

Making the Most Effective Use of Your Intranet System for Your Franchisees

Franchise Management and Intranet systems have proven benefits for the franchisees of any franchise organization. They effectively:

- Improve the communication and collaboration between the franchisor and the franchisee and among different franchisees
- Reduce communication costs for the Franchise system by providing an easily accessible repository of documents, ideas, discussion forums, etc to the franchisee thus eliminating the need to send this information through physical mail
- Provide 24/7 enhanced support to the franchisees – letting franchisees seek answers to their questions, report issues, etc online.
- Help corporate staff in getting instant feedback from franchisees in important issues through online polling tools
- Help the Franchisor in knowing which franchisees are actually getting their messages, when they are getting it and send reminders to those that have not read or received the messages
- Make compliance tracking of franchisees a snap for the franchisor
- Enhance the royalty collection process with real time information and reporting and easy collection of funds from the franchisees through ACH
- Provide marketing tools like Customer Management, Email Marketing to the franchisees to help them better market themselves to their end customers
- Help with creating localized print advertisements for the franchisee with online Ad-Building tools
- Help the franchisees order supplies online

However, even with all these benefits, franchisors often find that franchisees may not be effectively using all the tools available to them and leveraging the full benefits of a Franchise Management System.

Getting the Zee's to Use Technology and Systems

The historical adoption of technology by the Zee's can be broken down by the classic Bell curve where 20% of the users are always early adoptors of technology, asking for the most powerful features, the next 60% are average users just happy with the basic functionality available to them and the remaining 20% never tend to use their systems, instead relying more on manual processes.



Based on the experiences with hundreds of other franchise system, a franchisor rolling out new technology and systems can take several steps to ease the rollout process and get their franchisees to use the system.

Some of these steps, that form part of a successful rollout include:

- **Defining the benefits and getting franchisee buy-in on the benefits:** The earlier section of this article describes some of the common benefits of the Intranet and Franchise Management system. However, these benefits are often lost on users when the system is just presented to them as tools and technology. At that point, the users start viewing the system as a collection of technical tools rather than the overall benefit it provides to them.

An easy solution to overcome this issue is to create sufficient buzz around the benefits (and not the actual technologies or modules) through initial emails to franchisees, articles in newsletters, presentations at the annual or regional conventions, advisory council meetings and regional meetings. Once the franchisees are sufficiently educated over the benefits, the adoption of technology is much easier and simpler.

- **Avoiding Information Overload:** It can easily happen that in introducing the different features and benefits, too much information is presented to the franchisee in a very short time span. The result is that the end-user is not able to grasp any single part and develops a fear of the technology.

The recommended solution is to introduce the different features in the system one week at a time. E.g. The first week could be dedicated to Discussion forums where all franchisees are encouraged to make at-least one posting. The next week could be dedicated to the effective use of the library. The next week after that can focus on alerts and messaging, etc. A process like this not only lets the users get familiar with every part of the system with ease, but also allows corporate staff to monitor the participation of the franchisees and answer their questions about the use of the system.

- **Shutting down all paper communications:** While this sounds like a hard step to take, but several franchise organizations have seen extremely successful results out of such a policy. Humans are inherently resistant to change and even more so when it comes to technology. As a result, when rolling out a communication system, if a franchisor continues with their older paper based processes, the franchisees have little motivation to get the same information online.

Franchise systems can introduce a roll-out policy in which all paper communications get phased out over a three to six month period. Franchisees insisting on paper even after this rollout can be charged a small fee.



- **Providing constantly updating data, key reports and topical information:** Since the Franchise Intranet acts as an information portal, it is extremely important to keep it current with information and reports that are updated constantly. Any stale data or information that does not change over a period of time makes the franchisees reluctant to log into the information portal on a daily basis.

With the tools available in the Intranet, administrators can pre-populate stories that change automatically after a certain period of time. Similarly, performance reports on franchise sales and franchisee performance often motivate the users to log in and track their performance. Other data that can be put in includes RSS news-feeds, industry data, and case studies of best practices among franchisees.

- **Tracking user participation:** The Intranet system provides a log of user logins and user downloads. This allows corporate staff to continuously monitor user participation. Staff members can then work with franchisees who do not login or infrequently login and identify the challenges that each user is having. While this may a time-consuming task initially, once the initial fear by the end user can be overcome, they will become life long users of the system.
- **Delivering information to the user's desktop:** Intranets and web-based system work on a pull mechanism where the user has to login to the system to get the relevant information. With the FIQ Messenger, franchisees can get alerts, messages and changes to the Intranet system delivered straight to their desktop without having the franchisee to login proactively.

Summary

An Intranet and Franchise Management System is the core technical foundation of a franchise system's long term success. However, just like any other technology, user adoption requires careful planning and initial effort that can track each individual user's challenges and help overcome them through a variety of strategies.