

Northland Regional Council

CATEGORY: Technology Innovation Award

The project that this entry relates to is the design and launch of the Northland Regional Council's (NRC) Intranet – the eXpress.

The Need and Expected Benefits of the Project

The Northland Regional Council has offices in four locations throughout Northland, making internal communications a challenge.

Before Situation

Prior to the launch of the eXpress, we did not have an Intranet for staff. Internal communication was characterised by the following features:

- A weekly staff newsletter produced as a Word document and circulated by email as an attachment every Monday morning
- A plethora of “all staff” emails
- An excel spreadsheet with a staff phone list
- A series of folders on “E Drive” holding documents accessed by all staff

The issues that resulted from this situation included:

- Staff not able to easily search back through previous newsletter editions
- Staff inboxes clogged with non relevant emails
- No staff photos or other detailed information about roles in the Corporate Directory (it was only a phone list)
- Difficult and time consuming for staff to find information (particularly forms and manuals)
- No ability to search easily for instructions on carrying out tasks such as creating purchase orders, applying for training etc.

Expected Benefits

The eXpress provides solutions to the issues identified above. It also:

- Facilitates real-time information and resource sharing across all regional offices
- Decreases the amount of time Managers and Team Leaders need to spend training staff. e.g. They can go through the purchase order process but staff can then find detailed instructions on the eXpress when they go to create one themselves for the first few times.
- Provides “signposts” and explanatory information about key documents making them easy to find, particularly for new staff
- Decreases the number of times documents are saved on the Network. Prior to the eXpress when key documents were sent via email, everyone would then save their own copy
- Decreases the need for as many printed copies of documents such as account codes, staff code lists, staff phone lists, corporate wardrobe catalogues (e.g. all uniform items were loaded onto the eXpress thereby eliminating the need for printed catalogues).
- The semi-distributed publishing model helps to prevent bottlenecks

- The system is easy to manage and does not require significant IT expertise to update content. This reduces the Council's exposure to risk if key staff leave
- Enables other areas of the Council to comply more easily with their requirements (e.g. distribution of Health and Safety information).
- Helps to promote and maintain organisational culture through social interaction (e.g. online competitions, surveys, photo gallery).
- Decreases manual work required for analysis of survey results (e.g. staff survey information can be exported directly into Excel without the need to key in data from paper surveys)

Contribution to Strategic Direction

The eXpress contributes to the Northland Regional Council's overall strategic direction by providing a platform that enables staff to do their jobs more efficiently. It makes it easier and quicker for them to find information. It also provides a more efficient method of obtaining, storing and analysing feedback from staff on various issues.

The eXpress also contributes significantly to the organisational culture by supporting the activities of the social club and providing other services and features that make it a fun place to work. It also provides a platform for the CEO and others to acknowledge and celebrate staff successes.

Effective Project Management Techniques

The project is an example of great teamwork combining successfully the skills of representatives from the Community Relations Team, the Information Services Team and an external supplier (with staff based in both Auckland and Wellington).

The project was managed using effective management techniques including:

- Detailed RFP documentation
- Extensive scoring matrix used to choose external supplier
- An overall project plan
- Weekly project meetings with minutes and action items identified and documented
- A single point of contact from the Regional Council who logged and managed issues and feedback to and from the external supplier (although other Council staff and the supplier's staff were in direct contact as required)
- The supplier provided budget implications before any amendments were made to original plans so tight budget control was possible
- Technology (email and teleconferencing) was used effectively to communicate between project team members in multiple locations
- Content, Testing and Development logs were created to track issues
- Celebration of successes

Participatory Approach to Communication and Getting Buy-in from Stakeholders

The project team used various methods to communicate with staff and get buy-in to using the new Intranet. These included:

Incorporating Council History and Culture

The previous Word document newsletter was called the “Regional Express”. Therefore staff were familiar with the name eXpress in relation to internal communications. We still send a weekly summary newsletter on Mondays and a call for content on Thursdays which fits with staff’s current expectations.

The word “express” also communicates concepts of speed and efficiency which are key elements of the Intranet solution.

Launch Campaign

Prior to the launch a two week teaser campaign was run to raise awareness and stimulate interest. Posters featuring Council staff members in situations where the Intranet could help them were put in various places throughout the building (including notice boards, toilet doors, fridge door in the canteen etc). The posters changed every three days during the campaign. Using familiar faces in humorous, but relevant situations helped to achieve buy-in and interest from staff.

