

The Changing Role of Internal Communications: —*The Experts' View*

A SmallWorlders eBook for Internal
Communications Professionals



Introduction:

— *A New, Social World*

All businesses have faced some turbulence in recent times. And if you work in internal communications the chances are you've been buffeted harder than most.

The fact is that harsh economic conditions mean companies change: often rapidly, sometimes brutally. Internal communicators have an unusual – perhaps unique – role where they both effect change and feel the effects of change. It's an opportunity and a threat.

This ebook explores the issues internal communicators must solve as they strive to be effective, relevant and successful. We've lined up six experts (mixing consultant and in-house pioneers) to explore the issues that matter today:

- ① ***The focus on senior management:***
How are corporate leaders using communications and what can they do better?
- ② ***The impact on communication roles:***
What's does a post-credit crunch internal communicators job look like?
- ③ ***The emerging technology challenge:***
What are the key lessons in deploying new ideas, and what tactics help make them work?

For internal communicators, these points mean strategy and tactical shifts. Some are eagerly embracing the challenge to build the profile of the profession. Others have found it a bit overwhelming.

But one thing's for sure: a huge change in working objectives and methods is a huge opportunity for internal communicators to become a stronger, more strategic part of the business. So let's hear from the people who are making it happen.

Who is this ebook for?

If you're working in internal communications then this ebook is for you. It's designed to help you to understand and get excited about the new world of social, collaborative communication. It looks at ways the role of internal communications is changing (for better and worse) and then explores the new techniques, tactics and tools that every comms teams can harness to deliver measurable value in the face of shrinking teams and budgets.



The Contributors

— Consultants

Six of the world's top internal communications consultants and in-house practitioners – people who really know their stuff – have come together to provide their ideas. If you aren't already reading their blogs and following them on Twitter, you should be.

Each of them has given us their view of what's already changed, what's around the corner, and what internal communicators need to do now. We hope you'll find their insights as valuable as we have.



David Grossman

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David is one of the world's most sought after speakers on leadership and communications. CEO of The Grossman Group, he's worked with superstar organizations like McDonald's and Microsoft on internal communications strategy. He's also written several business books on communication, including his *You Can't NOT Communicate* series.

His most recent eBook, *The Definitive Guide to Taming the Email Monster*, struck a chord with information-overloaded workers everywhere, earning him a spot on: *NBC Nightly News* and a full-page feature in the *Chicago Tribune*.

If you want to improve communications or your business is buried in email, David is the man with the spade. Find his blog at www.yourthoughtpartner.com/blog or follow him on Twitter [@ThoughtPartner](https://twitter.com/ThoughtPartner)



Sean D Williams

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Years of leading communications teams at Keycorp, Goodyear and National City Bank have given Sean Williams a world of practical comms experience. He now shares that insight as CEO of consultancy Communication AMMO, which helps companies to maximise the value of internal comms by making intelligent use of new technologies.

When he's not advising businesses like Ernst & Young, Western Reserve Academy and Ketchum Pleon Change on communication strategy and tactics. Sean can be found teaching PR at Kent State University, writing the *Communication AMMO blog*, and lurking on Twitter under his [@CommAMMO](https://twitter.com/CommAMMO) handle. He's also a member of the Institute for PR Measurement Commission.



Elizabeth Castro

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Elizabeth Castro is senior vice president at Chicago-based O'Malley Hansen Communications. Her 14-year career has seen her manage corporate reputation, government relations and employee engagement for "big brands" as diverse as Hanesbrands, Integry, Sara Lee, and Furniture Brands.

A big fan of social media, Elizabeth is a firm believer in its power to transform corporate communications for the better. As editor of the popular *Communications Blog*, she regularly posts her thoughts about the impact of new technology on internal communications – and what internal communicators can do to get the most value from it. Follow her on Twitter [@thecommsblog](https://twitter.com/thecommsblog) and [@eliz_castro](https://twitter.com/eliz_castro)



The Contributors

— *In-House Practitioners*



Richard Dennison

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Richard is the internal comms guru for the one of the biggest communications companies of them all. Having joined BT as an intranet consultant, he's now responsible for the company's intranet and communication channel strategy.

