



# Executive summary

FOR THOSE on the roller coaster of managing employee communication within organisations, the ride has never been more thrilling. In what seems like a few short years, the internal communication environment has shifted from one of semi-controlled messages passing through a formal system, to an organic, collaborative and dynamic place where ever-changing technology is the order of the day.

This report examines this fast-moving environment, and explores how a diverse range of organisations are dealing with the age of social networking and user-generated content. It taps into the latest thinking from communication experts around the world and presents the views of some industry leaders. It poses the question: is internal communication now more about technology than psychology?

There's no denying that with the onslaught of technology, the complexity of the internal communicator's role has moved up many gears. What was a simple choice of channels a few years ago involving e-mail, newsletters, chief executive officer (CEO) talks and the like, has exploded into a smorgasbord of wikis, blogs, podcasts, tweets and social media profiles, to name but a few. With such a complex menu of tools, it's hardly surprising the channels themselves have taken on a life of their own and opened up new connectivity across organisations.

At the same time, the basics of internal communication have not altered. Some experts warn of the danger of focusing

too much on the tools, and ignoring the fundamentals of building good relationships and fostering trust within the organisation. That is never more the case than during times of crisis or major organisational change, such as that seen as a result of the global financial crisis. While enthusiasts at one end of the technological spectrum wax lyrical about the benefits of online collaboration, those on the opposite side urge caution and a re-emphasis on face-to-face communication. Many organisations examined during research for this report are striking a balance, retaining good strategy but embracing new media channels as part of their internal communication repertoire.

The report is presented in three parts. Part One provides an overview of the current key issues facing internal communication practitioners. The first chapter considers some of the dilemmas of the technological age and looks at how the entire landscape has changed in a very short period of time. It canvasses expert opinions on the value or otherwise of a range of new tools, highlights the importance of leadership and measurement in communication, and considers whether the focus on channels has meant a diminishing emphasis on broader internal communication strategy.

Chapter 2 continues that theme, looking at some of the latest thinking and international research on new media tools. How are these new channels being applied, and what are the main obstacles to effectiveness?

Chapter 3 goes from latest thinking back to basics, and underlines the benefits of face-to-face communication. It highlights the dangers of relegating this method to the 'old fashioned' box, and gives examples of situations where personal communication is the most effective channel.

Chapter 4 examines another basic aspect of solid organisational communication: building trust within a workforce. It evaluates some of the many options available within organisations to bring about a positive cultural shift and discusses the barriers to building and maintaining trust.

Chapter 5 covers a vital area for all internal communicators: communicating during organisational change. It accesses expert thinking to consider how newer tools can be introduced to enhance, not detract from, effective communication at times of turmoil within a business or agency. An important aspect here is that the channels are serving a higher purpose – a means to an end, not an end in themselves.

The final chapter of Part One considers the important issue of generational needs in today's workforce. Do Generation Y workers really have a completely different attitude to communication than their more senior colleagues? How can an organisation ensure staff of all ages have access to consistent information despite an emphasis on different channels?

Part Two of the report features a range of expert opinions, from those fully wedded to the technological revolution to those who advise caution and a re-focusing on traditional methods.

Advice from leading communication experts covers such issues as dealing with cynicism, the need for a genuine desire for change before internal communication really works, the crucial role of the person at the

helm of the organisation, and technology making internal communication even more important than it has been in the past.

Part Three presents a series of case studies that examine how diverse organisations have taken on specific internal communication challenges. Some case studies relate to the introduction of specific technology, while others discuss broader issues impacting on internal communication practitioners.

Some of the documented strategies are award winners. Others simply represent organisations quietly going about their business. Whichever sector or industry they relate to, all the case studies have a common thread as practitioners strive to come to terms with the many challenges and opportunities of today's internal communication environment.