Launch Event

Phase one of the Intranet was launched at an “all staff” meeting prior to Christmas 2005. The whole presentation was themed around an “express train” concept – fast, direct and efficient. Tag lines such as “Get on board” and “Departing soon” were incorporated into support materials. Staff received “tickets” as they entered with brief instructions on how to access the Intranet when they returned to their desks.

The presentation gave a brief overview and an online demonstration of key features of the new Intranet.

Follow-Up Survey

Eight weeks after launch, an online survey (using the new survey feature of the eXpress) was conducted to get feedback on strengths, weaknesses and ideas for improvements.

Presentations at Department Meetings

After a series of changes were made based on staff suggestions, the eXpress team presented the survey results, the changes and some quick training tips (based on observation of how a selection of individual staff members used the eXpress) at every department meeting.

A brainstorming session was held at each meeting to identify content specifically for each department’s section on the eXpress.

Excellent Service

A key component of getting staff buy-in is providing good service by ensuring the eXpress content is always up to date. Any staff member can submit content to be updated and the objective is to do this the same working day it is submitted. The submitter is always notified by email when their content is uploaded.

Innovation and Originality

The solution that the Regional Council selected is an “off-the-shelf” Content Management System. However a number of features were customised and used in an innovative way to achieve our objectives.

Integration

The Corporate Directory section is integrated with Visual Suite software. This means that staff can set their status (e.g. in a meeting, available, home) on their desktop and it is displayed in real time on their corporate profile page.

The Corporate Directory section also integrates with our telephony system. Staff details are entered once into the telephony system and then the information is synchronised on a regular basis with the Intranet.

The Events Calendar not only displays information about the event, but staff can drill down and find out location and attendee information as well.

Search

The search function has been customised so that staff can search easily using the following options that are selected from a drop down box:

- Search the whole site
- Search only the corporate directory
- Search “Who Does What” – the job profile section of the Corporate Directory
- Search Jargon – search for the definition of an acronym or jargon

Staff Identification

Most online Corporate Directories enable staff to enter another staff member’s name and come up with a result. We have this option available but have also added an alternative option where you can look through photos and click on a profile. This option was added based on staff feedback that sometimes they spoke to someone and wanted to check later who they were. This is particularly useful with the number of new staff joining the Council in recent months.

Staff profiles in the Corporate Directory also contain information on what languages they speak and other roles (e.g. fire warden) that they have.

Contribution to Organisational Culture

The eXpress makes a significant contribution to supporting the Council’s organisational culture and making it a fun place to work.

A Super 14 Picks competition was run earlier this year. Using the CMS’s survey functionality and ability to export data to Excel, it was easy to manage and proved popular with staff.

Special templates have been created for a “Word of Mouth” section which enables staff to provide a star rating out of 5 for the event, movie, programme, book, restaurant etc that they are recommending.

Customised templates have also been set up to create a “Jargon and Acronyms Directory” that is fully searchable, a travel stories section, image galleries of staff at work and scenic shots (all submitted by staff) and a te reo section.

Smart Management

A “What’s New” tick box was added to each template to enable information added anywhere on the eXpress to be automatically highlighted in the “What’s New” column on the homepage.

Easy to use

A “How Do I?” section was created where instructions for common tasks (e.g. creating a purchase order, booking a meeting room, setting up data show equipment) are displayed. This section is fully searchable making it easier for staff than having to wade through Policy and Procedure Manuals for instructions.

Programming changes were made to display the cursor automatically in the search field box on search pages. This saves staff an extra click when using this function.

Related links are used to make it as easy as possible to find the right information. (e.g. training course information always has the training application form in the Related Links section. This means staff can open it up straight away and don't have to navigate back to the forms section).

Successful Results

Launch

The Intranet was launched on budget and on-time (5 weeks from CMS selection to initial launch).

Usage

Usage is monitored on a monthly basis. On average the most popular sections are announcements, directory search, events calendar and what's new.

Refer to the appendix for usage graphs.

In addition to measuring standard usage statistics the eXpress team periodically use fun ways to measure how many people are reading the eXpress and how often. E.g. A one question "How do you eat an Easter bunny" quiz was run prior to Easter. The majority of entries came through in the first two hours after it was displayed, indicating a high proportion of staff are checking the Intranet regularly.

