



THINKTHINK!

Internal comms – no need to be all of a Twitter



It is said that the Mandarins of the Foreign Office ask for their internal memos and emails to be printed out so that they can 'read them properly'. They may also hand their mobile phones over to a junior and say "Get me Fortescue-Smythe on this thing will you, I can't work it at all and I need to know what his lot are up to in Bogata".

To ask these denizens of the FO to start Twittering each other about what they are doing would be foolish in the extreme. They haven't got where they are today by "engaging in social media", you hear them cry. (Although, of course, they have, it was just in a very different guise.)

Their younger colleagues down the hall who are Tweeting and Facebooking and in every way engaging in digital, social and business networking probably roll their eyes in despair.

And it is this dichotomy that must be taken into account when devising an internal communications strategy that will not just inform but will bridge the gap between these two groups and any more in between.

That internal communication strategies are necessary is a fact acknowledged by the most successful managers who understand that a downturn is an opportune time to re-group, re-brand and make sure that everyone is 'on message' when the dust settles and the banks open their doors again for business. It is also accepted as a fact that a workforce is a company's most valuable asset; but perhaps it would be more accurate to say that a workforce is 'potentially' a company's best asset. Unlocking that potential is the job of a good internal communications strategy, which will not only have the job of getting the brand and culture to the desktops of its workforce, but will do so in a way that appeals to everyone.

Being all things to all men is not easy but just as you would tailor an external marketing strategy to suit a particular client or demographic so you can do the same with your internal message. With the added benefit that greater choice means a greater likelihood that you will hit the right spot with the whole workforce.

It is round about here that we ThinkThink that you are going to need some expert help to devise a strategy that will not patronise the Mandarins nor be too facile for their grandsons – also known as the Generation Y - who simply cannot function without social networking. To design a site through which you can access enough gravitas to make it invaluable for even the most hardened digital cynic whilst keeping it light and inspirational for all levels is an art form. And one which Clear Focus have perfected.

An engaged workforce that is knowledgeable about the company's missions, goals and values will be more productive than one that is disaffected and ill-informed. In the bad old days a company would spread the word only when there was a big change afoot – redundancies, down-sizing, up-sizing, a merger... it was reaction rather than action.

The favoured tools of internal communication were traditionally the safe options of email bulletins, newsletters and weekly meetings. And although the advent of the intranet was heralded as a major leap forward, when badly used it sometimes turned out to be a black hole as its one-way traffic and lack of engagement meant it was largely underused. But what if the company intranet looked and acted like the sites that the people down the hall are used to such as Facebook and MySpace? What if it had a social media feel and could provide an environment in which both work and play could sit side by side. Focussing on the fun aspects of work it could act as a creative outlet where ideas could be expressed and exchanged.

The content of such a tool aims to strike a balance between work-based information and a general notice board and because it is user driven and has across-the-board information it should break down some of the barriers that exist between departments and levels.

It would be easy to see the generational differences in a large company as an obstacle to finding a message they can all hear but this need not be the case. If you include industry links and web tools within such a site it will by virtue of its very usefulness become vital to be fully effective and up-to-date in the workplace.

If it includes forums, RSS feeds and a photo and video gallery it will rapidly engage a large percentage of the workforce who will quickly spread the word. And if it has an eye catching design and an immediate call to action it will be hard not to get involved. Company intranets that really work are bold and well-conceived, they engage employees by getting them to design their own illustrator avatar and profile before the site even goes live so that the buzz is already out there. Clever use of Group Twitter or Yammer (Twitter for companies) can create further interest.

Starting off with some provocative forums and blogs already on the site should kick start the site, which will then gather its own energy.

But a company would be ill-advised to walk away from such a site thinking it will run itself. New promotions and campaigns are needed to keep it alive and fresh and maintain it as a focus for workforce development.

Closing music

We ThinkThink that the brave new media world presents a huge opportunity for internal communications. This revolution is to be embraced rather than avoided. In experienced hands it is an exciting concept that can revolutionise a tired old strategy.

A good communications company with experience in putting together a package like this can turn around how a company's workforce sees itself and the brand in a very short time.

Call my friends at Clear Focus on 0845 225 0325 and find out how...