Richard is a great evangelist for new communication and collaboration technologies. Nowhere is his enthusiasm and insight more evident than on his blog, *Inside Out*, where he gives readers “a view from deep inside the intestines of a global organization”, examining how social media is changing internal comms and the role of the internal communicator. He's also very active on Twitter [@RichardDennison](#)

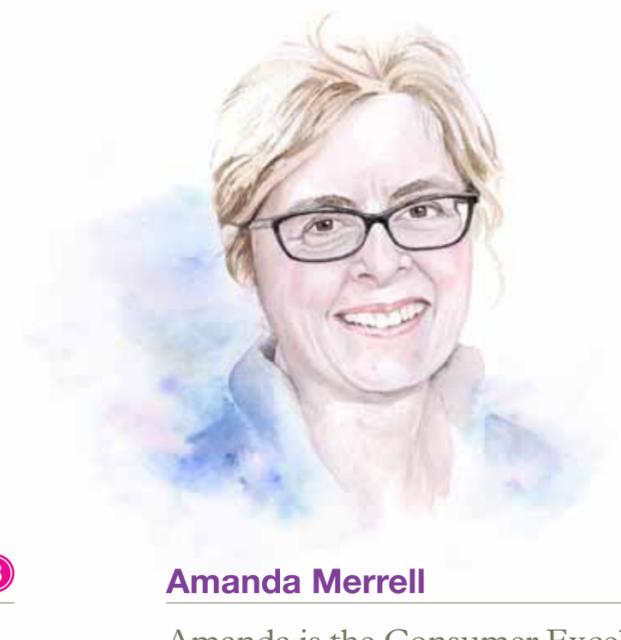


Francesca Castagnetti

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Francesca is responsible for the GCU digital learning environment and digital productions for Heineken's Marketing Capability team. She plays a key role in the way digital programmes in Heineken are planned and executed.

A graduate in both industrial design and marketing, Francesca started as a web designer before expanding into the world of intranet management. She previously worked as a web manager for ING.com's global portal before moving to Heineken.



Amanda Merrell

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Amanda is the Consumer Excellence Champion for Nestlé Infant Nutrition based in the Swiss headquarters. Working against a strict code of practice, she is responsible for ensuring people working in every global market can easily share Consumer and Health Care Practitioner communication.

Amanda is driver and advocate of Nestlé's mission to get people working as active parts of the Nestlé global community.

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Part 1

— *We asked David Grossman and Elizabeth Castro about how corporate leaders are managing their communications. They told us where improvements need to be made.*

David Grossman: — *The Year They Turned Off the Email Switch*

This year may be remembered as “the year they turned off the switch”. Three recent events suggest that companies’ over-reliance on email is finally weakening:

- French technology giant Atos banned email on Fridays in a bid to get employees talking
- Volkswagen has stopped routing emails to employees’ smartphones when they go off shift
- The Brazilian government decreed that answering emails out of hours counts as overtime

It’s great to see organizations recognizing they have a problem, but banning email isn’t necessarily the answer. It’s not email that’s the issue, it’s the way it’s used. Too many senior managers hide behind email when employees want and need a more inclusive style of communication.

When times are tough, simply firing out top-down email communications is bad for morale. Employees are worried about their jobs, and concerned about their role. They feel alienated from senior management, and don’t feel they’re being listened to.

As the economy improves, that feeling of alienation may spur employees to look for jobs with employers that are more welcoming. Surveys show that one third of people plan to leave their job in the next five years.

Social media can solve some of these problems by enabling two-way sharing of information. But it’s not the only answer; face-to-face communications are just as important. Internal communicators must focus on people before technology – and then choose the right tools to support a relationship – building strategy that keeps people informed and happy.

