



TRANSFORMING INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS THROUGH THE POWER OF DATA

An article with Leanne Cunnold,
SVP Global Internal Communications, Schneider Electric.

“My background is in strategy and general business management – running countries, regions and functions,” says Leanne Cunnold, the Hong Kong-based Global Head of Internal Communications for Schneider Electric. “In those roles, you always have data insights at your fingertips: What are your orders? What’s your revenue? Where are the margins? Are you meeting your number? It’s those indicators that let you know what’s happening and why – that’s how you make the decisions you need to make. So when I moved into internal communications two and a half years ago, and I found minimal data and almost no analytics at all, that was extremely challenging for me.”

Cunnold’s answer was to turn all of her commercial expertise on the internal landscape, building a professional data-gathering and analytics capability within Schneider Electric’s global internal communications function. The result has been a new focus for the function on the most impactful channels, assets and topics; time spared; resources saved; noise

reduced; and suite of metrics that have even helped overturn some of her own preconceptions about the effectiveness of certain tools and channels.

Getting the environment right first

“This job is about delivering information effectively and with impact,” says Cunnold, recalling her shock at the thin data ecosystem she found in internal communications – and on the most critical information. “You’re charged with transforming a function and growing it to the next level. It’s impossible do that if you can’t say, with quantitative certainty, what’s working and what’s not.”

Solving the issue was no simple matter. First, Cunnold found the function lacked basic data-capture tools: The tracking software provided along with Schneider Electric’s suite of digital channels – like Yammer’s off-the-shelf metrics module, or even GoogleAnalytics – were too rudimentary to offer her the real, actionable intelligence she wanted.

“They gave you basic hits, but there was no visibility on the key decisions both we and our audiences were making: Which topics were people reading about? Which channels were they using? Which were the best channels for which topics?”

Second, Cunnold knew that, even if she had better tracking software, the runaway scope of the comms landscape would prevent her from deploying it effectively anyway. For example, the company hosted over 150 digital newsletters in various forms, springing up out of disparate business units and functions, and on a variety of different IT platforms. “Many were just being emailed out. So even if we had the tools, there would be no way to get comparable metrics.”

Building an analyst capability

Upon taking over the role, therefore, one of her first actions was to move all newsletters to the same digital platform.

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Next, Cunnold set about finding the best tracking tools possible. From GoogleAnalytics, she migrated to Piwik, partnering with Schneider Electric's own IT Department.

Cunnold was now harvesting the data she wanted, but she still had one final hurdle. “We could now get the data, but we didn't have the analytics,” she explains. “We could see the numbers — who clicked; what they clicked on — but it didn't tell us anything. Measurement is not just about cataloguing the numbers, it's about seeing the movement between the numbers: What's the trend? Does the click-through or open rate increase or decrease with certain topics?”

It became clear that she had to bring a full-time analytics capability into the function. “At first, I had a comms person in my team analysing all this data,” she explains. “But that wasn't a viable solution. It's the wrong skillset. It's like asking a data analyst to write a wonderful storytelling article. What I needed was someone brilliant with numbers; adept at interpreting data and turning it into business intelligence.”

So, after a targeted recruitment process, Cunnold landed the position that continues to exist in her global internal communications team today: a former professional marketing analyst, based in India, tasked full-time with measuring and analysing the company's digital professional marketing analyst, based in India, tasked full-time with measuring and analysing the company's digital communications channels.

Reducing the overload

Finally having real insights in place, Cunnold was able to start making radical changes to the communications estate, and she immediately found her first area priority: information overload.

“What we saw straight away was too much noise coming out of too many channels, with too little coherence,” she explains. “Employees were being bombarded — which meant time wasted for them and more work for us.

Content was having to be reproduced in multiple channels, because we didn't have a sense of the different impacts of different channels.”

The 150 newsletters being generated across the company were a primary target. “Some were from Internal Communications, many from other sources,” she recalls. “I was determined to reduce them down to a

core few-dozen — by eliminating some; by combining others; or by finding more appropriate channels for the content. That was the goal: Streamline our content into fewer, more coherent channels, and be sure to match the content to the channel.”

The analytics afforded her the power to do that. “It gave us indisputable arguments for change,” she says. “It allowed us to show people whose heart and soul was in their functional newsletter, ‘This is not really working.’ The data analytics took all the heat out of that decision.”