Survey

The initial online survey (which had a response rate of 46%) showed that 94% of respondents were checking the eXpress at least once a week. Almost 40% check several times a day for news. 79% of respondents said that information was either Easy or Very Easy to find.

Comments from staff, when asked what they liked about the eXpress included...

"Links and for us out of towners, seeing who we are working with on the staff list."

"The fact it is updated so regularly".

"Best way to communicate with everyone. Information is easy to access for a long period of time. Easy to access kiosk etc. New information is added quickly by the express team".

"Saves clogging up the system with emails to all staff. Good general information provided".

"Offering little bits or summaries of relevant info and the ease of linking from page to page. Very easy to scoot around the place. Gotta love those hyperlinks!".

"User-friendly - even for the techno-phob! Informative Lovely 'atmosphere' Very inclusive".

"Its interesting newsiness combined with its structure which makes looking for something easy".

We have also continued to receive feedback from staff when we have provided solutions for their requirements. For example, this year the staff uniform items were listed on the eXpress with photos. The organiser gave us the following feedback:

"I meant to tell you and Jason that I have had some really good feed-back about the uniform site and how the options have been displayed/made available this year. I have taken \$6,000 in orders so far. So thanks for that." – Corporate Services Secretary

"Hi Tracy and Jason, Thank you very much for the way you have set up the training links, it is great. Clever". – Health and Safety Advisor

"Hi Tracey. I've had a big response from the homekill add. More than we can handle in fact, so could you remove it from the express please. Thanks for that." Catchment Management Officer

"I like the How do I? section , great idea!" – Information Manager

"Boy - that was quick!" – CEO Secretary

Good, Sensible and the Right Thing to Do

The number of Council staff continues to grow and good communication is an essential element of ensuring we function successfully.

The eXpress provides a sensible solution for getting key messages quickly to staff in a way that ensures information can easily be found again as required.

The Council needed to move with the times and find ways to use technology to make it easier and quicker for staff to find the information they need to do their jobs. A Content Management System was the sensible way to achieve this.

The project was planned so that we launched Intranet first. This enabled the Community Relations and Information Systems Teams to get to know the system and test new things in a controlled environment. The public website will be moved onto the same platform over the next 12 months.

Appendices – Homepage Example, Usage Statistics, Launch Campaign Poster Examples

APPENDICES

EXPRESS HOMEPAGE EXAMPLE

eXpress - eXpress - Microsoft Internet Explorer

Address: <http://express/>

eXpress Find Person

Help | Contact | Site Map | Print this page

Home Corporate Staff Departments Social Links

What's New

[FOR RENT: Carparking spaces in Pit Stop workshop carpark](#)
\$50 per month

[Want some company to train for walking the Kerikeri half marathon?](#)
Join the Markby and Flash "Walkers and Talkers"


[FOUND: Paua Earring](#)
Found under Matt's desk - see the photo.

[ORBIT Hair and Beauty](#)
NEW salon in town: Quality Street, Whangarei

[Monitoring Water Quality Presentation](#)
11th August @ 10.30 - Please RSVP to Didee

Announcements

[LTCCP final documents now on the NRC website](#)

 Copies of Volumes one and two of the Northland Community Plan 2006-1026 are now on the Council's Website and hard copies are also available.
[Visit the NRC website.](#)

Power saving tips

 'Switch it off' – the quickest and easiest way to save energy is to apply the simple rule 'if it doesn't need to be on, switch it off'. Please help us do our bit to save power. Here are this week's power saving tips...
[Read more](#)

Events Calendar

July 2006

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
26	27	28	29	30	1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31	1	2	3	4	5	6

Applications

[GIS North](#)
Aerial photography, map data & GIS mapping tool

[Kiosk](#)
Apply for leave, check your leave balances on Kiosk

[SmartStream](#)
Purchase orders, account balances & financial information


News

[Plants ready for Lake Omapere planting days](#)
27/06/2006 12:28:00 p.m.
More than 10,000 plants have been prepared for the three planting days planned at Lake Omapere, the first of which is being held this weekend.

[Rabbit virus set for release](#)
23/06/2006 10:31:00 a.m.
Release of the rabbit calicivirus in Northland next month.

