

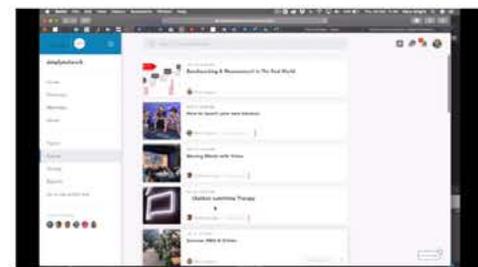


Corporate intranet supports valuable communication

- consultancy -

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Effective internal communications for a global company brings many advantages but can be hard to implement and maintain. With various stakeholders and their differing needs, creating an engaging communications strategy is an opportunity for commercial and organisational goals to be met. Global plastic packaging manufacturer RETAL shares how developing its intranet has been both more difficult and more rewarding than it expected.

For traditional manufacturing companies, the understanding of what effective communications are and why they're necessary can be the first hurdle in developing a communications strategy. Different stakeholders can see the value of communications in opposite terms, with the ROI hard to quantify, especially in the short term. Yet the cost of poor internal communications may only be seen when it's too late, so proposing, agreeing to, and, crucially, getting the budget for, a corporate intranet is the first hurdle.

RETAL develops and manufactures plastic packaging solutions to customers in over 60 countries worldwide. The business was founded in 1994 and currently employs around 1,500 employees. Today, RETAL has locations worldwide including Eastern and Western Europe and the US, so its wide range of cultures both internally with employees and externally with customers and other stakeholders, means that communication is key. Having historically relied on separate communication within each of its locations, the company realised that integrated internal communication could add considerable value to both its employee engagement and its bottom line – as long as it was done right.

This realisation was not overnight, however, and it certainly wasn't an easy sell across the company. Natalya Lobko, RETAL's Director of Communications, tells simplycommunicate, "We are a traditional manufacturing company that wants to evolve in the best way for our people and our business. As a privately-owned global company with our unique mix of cultures and history, we have to be clear of the value of any investment. There are a group of us in RETAL that could see that our communications could be improved with the right attitude and the right tools, so we put together a project team to develop a proposal for the board."

Creating structure

Lobko, alongside Project Manager Pavel Matuska, created a project proposal that explained the needs, goals and requirements of an integrated communication strategy, with the implementation of a company-wide intranet at its core. Lobko continues, "It was exciting to develop the proposal as we had to get right to the heart of what we wanted and why we wanted it. For a few years before, we'd been working on improving our internal and external communications on a relatively unstructured basis, so to be able to give our project a form was crucial."

- cartoon of the month -



The presentation included clarity on the goals of the intranet, such as increasing employee engagement, improving internal knowledge management, and building a positive communication culture. Strengthening brand identity to be aligned with the existing corporate brand identity was highlighted as a key goal, with more purposeful brand management required to bring together the various functions and locations to show the broader capabilities of RETAL. The team also knew that it would be most suitable to create an intranet using its existing SharePoint platform, as Microsoft Office 365 was already well used and well received across the company. A SWOT analysis proved useful too, by identifying what RETAL already had in place that could be built on, and showing potential challenges such as different cultural attitudes to transparency of information, and the current fragmented, decentralised communication.

Pavel Matuska continues, "Natalya and I make a good team because she's very focused on the 'dream outcome' of the project and I'm more practical, so between us we were able to define both an inspirational and a realistic catalogue of requirements. We had incredible support from our project team too, who really helped to drive the project forward. Our initial meeting included our European HR Director Ausra Cepukiene, who brought insight into how the intranet needed to support our internal HR requirements, and the project could not have happened with our two Olgas; Olga Batsko's SharePoint knowledge was crucial and Olga Mukosienko's multilingual content capabilities brought everything together. As the project manager, I sat in the middle of the wider company and the project team, so I was constantly keeping relevant people informed and sharing feedback."

From eight, to four, to one

Once the project goals and the detailed requirements list had been clearly defined and approved, RETAL sent the tender out to potential service providers, with eight companies initially pitching to win the contract. After the first eight was assessed, RETAL met with four companies for a more detailed presentation, of which one was Attollo.