In some situations, Cunnold was able to find less draconian solutions, scaling down a newsletter from weekly to fortnightly publication, as the more granular analytics showed that people read the newsletter more often when it was published less frequently. “Because employees then weren't being bombarded with it every week, so they were more likely to see it as an opportunity to learn.” In total, the number of newsletters across the company was reduced from 150 down to a core 40. “That is a huge impact on noise reduction — and on both producer and receiver's time.”

Streamlining campaigns

Schneider also managed to streamline the number of major campaigns being run internally around the company. “And we did that, again, by showing in hard numbers what was successful and what wasn't,” she explains. “A couple of years ago, we were running 10 HR campaigns a year — on performance appraisals and goal setting, learning and development, diversity and inclusion, wellbeing, and so on. That's a lot for employees to absorb, and a lot of work for us at the back-end because HR would want lots of visible assets to be built to support those campaigns— stories, packs, toolkits, videos and events.”

The result of having detailed metrics on performance and impact has been profound: As a result, the Chief HR Officer has agreed to reduce those 10 annual campaigns to just four core ones for the coming year. “That not only focuses attention, it means we're zeroing on the real strategically important topics. When you have 142,000 employees around the world, there's a lot of information going around — what is our strategy; what initiatives are aligned to that strategy — but there's only so much that one employee can consume. This allows us to be much more targeted on what matters.”

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Changing perceptions

But Cunnold has not just been using analytics to refocus the communications operation on more strategic initiatives; certain enlightenments have come to her too.

“When I took this role, I had all those newsletters in my sights,” she explains. “It’s such an old-fashioned channel! I really wanted to get rid of them.” But the data analysis, when it arrived, told her a quite different story.

“I saw was that, within countries and individual functions, people really liked them. It’s close to them and their concerns, and still viewed as a valuable channel for news consumption. So my stance softened somewhat, because the data is there, and I’ve had to accept that the targeted amount we have today is actually about right.”

Visibility through a dashboard

The work to rationalise and optimise content and channels continues. The analysis performed by the analyst now gets rolled up into a regular dashboard of metrics, used to constantly monitor uptake of messages, channels, topics and campaigns, and to recalibrate the emphasis of Schneider Electric’s communications worldwide.

“He produces a monthly report that tells us, at a glance, where we need to start shifting resource and priorities,” she explains. “I can see in a single snapshot which channels are successful and which need work; where are we green and where are we in the red.” The deck runs to a full breakdown of usage and uptake by country. “And that’s one of the key things we couldn’t get with our previous capability. We have three core businesses, within each of which are more business divisions, and then functions and 100-plus countries globally. That needs a lot of breaking down. Now I can see instantly that our China organisation is still ‘amber’ or ‘red’ around uptake of Yammer. I also know that’s fine, because the comparable analytics in the dashboard show how popular WeChat is in China, so we know it’ll be a

very slow move to be ‘green’ on that (or maybe never). But I can also see, for example, that only 13 percent are going to the employee portal, so I know to go after them to improve their core content. That’s the kind of deep-dive analysis that’s invaluable for making decisions.”

The right message to the right medium

Crucially for Cunnold, the dashboard has provided clear insights on how to match channel to content – and what pushes the right levers in building uptake.

She has seen clear analysis that, for campaigns on community-building topics like diversity or International Women’s Day, Yammer has a very successful uptake; but for employee development messaging or goal setting, much less so. “So when we next have these events like International Women’s Day, it’s right there on the dashboard: We can say, ‘Let’s forget about sending out a newsletters or posting about it on the local intranet, because it’s Yammer that’s the most successful channel for this topic.’”

The dashboard also shows, at a single glance, peripheral impacts on channels. “For example, it’s helped us see that Yammer is successful in those functions or business areas where leadership is very active on the channel,” she explains. “That’s a very powerful insight to start building more leadership engagement.”

All of which begs the question why internal communications is generally poor at pursuing metrics like this in such a driven way. “Why don’t people do this sort of stuff more? Maybe because it’s quite challenging. You’ve got to have the budget to invest money into getting the analytics from the system. You have to assign a resource to it. You’ve got to pay for the analytics. But the benefits so clearly outweigh that investment– it’s more efficient for internal communications, more impactful for employees, and better results for every business area running campaigns. So you just have to make it a priority – and then be willing to argue for it as a core business capability.”



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Currently in Hong Kong, Leanne has been with Schneider Electric for 25 years across various senior leadership positions in sales, marketing, LOB, strategy, M&A, and Communications. Her most recent role with SE is leading global internal communications with a large team across all markets.