NZ Herald News

Reminder: First Aid & Driver Training

 Just a reminder that information for booking First Aid and Driver (4WD, Defensive & Towing) training courses is available in the training section of the eXpress.
[Find out more](#)

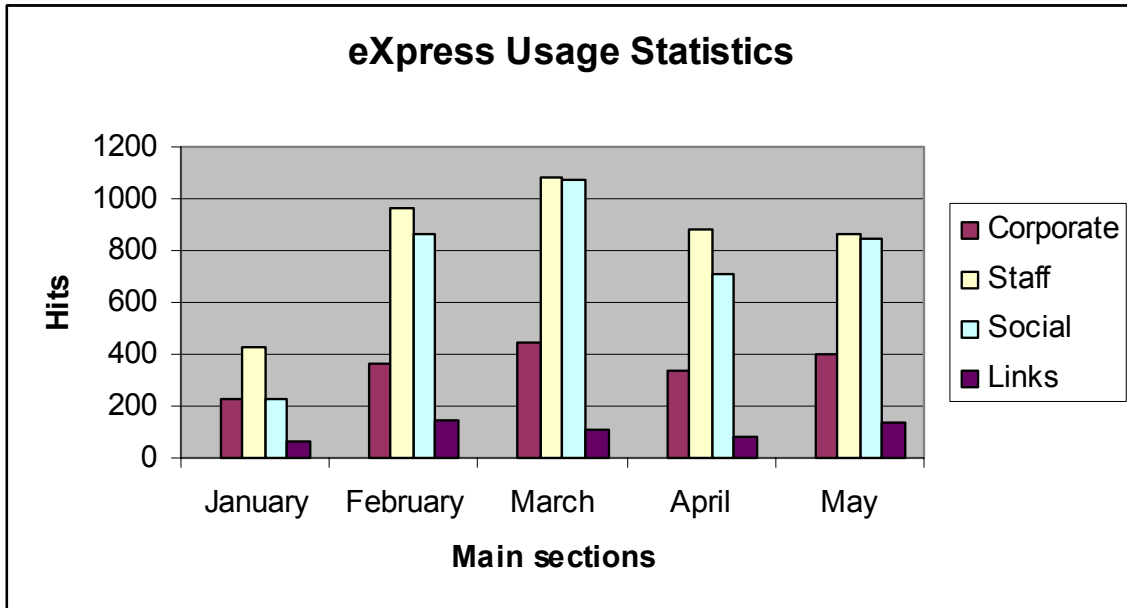
New postcodes - you will be affected !

Local intranet

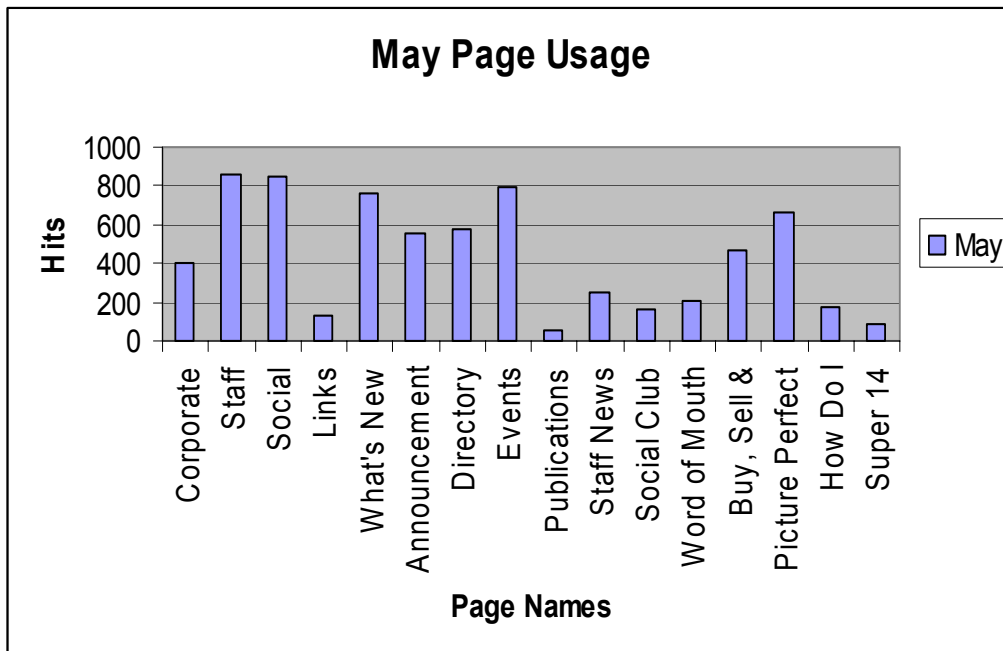
start | eXp... | Use... | eXp... | Ma... | eXp... | lost... | RE... | NR... | EN | 11:44