160

average number of emails sent by one worker in one day

247 billion

emails sent each day in 2009

2-4 hours

time spent on email each work day by the average employee

One final emerging trend: the everyday person as hero. People on the shop-floor of society and business are increasingly celebrated in the mainstream media. Social media can help organizations find and celebrate their own heroes by enabling bottom-up communications as well as top-down.

It’s all part of a new, people-focused culture in which everyone is well informed, aware of their value and where they fit within the organization, and able to share their views, questions and successes.



Source: The Definitive Guide to Taming the Email Monster, The Grossman Group, 2012

Elizabeth Castro: — *Restoring the Emotional Connection*

Emotion is often left out of business strategy, but in fact there's a direct link between how connected employees feel to the organization and their level of engagement.

That engagement has a direct impact on financial performance, so internal communications has a vital role to play in ensuring business success.

Our research audits reveal that employees crave consistent information that shows the organization has an eye on success. They want to understand the health of the organization, what leadership is doing to make sure it stays competitive and how they can be a part of it.

For internal communicators, that means helping managers to communicate business strategy in a way that gets employees motivated, engaged and keen to contribute. That boils down to two things:

1. Facilitating ongoing interactions with direct supervisors. Not all supervisors know how to start those conversations or answer difficult questions. Internal communicators need to give managers the right information, tools and training to be more confident, consistent communicators about organizational goals and initiatives.

2. Employees often struggle to understand how their own job fits into the larger context of strategy. They need to know what success looks like and how to achieve it. The key is to translate business goals into direct action items that collectively enable those goals to be met. I use the mnemonic ALIGN to describe this process:

- **AUDIT** – Understand the unique structure and challenges of your organization
- **LEAD** – Develop an effective communications strategy from the top down
- **INFORM** – Help supervisors be the experts and drivers of success within their teams
- **GUIDE** – Tell employees what you expect and how to achieve success
- **NURTURE** – Continue to foster communications with consistent messages over time

By clearly articulating business and individual goals, internal communications has a vital role to play in helping employees to forge a positive emotional connection with the organization. The resulting increase in engagement and focus means the organization has a better chance to succeed.



“There’s a direct link between how connected employees feel towards the organization and their level of engagement. If you keep employees engaged and focused, your organization has a better opportunity for financial success.”

Elizabeth Castro

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Part 2

— *We asked Sean Williams and Richard Dennison about the changing roles of internal communicators. They told us why changes are needed to survive and thrive.*

Sean Williams: — *A New Kind of Enterprise Communication*

Internal communications is undergoing a big shift, driven by two factors: the economy and the emergence of new social and analytical tools.

It's often said that smart companies market in a downturn. I'd like to propose another characteristic of smart companies in a downturn: they increase their focus on internal communications.

It's not a natural instinct. Most companies, when faced with a weak economy, will cut everything apart from sales. But it's at times of great change that companies need internal communications most – to keep people motivated, informed and invested in the future.

Senior management may not appreciate the importance of internal communications to keeping the business together during times of upheaval. So communicators must learn to articulate their value and prove that they make a positive, material impact on the business.

That means measuring – in hard numbers – how internal communications are helping individual employees and the overall organization to meet defined business objectives. Before that can happen, communicators must understand the strategic goals of the business and define measurable internal communications programs that enable those goals to be met.

