# Card sorting basics

Discovering structural themes for intranets and websites

Often used to discover the thoughts of users regarding 'where' they would like to find topics on the intranet, card sorting is a low-tech exercise that helps people influence the design of a site. By collecting real-world information based on **people's expectations**, rather than relying on the design or intranet team's logic and wishes, a site can be built that is people-centred and meets users' needs.
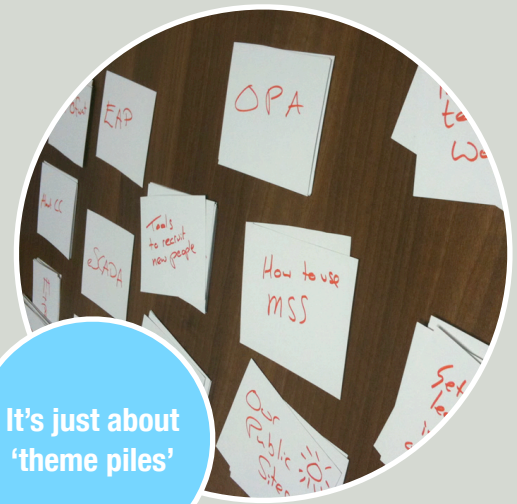
It's just about 'theme piles'

Easy and obvious

Modern intranets / sites offer more than a simple 'reading experience'. Many support business **content**, crucial **communication**, **collaboration**, and **action** / task execution.

Sites can focus on the needs of the people who use it, rather than any single expert. Designing the intranet around the organisation structure may seem *obvious*, but has few benefits for new employees or those outside of a particular department. Such a design can emphasise 'silos', hobble knowledge sharing and increase repetition.

"Task-oriented, people-focussed."

Matching the site's structure to the expectations of daily users enables people to work more efficiently and effectively, ultimately benefiting the company's bottom line.

Participants can work in a **group** or **alone**, and should be representative of the audiences of the intranet / website. It may be beneficial to ensure plenty of 'non-expert users' participate. Several sessions will be needed, and 5 to 30 people should be canvassed from a variety of departments / audiences.

Scores and scores of index **cards** / note cards are prepared with **topics and actions** (hand written) based on business needs and any previous intranets / information systems in use. More topics can be created during sessions and marked 'new'.

Participants should work through the stack of cards, **laying them out** and moving them into **groups** as they deem suitable. It is natural for the number of groupings to be fluctuate throughout the session; participants should feel free to start a *new group* or *combine groups* as and when they feel it is natural to do so.

Participants might work quite quickly during a 'first pass' of the cards, and **reflect and discuss** their reasoning more during 'second and third passes'. A '*don't know*' or '*miscellaneous*' pile can be used, and reviewed throughout the session.

Results are recorded and later analysed to discover **patterns** and consensus. The intranet team and designers should review the results to create the final navigation / structure of the site.

Open or closed

The number and / or names of categories can be predetermined by the intranet team / designer or by previous rounds of card sorting. If predefined, card sorting is known as 'closed'.

If participants develop as many 'theme piles' as necessary, it's known as 'open' sorting.

Online sorting

Physical cards bring an immediacy to something that can seem ephemeral, but when expediency is needed, online card sorting is a quick way to gather expectations.

A major **benefit** is that an online service will **analyse** and **factor-down** the results for you.

Websort.net is recommended.