EXPRESS Usage Statistics

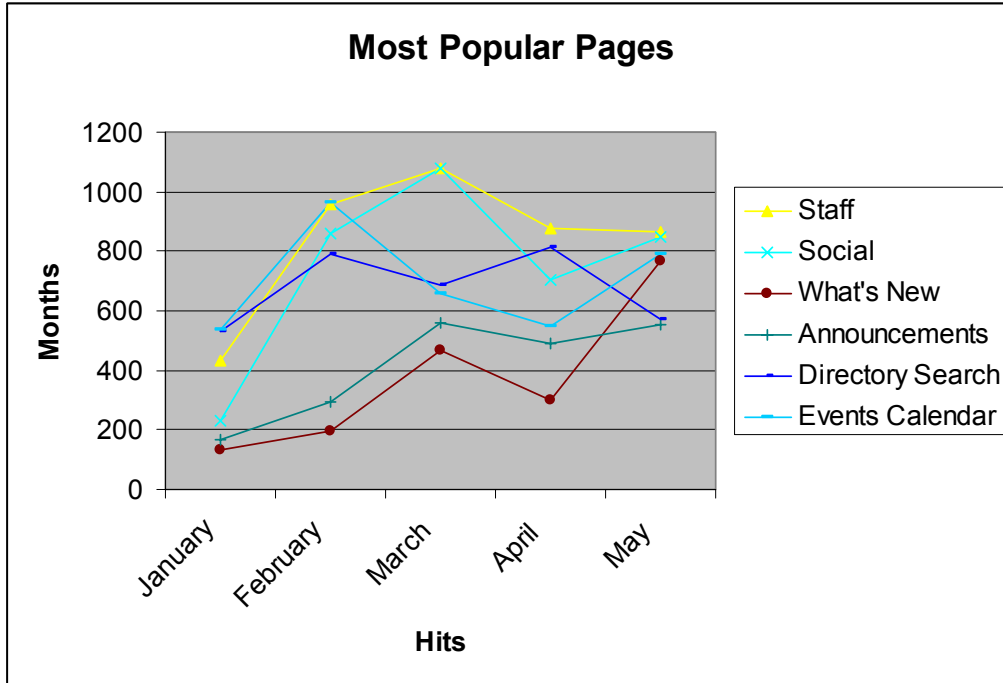
General Usage



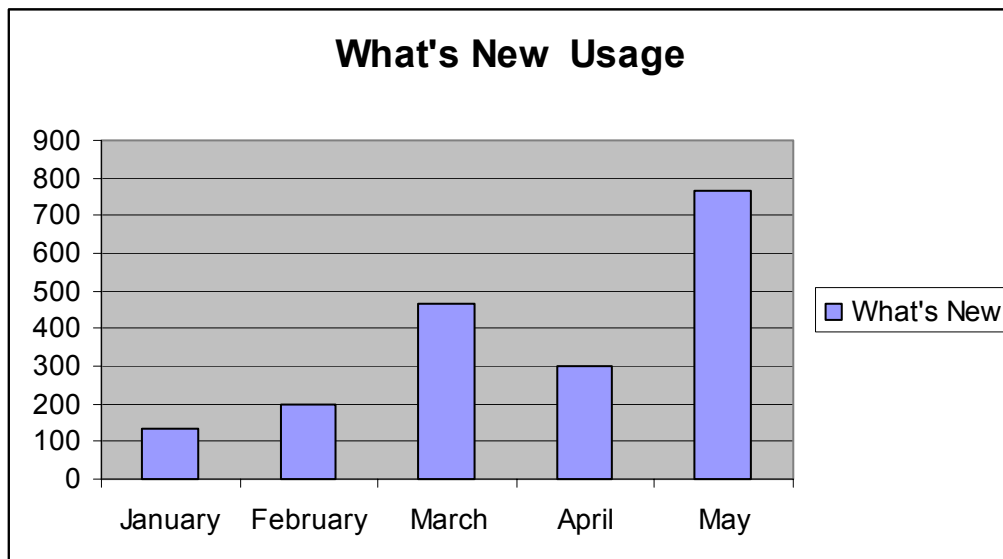
- **THIS GRAPH SHOWS USAGE OF THE MAIN SECTIONS EACH MONTH SINCE LAUNCH.**



- **WE CAN TRACK EACH MONTH WHICH PAGES ARE MOST POPULAR.**



- **THE MOST POPULAR SECTIONS ARE STAFF, SOCIAL, DIRECTORY AND EVENTS.**



- **THIS GRAPH SHOWS THE INCREASED USAGE OF THE WHAT'S NEW SECTION FOLLOWING TRAINING SESSIONS FOR EACH DEPARTMENT IN APRIL.**

