Hi everyone, i’m very honored to be in Antwerp for this very first WordCamp in Belgium. Today i want to share with you one of my strongest convictions: thanks to BuddyPress, companies can enjoy WordPress to power their social Intranets and improve the way their workers collaborate together.
• An Intranet is a **private network** accessible only to an organization’s staff. *(Source Wikipedia)*

• An **extranet** is a website that allows controlled access to partners, vendors and suppliers or an authorized set of customers. *(Source Wikipedia)*

• **intranets**: **websites** only accessible to the organization’s staff.

  **I will talk about intranets.**

First to avoid any confusions, when i talk about intranets, i refer to **websites only the organization’s staff can access to.**
I am Mathieu VIET, a random employee of the French Post Office. But I am also imath:

- one of the core developers of the BuddyPress open source project,
- I write BuddyPress, bbPress and WordPress plugins,
- I’ve been regularly doing some small contributions to WordPress core since its 4.0 version.
- I blog at imathi-[dot]-i-you.
- And with 2 of my friends (Thierry Pigot & Grégroire Noyelle), we’re organizing WordPress meetups in Paris and we’re producing podcasts over at veryfrenchtrip [dot] com.

Finally and most importantly, I’m a dad and a loving husband who can run but can’t fly.
Next month I’ll be forty two, so i’m pretty old, and i knew a time when my company didn’t have an Intranet. This was the dial-up internet time and learning computers at school meant to learn how to use DOS, Microsoft Word and Excel. And i must say that what I’ve learnt was very helpful when I started working for my company twenty years ago.
I was a salesman and as such I often spent hours writing commercial proposals for my customers on Microsoft Word 6.0. This was a really great piece of software. We could actually preview what we were about to print, amazing! By the way, Microsoft Excel was another very nice tool, thanks to it we could simulate mailing or shipping costs for our customers or even print bulk mailing.
I remember we were a team of 8 salesmen and there were only 2 computers in the office. So we were using floppy disks to save and carry with us our masterpieces. Sharing documents between us or reporting our sales to our hierarchy was achieved thanks to these little disks. Floppy disks were everywhere, we even had specific secured boxes to tidy them.
Another very important tool was our **phone book**. This is the tool that allowed us to store all phone and fax numbers for the **coworkers we needed to contact frequently**.
Some had a specific phone book and a diary, I personally chose to use an organizer. This way I always had all the most important informations at a unique place. The key for a good use of this specific tool is to use a pencil you can erase. Because, this way when a phone number changes, or when a coworker is replaced or when an appointment is deleted, you can properly update your data.
I guess some of you are thinking I completely lost my mind talking about my past at a WordCamp talk! Actually what I’ve just described appears to be the top 3 features expected about Intranet softwares according to the “Observatoire de l’Intranet” survey:

- Our old phone book has been replaced by a powerful employees directory,
- our diary is now a shared tool other employees can check out to see if we are available or busy
- and document sharing or should I say Microsoft generated document sharing is so important in our working life.
So I’m not surprised, knowing Microsoft has been helping us for more than 20 years in creating our documents, to see that Microsoft SharePoint is leading the market of Intranet softwares. This chart is showing that 36 percent of the three hundred and forty seven companies who replied to the “Observatoire de l’intranet” survey are using it to publish their top down informations. As you can see 5 percent chose to use WordPress, which is nice.
But as soon as we look at what these companies chose to power their social or collaborative Intranets, WordPress sadly disappears. Obviously Microsoft Sharepoint seems to be a really great piece of software as almost 1 company out of 2 is using it, but it's also a very expensive tool to deploy. I’ve found on one of its competitor’s site that for two hundred and fifty people it could cost more than eighty five thousand euros.

So about the 5% of companies using WordPress for their top down informations, i guess:

- some of them are using another tool for their social or collaborative intranet,
- some others probably decided to not have such an intranet which is too bad.
- and perhaps some others had no clue WordPress could do it with a little help from BuddyPress which is even worse.
So yes, of course, **WordPress can power intranets.** It’s easy to host, to use, unlike some other softwares it’s free and open source but most importantly **WordPress is extendable.** This means: if your intranet needs a specific feature, **there's a good chance you'll find an existing plugin providing it**, otherwise it's quite easy to build your own plugin.
So how do you build a Social Intranet for a company using WordPress? Even if I’ve just narrowed the subject, there are still many ways to achieve this. For the rest of my talk I will tell you about the way i chose. This doesn’t mean it’s the best one, of course. But, i’d say it’s a very powerful one. Of course i chose BuddyPress. Thanks to it i was able to quickly

- put up a directory of workers,
- put up advanced profile pages for each worker,
- and put up private workspaces workers can create or join to collaborate.

BuddyPress is a very modular plugin organized into components you can activate according to your community needs, for instance i’m not using the “Friends” component, because i think it doesn’t make any sense in the context of a corporate intranet.
Two of these components are systematically loaded, the BuddyPress core and the Members component. The first great feature provided by the Members component is the Members directory. It allows you to list all the users of your intranet and to eventually reorder this list according to:

- the date they join the community,
- the date of their last activity
- or alphabetically.