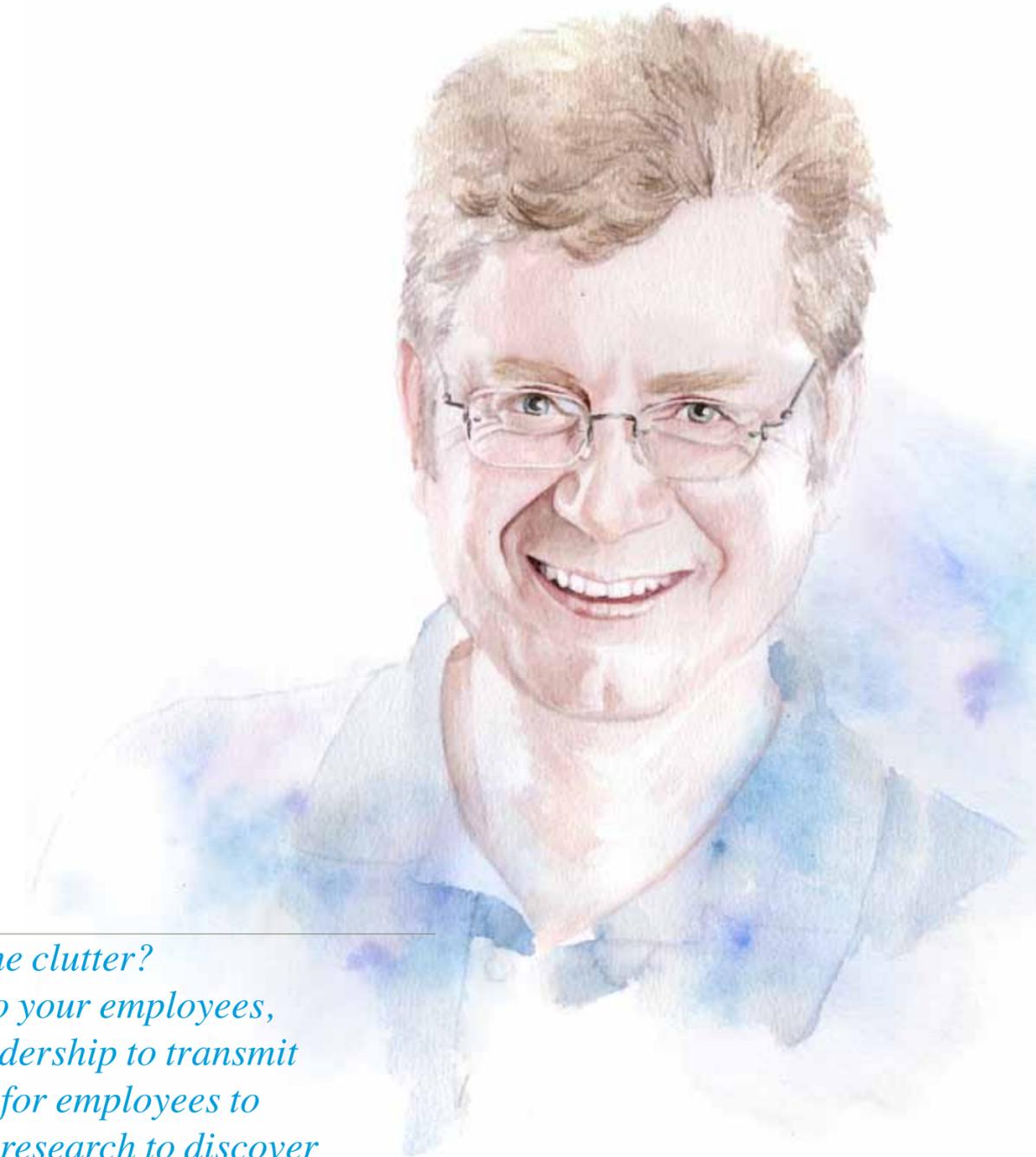
It's a much more strategic role than most internal comms professionals are used to, but many are stepping up to the plate. They know it's time to move from tactics (newsletters, news, magazines, calls) into something built around delivering business value.

Social media has a key role to play in this transition. It provides a platform for dialogue, collaboration and information-sharing – all things that modern enterprises desperately need. It also provides a wealth of data about user engagement and employee sentiment that can be used to demonstrate the value and impact of internal comms.

This year will see the emergence of a new kind of enterprise communication: strategically-planned, focused on business goals and supported with great new social and analytical tools.

*“How do you cut through the clutter?
Write stories that matter to your employees,
balancing the need for leadership to transmit
information with the need for employees to
have relevant content. Do research to discover
what those stories should be, and do it often.
All you've got to lose is your irrelevancy.”*

Sean Williams



Richard Dennison: — *The Social Intranet Breaks Down Convention*



If there's one thing that's changing the world of internal communications incredibly fast, it's the rise of the social intranet.