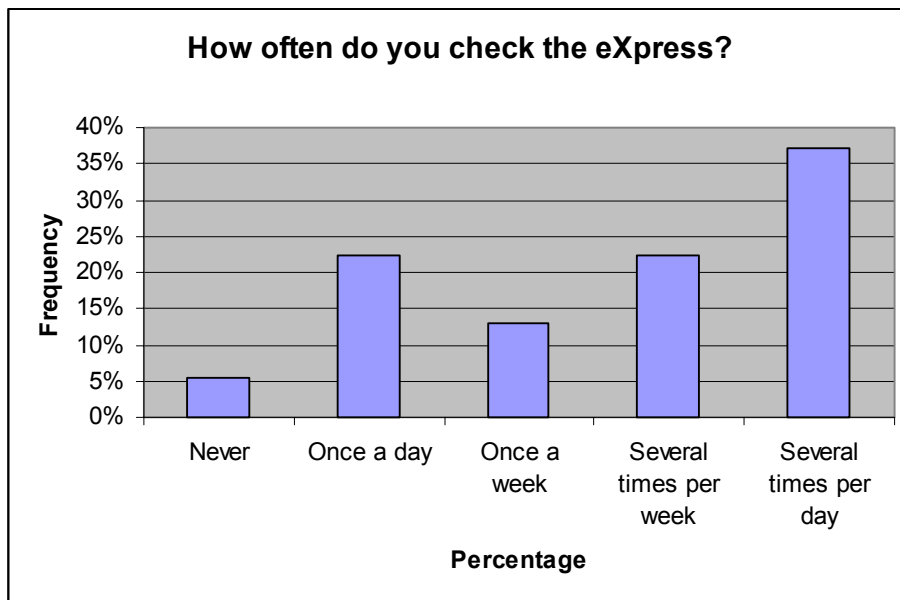
Content Updates

Content updates are tracked each month and recorded. This information is used to help us focus on making sure content is refreshed. The target is 100 updates per month.

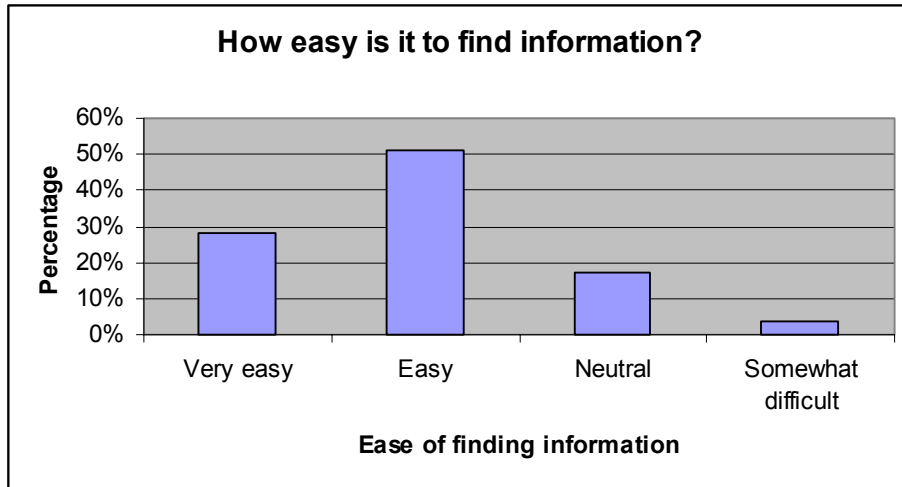
	January	February	March	April	May
2006	105	102	123	98	123

User Survey

Staff were surveyed eight weeks after the intranet was launched using the new online survey tool. The survey had a response rate of 76%.



- 94% of respondents were checking the eXpress at least once a week.
- Almost 40% check several times a day for news.



- **79% of respondents said that information was either easy or very easy to find.**

LAUNCH CAMPAIGN POSTERS
