

- Interactive Systems 3 -
Practical 3: Public, Intranet and Extranet Design

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January 2003.

1 Introduction

In this week's practical you will analyse the different design techniques that may be needed in public, intranet and extranet systems. To recap, standard, public web sites provide open access to the information that they present. Password access is not required and the audience for the information can be broad. An intranet, in contrast, provides information for the members of the organisation that hosts the site. People who are not members of that organisation can be deliberately prevented from accessing the entire site or portions of that site through password protection. Finally, an extranet provides information to the members of cooperating organisations. They may provide product information to potential groups of customers. They may provide documentation to regulatory or government organisations. As with intranets, some areas of extranet web sites can be password protected if they contain commercial or other 'sensitive' content.

2 What Do I Do Now?

This section briefly summarises your task for this week's practical component of IS3. You should complete these tasks working in the same teams that you have been assigned for the level 3 team projects. If this causes anyone any problems then please see me as soon as possible. These teams will also be used for the first part of the IS3 assessed exercise.

2.1 Research Practical Differences between Intranets and Extranets

Begin by reading some of the on-line resources that describe practical experiences in developing both intranets and extranets. The following web sites provide a starting point:

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http://www.intranetjournal.com/  
http://www.cio.com/research/intranet/  
http://wp.netscape.com/comprod/columns/mainthing/extranets.html  
http://www.mitre.org/pubs/intranet/
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Do not spend too much time here but these resources will provide additional material to the lectures during revision for my portion of IS3. As in previous practicals, remember that some of these sources have an interest in promoting intranet and extranet services or in promoting their work on a corporate system. You should remain slightly skeptical to some of the claims unless backed by formal or informal validation.

2.2 Browse NASA's Public, Intranet and Extranet Resources

Your main task in this week's practical is to spend some time looking at the differences between areas of NASA's public web site. As you would expect, the main portal can be found at <http://www.nasa.gov>. However, a good starting point would be to look at the pages associated with the SOHO mission:

<http://soho.nascom.nasa.gov/>

An example of NASA's Extranet services can be found via their procurements office on:

<http://www.hq.nasa.gov/office/procurement/index.html>

You cannot directly access the NASA intranet without access permission. It is, however, possible to view a portion of their technical documentation resource on:

<http://www.hq.nasa.gov/office/codeq/doctree/qdoc.htm>

This site provides access to safety and mission assurance documentation. Traverse down some of the nodes to view individual documents on the site.

2.3 Develop Extranet Guidelines and Document Your Findings

Using your own analysis of the NASA site and other extranets, devise a list of usability guidelines for extranet applications. These guidelines should be based on the Nielsen heuristics that you met in previous lectures and practicals but should be focused more narrowly on extranet systems. They should capture both page composition and navigation issues. Next, swap your guidelines with those of another group. Both groups should then apply the others guidelines to a portion of the following web site:

<http://www.roads.dft.gov.uk>

You should then report back and compare your experiences in using the guidelines. Do you think they actually helped to identify significant usability problems or not? Could they be used to guide development and not simply validate existing designs? This exercise is not degree assessed. However, it may help with your assessed exercise if you write a one-page summary of your guidelines and their application.

3 After the Practical

By the end of this practical you should have experience of the practical differences and similarities between public, intranet and extranet interfaces. You should also have some experience in the difficulties of guideline development for extranet, web-based applications.