A UK-based digital workplace consultancy that specialises in delivering SharePoint-integrated corporate intranet solutions, Attollo was co-founded by Sam Dolan, who met with the RETAL team. Both Lobko and Matuska say that Dolan's extensive technical knowledge coupled with a positive attitude and down-to-earth personality meant that Attollo stood out from the start. Lobko says, "Sam is confident, experienced and he really knows what he's talking about. Attollo wasn't the cheapest proposal but it was comprehensive and honest. We didn't want to reinvent the wheel, but we knew we wanted a solution that would allow us to create the platform we needed, so the ready solution for SharePoint offered by Attollo was very appealing. Buying the Attollo tool meant we were also buying knowledge and some predefined processes, which gave the project a strong head start."

The ready solution offered by Attollo was a key element in it being awarded the project too, with its proven integration at other global businesses meaning that Sam had seen and handled all manner of challenges in the successful implementation of corporate intranet. Dolan explains, "Working with Natalya, Pavel and the RETAL team has been a great experience; I've really valued how open they are and how they were determined to get the best intranet solution for the company by listening to what we could do and combining that with their wish list. Our platform gives a starting point for a digital workforce, it's a gateway to better communication."

The project was initially set to take 28 weeks from start to finish, yet it ended up taking 10 months, due to evolving requirements, delays in defining information architecture, correct content creation, and some resistance internally. The intranet was agreed to be in English, RETAL's corporate language, with the ability for various other languages to be accessible through Google Translate, which also caused some hold-up. Matuska says, "As a project manager, it's up to me to smooth the transitional elements of the project, so, with Sam and Natalya's help, I was able to keep the project moving forwards, even if it was slower than we wanted at times. A big part of the delay was the SharePoint root clean up and removing old information architecture mistakes."



Utilising skills in-house

Part of the Attollo service provision is its on-site training and onboarding process, which it delivered to RETAL over four days once the intranet was 'soft launched' in order to gain 'ambassadors' for the project. Dolan adds, "RETAL has a strong, engaged comms team that was the perfect group to receive the training. Attollo is so easy to use, we only needed one days' worth of hands-on training, the other three days were spent in a Requirements' Workshop, (diving into their high-level requirements and aligning it to our solution offerings), a Content Planning Workshop (looking at their content), and an Information Architecture Workshop (looking at their site structure, tagging, UI, UX, etc.) We spent time together going through the different elements and capabilities of the platform, with their extensive understanding of SharePoint an excellent start for me to build from!"

The RETAL intranet project included a well-received competition to 'Name Our Intranet!' on the company's existing internal newsletter, which had been a pre-cursor project that helped promote communications and its value to stakeholders across the company. The competition was a great opportunity to engage with its future intranet users and to identify active people and nominate them as potential department site owners. RETAL chose the name CIRCLE as it reflects the inclusive element of the intranet and the continual development, as well as delivering visual cues aligned with the existing corporate brand identity.

With the winning name CIRCLE announced, the project gained apace beyond the project team. Lobko says, "Once we had the name, we were really driven to launch and show the company at large the value of sharing knowledge, news, and important information. Throughout the process, we have taken care to involve people as much as possible, both those who have been keen from the start and those that were more reticent. As a multinational company, we have to take into consideration very different communication styles, both on a formal and informal level, and appreciate that some people are not comfortable with that 'sharing everything' approach. We have to be true to our values and our intranet project has achieved that."

With RETAL's CIRCLE intranet from Attollo now efficiently up and running, Natalya and her Corporate Communications' team are focused on engaging content and regular news updates. The platform delivers a central location for each of its global functions to have a dedicated channel, plus cross-company content such as employee profiles and details of upcoming events and exhibitions.

Matuska concludes, "This has been a rewarding project as it has shown the value of strong, carefully-defined communication for a global manufacturing company like RETAL. With increased digitisation and a greater value placed on content, an engaged, integrated intranet is a must for a strong brand identity. Attollo has created an intranet for us that appropriately reflects us and our business and allows us to grow our internal communications and influence our external communications. What is crucial now is that our communications team continues to utilise this tool; by training and encouraging our people to take ownership of their own place in the CIRCLE."



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