For a long time, internal communicators resisted social media. It was new and unproven and seemed like a distraction. Communicators couldn't see how it could work to the organization's advantage.

That attitude is going away now. People are seeing social media as an opportunity to change internal communications for the better. They're moving from a top-down approach to a social intranet where everyone has a say, and where the impact of any communication is immediately visible.

It's game-changing stuff, and the role of the internal communicator is shifting dramatically. The new breed of communicators are highly visible leaders, acting as spokespeople for the organization, driving change and coaching senior management in how to use new tools and platforms.

They're becoming more accountable, too. Everything in the online social world is eminently measurable, and there are lots of great new analytical tools. Communicators must be constantly alive to what works and what doesn't, constantly looking for ways to increase the value of communications.

Often, that means identifying the influencers in the organization – who may not be whom you think – and finding ways to work with them. One manager in BT's internal security department created a huge stir with clever, engaging video content and an eye for social media. If she'd followed conventional channels she

would probably have got zero attention, but social media gave her a wonderful opportunity to experiment with new ways to communicate and engage. And it paid off.

But just because communications are becoming more inclusive doesn't mean it should be a free-for-all. Communicators must exercise proper governance and make sure that whatever they do aligns with business strategy. Responding to change is not the goal: the goal is to manage that change in the interests of the organization.

“Internal communicators are no longer supporting the spokespeople – they are the spokespeople. It's head above the parapet time.”

Richard Dennison

Part 3

— *We asked Francesca Castagnetti and Amanda Merrell about the shifts in technology driven by social media. They told us about the new tactics they're deploying to change their organizations.*

Francesca Castagnetti:

— *Blurring Internal Communications Boundaries*

The very idea of internal communications is changing: scope is growing, goals are shifting and boundaries are blurring.

That might look chaotic at first glance. Things that change, grow, shift and blur are rarely signs of order and tranquillity, but, in this case, it's a positive. There's a chance to innovate and change the way things are done – an opportunity to re-invent what internal communications does.

We're a more visible part of the employee landscape in three ways: understanding their roles, developing their careers and innovating in their jobs.

Understanding

Internal communications used to be all about writing content and pushing out communications. You'd fire and call whatever you hit the target.

Today, it's a far more democratic process. The target fires back. We take our analysis – both quantitative and qualitative – to understand how messages are received. The feedback loop leads to a better understanding, shifting from the sender's to the receiver's agenda, the ultimate goal of internal communications.

Development

As boundaries blur, internal communications plays a role in employee development. We communicate, and support, development programs that enable employees to build, plan and measure learning programs central to career development.

And, most importantly, play a key role in building a stronger sense of Heineken brand and personality.

