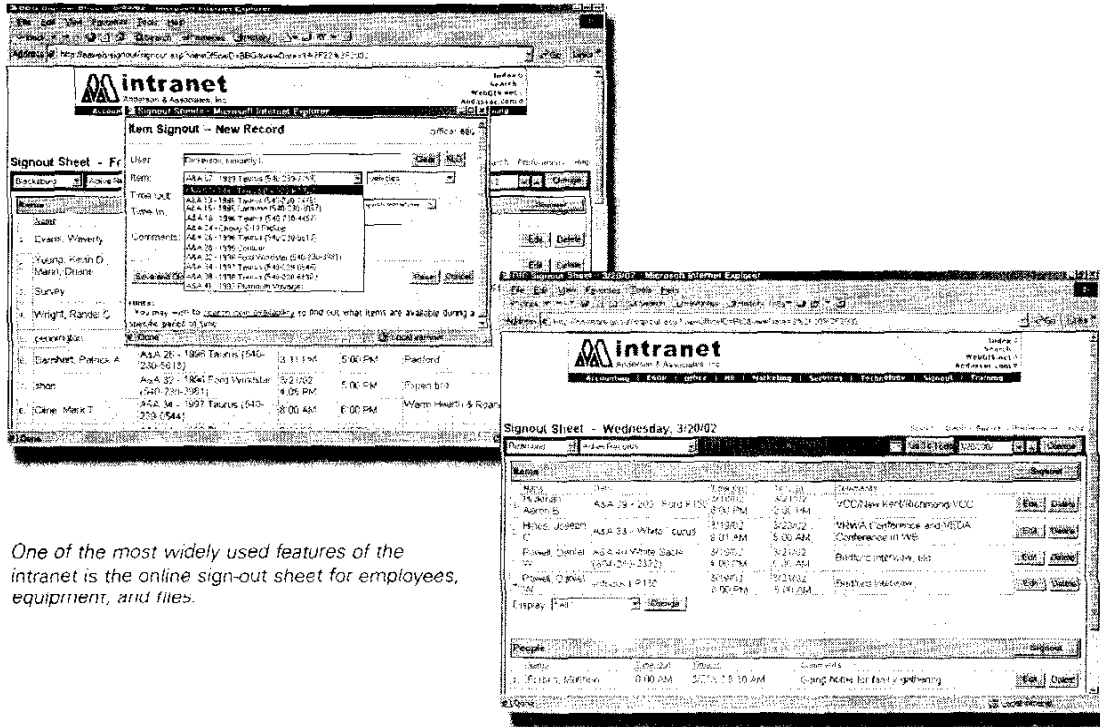
Employees can access the intranet from home or any of the branch offices. However, clients are not given access to the intranet.

The home page of the firm's intranet contains a header with a menu of the major sections of the site: Accounting, ESOP, Office, HR, Marketing, Service, Technology, Signout, and Training. The header also includes links to an index of the site, the Internet, and a newly added intranet search function.

The home page also includes a block on the left side of the page that shows what's new with the site. It also includes some tips and quick links for some of the most commonly used features of the intranet such as finding other employees. The major sections of the intranet include:

Signout. One of the most widely used features on the intranet is the online sign-out sheet for employees, equipment, and files. It has replaced the firm's paper sign-out sheet that was kept in a three-ring notebook in the lobby. Whenever employees left for an appointment or lunch—or signed out company vehicles, conference rooms, cameras, laptops, and other equipment—they needed to walk to the lobby and sign out. Now, the online sign-out sheet allows employees to sign out from anywhere, whether they're in a branch office or working from home. The online sign-out section is organized by each of the firm's six offices.

Accounting. Anderson & Associates practices open-book management. All employees are given access to complete financial statistics for the firm, and the intranet has helped the firm distribute this information. The intranet's accounting section contains extensive information on the firm's financial well-being.



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The accounting section includes reports on key financial indicators such as accounts receivable, backlog, net revenue, net revenue factor, net revenue projections, and proposal costs. Along with reports, the intranet contains explanations of these financial performance measures. The report page also includes information on billing rates, CADD hours, leave time, new jobs, and a time analysis.

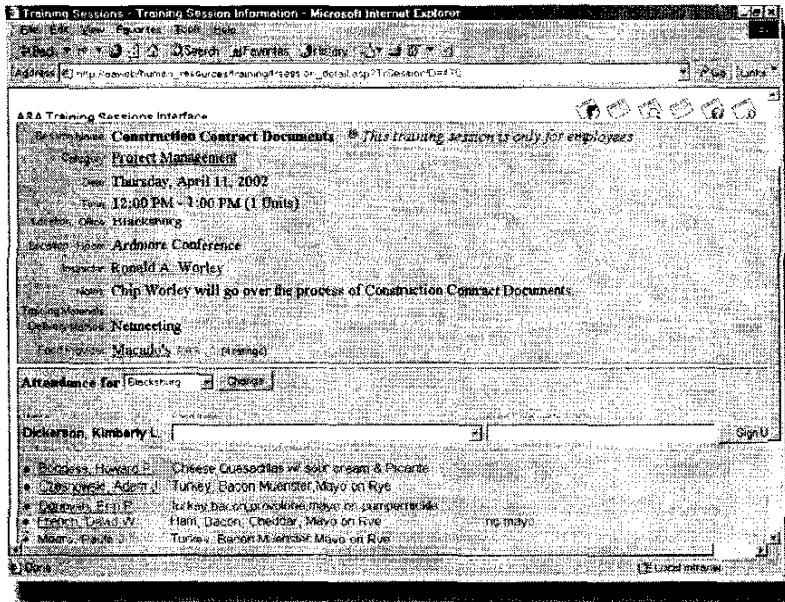
The intranet's accounting section also includes new task request forms, expense reports, job numbers, an accounting calendar, interactive project reporting, an overview of understanding paycheck information, and a link to the firm's timekeeping program.

