

Future-proofing Internal Communication

How times have changed for internal communicators.

This thought struck me during Melcrum's 2012 Summit in Sydney after I shared the Twitter hashtag #MelcrumSummit. The majority in the room got involved and participated in the global Twitter conversation using a SmartPhone.

Quite a shift when you remember that just two years ago, the technology that the average internal communication professional brought with them to an event tended to be limited to a laptop, snuck out during breaks, in order to try to remotely update something on their organization's corporate news site. You could spot the well-funded communicators as they had a corporate mobile. Usually email-ready.

Since then we've seen an adjustment in the degree to which internal communicators are adopting social media and mobile technologies. The recent [blog](#) wrapping up Melcrum's European 2012 Summit was taken from a collection of the tweets and 140 character nuggets sent out during the event by communicators.

But are we using this technology effectively? I believe so, but only when its backed up by a strategic mindset. There is something elegant about 140 characters, which I discovered upon starting my comms career in an automobile association during the early 90s. Communicating with the roadside mechanics was limited to 140 character messages on their dispatch monitors, which forced the message to be honed down to the essential facts. Instantly, we knew there was no room for tone – this was transmission of information. The communication would come later, when the patrols came back to base, met in the depot or had a team leader ride with them for a face-to-face discussion. We adapted our message to the available technology and the context of the workplace.

However, as we can see from Melcrum's research into the use of social and collaborative tools in organizations such as the [Communication for Collaboration](#) Forum study, published earlier this year, there are times when the “technological tail wags the communication dog”. There are a great many communicators who could add “retrofitting strategy to technological decisions made by the IT function” to their curriculum vitae. This is often prefaced with “our company has just bought [insert name of software here] and we now need to work out who has used this effectively for communication.”

Forward-thinking for function success

There are certain big questions that can't be answered in 140 characters, so it was no accident that the Summit included futurist and visionary Anna-Lise Kjaer. With Internal Communication teams resource-strapped and time-poor, planning for the next three years can feel ambitious. Getting to the end of 2013 without budget cuts or team shrinkage keeps many IC heads awake at night. Yet Kjaer asked questions about the workplace in 2020 – a full eight years from now, no less. Questions such as:

- What impact will cloud computing have on the way employees connect?
- What is the implication of even greater globalization?
- How will technology change the physical, social and psychological nature of work?
- How will people find happiness in the “new” workplace?

Answering these types of question requires our profession to look to functions beyond the communication disciplines – the analysts, the strategic planners, the technologists, the organizational development practitioners, the scientists, the creatives and designers – who see 2020 as a short-term horizon.

These timelines are also longer than communicators are typically used to working with. Many change programs take place over three to five years, but the average tenure for an IC manager is (considerably) under five years in the one organization.

So, I'm left with two questions, of exactly 140 characters:

How do we future proof the Internal Communication function? How can you prepare your company for effective communication in the year 2020 if you won't be there?

Join the discussion in the [Melcrum Communication Network LinkedIn group](#).

Until next time,

Jonathan