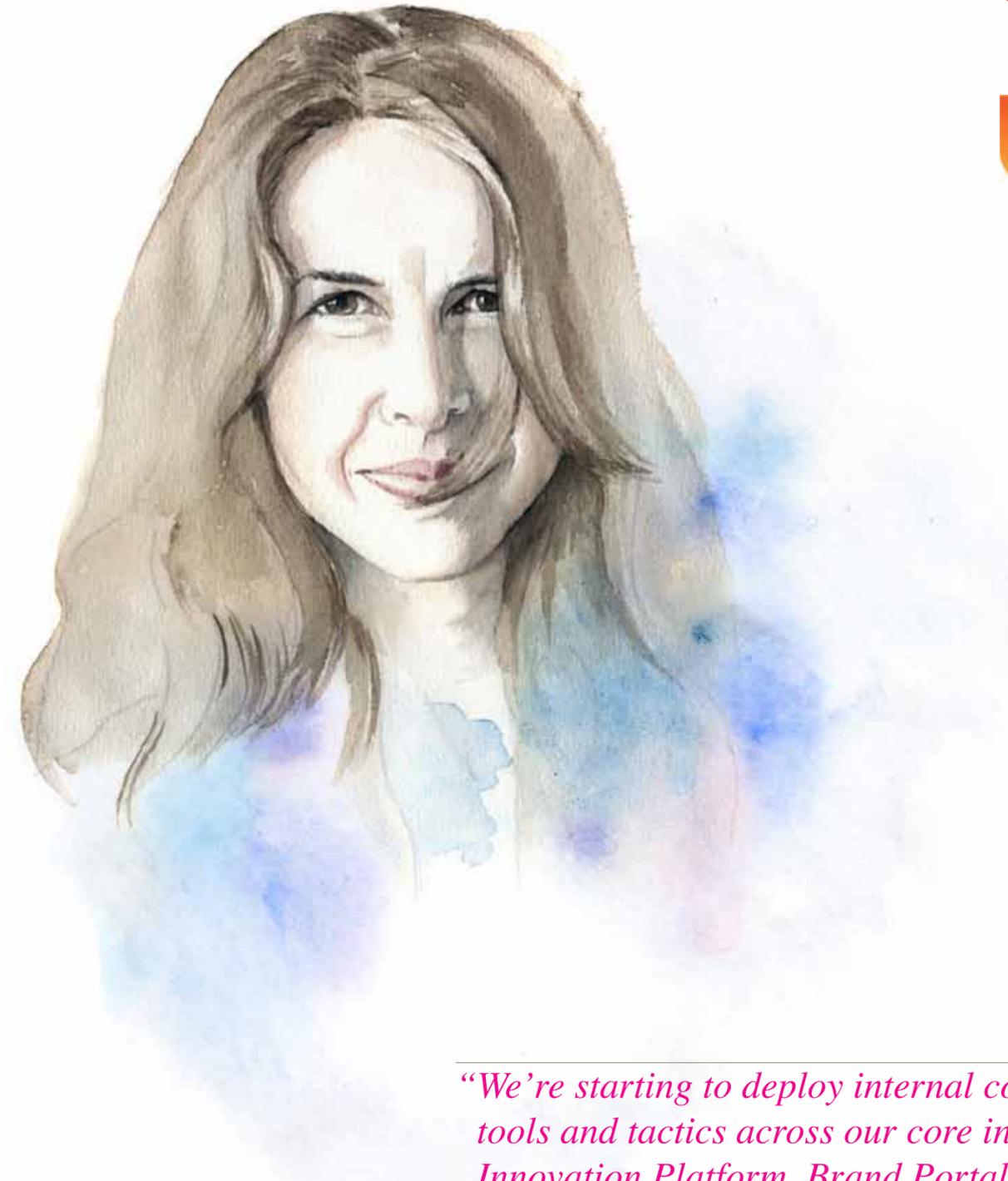
Some argue that we're in the HR domain here. But we're also in the communicator's domain.

The growth in scope and shift in goals means more value for employees and the organization.

Innovation

We're also thinking about how we drive innovation. We've been bringing people together in forums to share ideas for a while now. And these discussions have led to some fantastic projects. But we want to see more ideas, more projects and more results.

This year we're starting to introduce gamification (essentially rewarding employees for great corporate citizenship). Our goal is to apply social networking tools and tactics to organizational goals. If people are delivering ideas and projects that boost the bottom line then we want to recognise that contribution. We're starting this project this year and are excited about another win-win scenario for the company.



“We’re starting to deploy internal communications tools and tactics across our core intranet channels: Innovation Platform, Brand Portal and Enterprise University.”

Francesca Castagnetti

Amanda Merrell: — *Rounded Communication Tools*



The big change we're driving is from top-down internal communications to a collaborative, community-oriented approach.

Previously we would tour individual countries giving presentations to marketing teams, for example highlighting case studies that had worked in one country and could be used in others. Or we would try to share content and best practices by email.

Both approaches had shortcomings: people who missed the presentations failed to incorporate the recommended content in their marketing plans, or couldn't find it easily. With email, people's inboxes were overloaded, so they often didn't get round to reading them. Email wasn't an effective way of cascading information, as it never got further than the people on the email list. It was also difficult to share big files, such as videos.