ESOP. Anderson & Associates has an Employee Stock Ownership Program (ESOP), so employees are interested in the financial information that the firm provides. "We want to know where we are and where we're going," Dickerson says. The intranet's ESOP page provides employees with more information about the plan.

Training. The intranet includes an Anderson & Associates University training section. This section includes a calendar of upcoming training sessions. Each session description includes the date, time, location, instructor, continuing education credits, and delivery method. It even includes information on where lunch will be ordered from along with a rating of the place. Employees can sign up online to attend any training session and can place their specific lunch order as well.

The firm also includes training documents on the intranet. If a training presentation includes any supplemental materials, such as PowerPoint slides or handouts, those are posted on the site. The site also has a technical manual that includes outlines of training presentations.

Employee Directory. The intranet has an extensive employee directory. There's a database with names, pictures, and biographical information for all employees. Employee teams have the latitude to personalize their sections of the intranet. They can choose to put pictures of team members along



Employees can sign up for training events right on the intranet. They can even place lunch orders for the event right on the site.

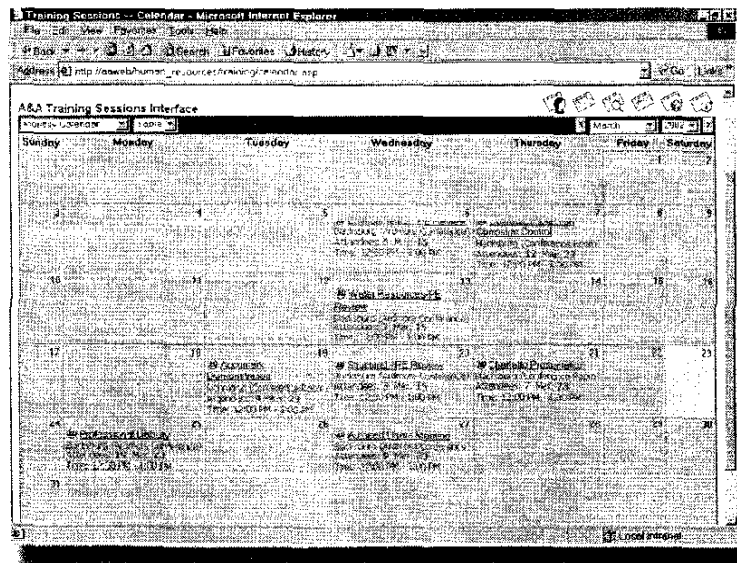
with biographies, schedules, or anything else they want.

The intranet has a search page that allows users to do a keyword search or scroll through the pictures. There's also a phone list with contact information for employees in each office. Another popular feature is the master spec, which employees can mark up for specific projects.

The technical side of the intranet is maintained by an in-house web developer with the help of a couple of interns. They monitor the overall site and make sure the links are active.

The responsibility for maintaining the content of the intranet is spread out among a number of employees in different functional areas. For example, the human resources department maintains all the information on its section of the intranet. The office manager maintains the office part as well as

The intranet includes a calendar of upcoming training events.



the technical manual, the master specs, templates, team schedules, and standard details that are used in the specs. "Everybody has access. If they have the program to modify and edit the intranet, they can modify their own team pages if they choose to do so," Dickerson says. The approximate annual cost to maintain the intranet is \$5,000.

Anderson & Associates doesn't have official incentives to get employees to use the site. "We try to encourage use of the intranet as much as possible both verbally and through e-mail," Dickerson says.

She says more and more employees are using the intranet on a regular basis, but there's still a selling job that needs to be done. "There are still some folks who insist that it's not efficient to use, but we try to show them the benefit of using it. Our selling point is showing them it's beneficial to them if they use it," she says.

Dickerson says the intranet has made it easier for employees to access information. "Although we have access to all branch servers at any given time, employees may not know all the subdirectories. So it's easier for them to go to the intranet to get a

particular piece of information. Employees don't have to know the direct path," she says. Another benefit is that employees can quickly find information by doing a keyword search on the site.

The intranet has also helped boost the firm's productivity. "There's less foot traffic in the office from people trying to find information," Dickerson says. "There's less interruption to other employees because there's now a central location to go to find information before having to ask anyone. If employees search for the information, they'll be able to find it on the intranet.

"It's really a powerful tool when used to its potential," she says. "I highly recommend that other companies do something like this. It's a very useful tool to have."