I chose to design each entries of this directory a bit like business cards as you can see. These cards are containing some extra informations to inform about:

- the user’s job,
- the department of the company he works for
- and their phone

These custom user fields are brought by the BuddyPress extended profile component. Thanks to it, you can easily create as many field as you need and your intranet members can edit them from their profile page. What's great is that the directory search will also look into these profile fields. As a result, when you need to build a project team, you can look for specific jobs and quickly see who can join your team.

To complete your employees directory, you can also use the BuddyPress member types feature. Under the hood it’s a taxonomy applied to users. A bit like developers can register custom post types, you register member types. Once registered you get a minimalist UI to set a user’s member type within its WordPress administration extended profile screen. But there’s no UI to actually create new types or browse the members directory according to a member type. That’s the reason why I’ve written the BP Member Types extended plugin. I think Member types are really interesting because as we are a Group of companies, we were able to use them to attach each member of the community to their belonging company. So it’s now very easy to filter our employees directory according to each company of our Group. It’s also very easy to edit, add or delete member types when a company name changes, a company is created or acquired, or when the company left the group.
The Members component also comes with extendable Profile pages for users. As you can see most of the built in BuddyPress components are adding their pages to display their specific content in this area. For example: the activities involving the user, the user's public profile, the groups the user is a member of, etc. BuddyPress plugins can also add their own pages using a specific API to create public or private pages. Private pages can be very interesting when you need to build a personal dashboard where the user can manage his company account for instance.
Thanks to the BuddyPress Groups component you can build your intranet collaborative workspaces. Groups can be public, private or hidden. And i must say, there are most of the time private inside of our intranet.

When a Group is private users need to request the Group admin to be able to join the group. Just like the Members component, the Groups component comes with a directory page and single groups pages and just like the members profile pages there’s a specific API plugins can use to add their own pages to the group. A good example is the bbPress plugin. As you may know bbPress is a great forum software and it integrates the best way with BuddyPress Groups so that each group can have a forum with a consistent visibility.

I’m using 2 other plugins to extend the Groups component. The first one BP Groups Taxo is there to let group admins add tags to their Groups. This way they can inform users which population they are targeting. As i’ve said earlier, i deactivated the BuddyPress Friends component, and you must know inviting people to join a group is only possible if this component is active, so to bypass this BuddyPress restriction, i’ve built the Workmates plugin so that any member of our intranet can invite others to join a group.
Document Sharing is the most important collaborative feature of our intranet. Our users need to share what they are used to work with that is to say texts, spreadsheets, presentations and sometimes pictures. BuddyPress doesn’t include any document sharing feature yet. But it includes a really great API to help you build one. So i’ve built my own file sharing system with the BuddyDrive plugin. Thanks to it, members can safely share private or public files with other members of the community or specific groups.
About social sharing and intranets. First, it's very different from Internet. On Internet almost everyone has a point of view and share it. On intranets, people seems to be afraid to express themselves. So we almost have no comments to our top down informations for instance and People only collaborate on specific topics into private groups which is nice but doesn’t show how dynamic our community is. So i’ve been trying to extend the BuddyPress activity component to help people really enjoy it. BuddyPress activities can be a lot of things:

- status updates,
- user profile updates (eg: Johnny changed their profile photo)
- relationship updates (eg: Johnny added Selma to their contacts)
- group updates etc..

BuddyPress activities can be commented, users can be mentioned, so it’s an interesting way of publicly starting conversations. The main issue we had with activities was that it’s not easy to find what are the trending ones. The ones we absolutely need to read. That’s the reason why, i’ve recently written the BP Reactions plugin. This plugin allows people to react to an activity:

- they can add it to their favorites
- they can like it
- or developers can add any other reactions of their choice. For our intranet, we choose to add the “recommandation” reaction.

Users can easily find their reactions within their profile page. And in the Activity directory i added a new tab to list all the most reacted activities ordered according to the numbers of reactions they got. So it can help our users to find out which are the most interesting activities of our intranet.

Finally we also use a plugin to give people a bookmarklet so that they can easily share internet sites or specific web pages into new activities.
So far our intranet website was **hosted** on the **Intranet network**. But we recently decided to **move it** on the **Internet** so that we can use it directly from **touch devices** and so that any worldwide company of the group can access to it.

The big difference then is that we need to take care of controlling the access to our **Intranet website**. I chose to use the “**Restricted site access**” plugin, even if it wasn’t completely matching my needs, it was **including some hooks** i was able to use to **extend it the way i wanted it to work**. I’ve packaged these specific behaviors into the **BP Restricted Community plugin**. So now we are making sure it’s possible to **register** to the site for the users having a **specific email domain** and we’re also making sure **BuddyPress pages are not reachable** if the user is not logged in.
This is the end of my talk. Today i wanted to show you, thanks to an intranet website I've built, it’s completely possible to power any intranet thanks to WordPress, BuddyPress and some other plugins. The plugins i’ve talked you about are all free & open source, of course you will still have to deal with some costs like the hosting one, but comparing to paid softwares, i really think WordPress can help companies of any size to successfully power regular, collaborative and social intranets.