Archant Case Study

A Traditional Publishing Firm Embraces Enterprise Social Networking
to create Competitive Advantage

SOCIALCAST
by vmware

"We advocate using social media for our external marketing purposes, so we understand the need to provide a secure business platform where people can communicate with their teams and peers and stay focused on the working day rather than just having a chat. Our aim is to provide Archant employees with the best enterprise social networking platform, and that is Socialcast."

— Chris Thompson, Head of Development, Archant

ARCHANT

Archant is one of the United Kingdom's largest, independently owned regional media businesses. Archant traces it roots back more than 160 years, and specializes in print and online publishing. Privately held and headquartered in Norwich, UK, the company employs 2,000 people.

Archant produces daily and weekly regional newspapers and owns three magazine companies which produce about 80 magazines covering topics from weddings to current events. The company also publishes 180 websites and digital products, in addition to hosting events and exhibitions, and supporting rewards programs for the vendors they support.

Business Challenge

How do you bring a group of seasoned professional journalists into the digital age of communications? For Archant, the UK's largest independently owned media business, social networking was seen as a vital step toward bringing a traditional publishing house into more modern, open, and collaborative ways of doing business.

A Paradigm Shift in Communication Style

Archant was ready to stage a shift in mindset through the use of enterprise social networking. The idea was to try and connect people located across various offices, making it more efficient for them to share information and ideas. They also wanted the ability to broadcast important information company-wide, or to specific groups. A tool that could instantly link individuals, work groups, and offices was seen as way to complement and eventually replace the prevailing, yet inefficient forms of communication such as email and the telephone. With enterprise social networking, Archant could bridge the gap between old and new communications styles, since many employees were already familiar with personal social tools like Twitter and Facebook.

Archant planned a general overhaul and refresh of the company's intranet site. Sifting through the dated tools, content, and materials, it was apparent that they needed a "new and different" approach to disseminating information. They began to explore a company-wide social network as a way to keep content and ideas fresh. Microsoft® SharePoint®, Archant's intranet mainstay, was an obvious choice for an internal corporate social network. Upon close examination, however, Head of Development Chris Thompson and his team realized that the SharePoint offering would be too complex to learn, and the features and functionality couldn't address all that Archant needed in an enterprise social network.

Archant wanted a tool similar to Facebook, but knew an external social network wouldn't work. It was important to locally manage policy and control the company's wealth of proprietary information. They needed an on-premise solution to manage access to content, ensure corporate policies were followed, and keep proprietary information secure. Researching options, Thompson and his team chose Socialcast for its ease of use, and administrative control.

"Had we not put Socialcast in place we wouldn't have advanced with next generation communications, or helped to increase our sales and revenue"

— Chris Thompson, Head of Development, Archant

Socialcast Solution

From Traditional to 21st Century

Archant dubbed the company's new Socialcast enterprise social network "Connect". With Connect, Archant has moved a traditional publishing house toward more modern, open, collaborative ways of doing business.

On the day that this new enterprise social network was launched, Archant CEO Adrian Jeakings designated one Friday afternoon as "Profile Day." All employees were asked to take the afternoon off from their typical duties to create a profile, add a profile picture, join relevant groups and connect with their colleagues. It was a successful kickstart. By the end of the day, more than 1,000 Archant employees were hooked; logged in and engaged in the Connect community. Today, Connect has 1,400 users—more than half of the company.

At the outset, the Human Resources team began utilizing Socialcast's broadcast feature to communicate new policy changes and important corporate information in the Connect community. They found that they now had a way to reach those employees who weren't opening Human Resources e-mails.

Employees can also use the web-based or mobile versions of Socialcast while away from the office to stay abreast of company and group developments and participate in conversations in the Socialcast community.