So in 2011 we revamped the intranet in two ways: by creating a central content library, and by enabling participation and commentary from our global marketing community.

Now we can understand what content works by measuring KPIs such as likes and dislikes, which content gets shared the most, and what gets the most comments and recommendations. We're also encouraging people to create and share their own content.

It's about understanding what the community finds valuable. We know that video and live broadcasts featuring senior management, where people have the chance to ask questions and get answers, are extremely popular. For junior staff to have direct access to very senior management is very motivating: they can gain recognition at very senior level which was rare in the days of top-down communications.

There are two pieces of advice for internal communicators looking to move to a more collaborative approach. Firstly, don't be too prescriptive: listen to the community and understand what works for them. We listen constantly, and discovered for example that people wanted to access the intranet from their personal iPads. That wasn't in our plan, but we saw the value and reconfigured the site for iPad access. And finally, it's all about content. Get the content right, and engagement will follow.

“One of the most popular things is live broadcasts with senior management, as people have the chance to ask questions and get answers.”

Amanda Merrell

Conclusion

— *To sum up we had a think about the collective impact of the challenges facing different internal communicators this year.*

Conclusion

— *Kevin Cody,* *CEO, SmallWorlders*

Our six contributors have picked apart the issues facing internal communicators with skill and precision.

Nobody disputes the need for internal communications to change. Everybody agrees it can emerge from a difficult period more strategic, relevant and accountable than ever before. But there's a caveat. Communicators have to take on some key challenges and win them.

Be Engaging

It's not just about what you want to tell them. It's about what they need to hear. We've read why - from both a philosophical and practical point-of-view - conventional, email-driven, top-down communications are failing. The opportunity to build rounded communication is now upon us. We need to engage employees with rich and two-way personalised communication. The alternative will be watching them march out the door when times, inevitably, improve.

Be Rewarding

Internal communication should reward employees. And that works on two levels. Firstly, you need to enrich them with communication that's explains their strategic fit with the organization. Secondly, you can thank them with social or, if you prefer, tangible rewards when they provide value. It's a win-win situation. Happy employees are productive employees.

Be Valuable

Delivering demonstrable value is increasingly important. We want employees to achieve more, but can they, or we, realistically work harder? We need to make communications smarter and more strategic. We need to align with evolving organizational goals and spread our communications skills into the domains of innovation, collaboration, learning and sharing. By demonstrating value-add, we can improve life for our employers, employees and, crucially, ourselves.

Be Measured

A strategic communicator needs to be measurable. We need to be able to show that you can do the things that matter: build relationships, retain staff, boost productivity, speed up inductions and reduce the cost of learning. Let's embrace accountability.

We will be working hard to make sure our intranet technology supports all our clients in their bid to become a post credit-crunch communicator. It's not about the technology, that's for sure, but if you have the right attitude, drive and creative approach, it can help you make a difference.



About SmallWorlders

At SmallWorlders we're privileged to work with some of the world's top brands to build some of the smartest intranet platforms around. In every case, the communicators we work with are passionate agents of change, eager to adopt new technologies to create a more collaborative, more productive – and more fun – workplace.

We adhere to one of the core guiding principles of internal communications: people first, technology second. No matter what cool new tools are available, the most important thing is getting people together to work smarter, better and more enjoyably.

We can build you an internal communications platform your whole organization will love. Visit www.smallworlders.com and take a look at what we've done for brands like Heineken, Nestlé and DeBeers.

This isn't our first ebook. Check out:

Why your marketing intranet fails

This eBook will teach you how to spot and avoid common pitfalls on your way to a platform laden with intranet goodies.

Intranet Usability Workbook

In this eBook we share everything we know about usability. It's the stuff that saw us win a Nielsen Norman Usability Award and led to our Intranet Design Annual award win in 2011.

We've also got a blog

Or visit the [*Social Intranet Blog*](#) to get the latest news and views from across our studio.

Or if you want to just talk ...

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