"Connect has been good for company morale," according to Chris Thompson. "With sales reps using Connect to brag about a new advertising deal or favorable customer developments, everyone's confidence benefits from knowing how well the company is doing." In fact, community-wide broadcast messages in Connect have spurred competition among Archant's sales teams. "Sharing profits, strategies, and successes publicly through Connect has ultimately generated more revenue for Archant,"said Chris Thompson, who went on to say, "when one sales group posts wins, other sales teams respond with their numbers, each trying to outperform each other."

By posting resolutions or fixes through Connect, less one-to-one interaction is required by IT staff to solve problems, freeing the help desk to tackle more complex issues.

Technical or company-wide IT issues are also shared through Connect. The company's help desk can quickly see who is affected by known or unknown technical issues, and thereby respond to problems faster. Connect users can help get the word out as soon as technical issues are resolved too, reducing update calls to the help desk even further.

Creating a Culture of Openness

One result of Connect was to immediately flatten the organization. "Our CEO is using the platform. People feel like they understand the mission of Archant and that they are a part of a team," said Chris Thompson.

This new accessibility to executives who were previously viewed as very formal and remote has been energizing for employees. For example, one of Archant's senior directors wanted to encourage employees to add personal photos to enhance their profiles, as opposed to plain headshots or passport photos. Being a horse enthusiast, he posted a profile picture of himself with his horse. People learned something new about this executive, and it set a tone for other executives and employees to share personal information.

This has helped to create a more open culture and to surface connections between employees with similar interests.

Connect has made it possible for any employee to follow or engage with executives that they might not otherwise have had the opportunity to interact with on a day-to-day basis.

"Deploying Socialcast was a completely seamless experience both for our IT organization and our employees."

— Chris Thompson, Head of Development, Archant

Business Impact

Socialcast was easy for Archant to deploy company-wide and required no user manuals or time consuming training sessions. Chris Thompson went on to say "deploying Socialcast was a completely seamless experience both for our IT organization and our employees."

Embedding Social Into Everyday Business Systems

Archant is quickly realizing the business value of Socialcast by leveraging some of the key features of the platform.

Archant has integrated social capabilities in SharePoint using Socialcast Reach, allowing them to pull information and conversations into the Connect community. Now when employees go to the company intranet for HR forms, documentation or expense reports, they can ask questions and the conversation is seen on the intranet in addition to being posted directly into Connect. All employees benefit from these discussions because everything is kept in context.

Socialcast allows Archant employees to create groups around projects, departments, or interests. Groups are thriving at Archant. Within the Connect community there are Environmental Groups, Travel Groups, Photography Groups, and an Accounting Department group to stay aware of outstanding payments, invoices, new customer billings, etc. Travel Groups have proven especially helpful to advertising representatives who travel and need to find places to eat or stay; with Connect they can see what colleagues are posting as reviews.

Groups allow employees to share interests and expertise which keeps employees engaged and actively participating in Connect.

The Photography Group is also very successful at Archant. As a publishing firm, Archant employs many talented photographers who participate in photo competitions, and Connect gives them a way to share their accolades. There are also weekly quizzes in the environmental group to identify a mystery "green" object, which engages a lot of users and prompts discussion around environmental issues and how the company can respond to them.

Socialcast Improves the Value of Collaboration

The business value of Socialcast can be measured in both direct and indirect ways. Thanks to Connect, Archant has seen collaboration across magazine teams improve dramatically.

Connect has also created a channel for Archant employees to publicize what they are working on, which can encourage others to offer support and insight that otherwise may not have occurred. By eliminating much of the time spent tracking down answers or expertise, Archant employees are more productive, more efficient, and able to fill knowledge gaps faster.

Surprisingly, Connect has also proved helpful during the hiring process. Prospective employees are attracted to Archant's contemporary forms of internal communication and working together. The world depends on social platforms in our personal lives, and Archant now delivers a similar type of platform at work. Connect has made Archant a more attractive employer to next-generation employees who have come to expect these kinds of tools in the workplace.

Teams that hadn't worked together before now solve problems and share stories around strategies and tactics. This tighter integration has had a direct impact on the bottom line resulting in more successful launches, new deals, new types of advertising and more.

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