

Nampak

Nampak Plastics is one the UK leading manufactures of HDPE milk bottles, supplying over two billion bottles per annum. The company has 550 employees across nine sites in the UK and is in the process of opening a plant in Southern Ireland, employing a further 25 employees. Nampak's head office is in Milton Keynes.

Why did Nampak want to use social media to access employee voice?

There is a strong emphasis on colleague engagement and the importance of employee voice to help achieve the desired culture. Eric Collins, Managing Director explains how, when moving into his role eight years ago, he took a new approach and looked to move the organisation from a *"traditional hierarchical, hard-nosed manufacturing business"* to a company that gained a competitive edge through collaborating and driving innovation through one of its main assets – its colleagues.

It was important to give colleagues a voice to share ideas, and harness innovation with two-way communication tools This was seen both as being a good in itself, and also a key element of organisational success: *"My own personal view is, no matter what job you're doing, if you feel involved, you feel you have autonomy, a role in decision-making... you'll care more about what you're doing and hence the company will have better results."*

Employees echoed this view, with a member of the sales team explaining that employee voice is: *"Of paramount importance. You need to listen to the staff underneath you as they're actually doing the job. You need their support if you've got a problem or you think you could do something better."* The colleagues explained that being listened to made them feel valued and allowed the organisation to benefit from their expertise and experience.

The organisation has a number of well-established voice mechanisms, including an annual business conference and excellence awards evening, which was in recognition of colleagues' hard work and effort throughout the year

This was followed by numerous mini conferences over a two-month period to capture the remainder of colleagues who did not attend the annual conference. The purpose of this was to communicate future growth plans for the company, and provide a sense of direction for all colleagues.

Regular team briefings are encouraged at sites, and twice a year there is a colleague survey carried out, while Nampak also recognises a trade union at a number of its sites. Although there is an intranet in place, this is seen as being too 'static' rather than interactive, and it is difficult for shop-floor employees to access given limited computer access. Colleagues work 12-hour shifts and have limited time to access the intranet during working hours.

The management at Nampak have been excited by the opportunity of social media to add to existing channels - to strengthen employee voice, and address some of the challenges they were facing. After looking into a variety of options, Nampak launched Yammer in October 2015.

What did they do?

One of the key factors in introducing Yammer was the desire to have a tool that was engaging for employees, easy to navigate and use, and was readily available. As Eric

Collins described: *"It's got to be compelling enough that people could access it every day, just as they might do with Facebook."*

However, while only three months into using Yammer, take up has been relatively slow with 145 colleagues signed up out of 550. Eric Collins explained that while usage by managers and office-based employees is relatively high, *"we seem to be having difficulty getting to the colleagues operating machines on shift work."* This is seen as partly due to IT problems. Employees need either a Nampak email address – which most factory based colleagues do not have – or register their personal email, so it's seen as a drawn out exercise.

Managers identified another barrier as a reluctance to use Yammer among some employees who are unfamiliar with social media. However, employees who had not previously used social media before, describe the tool as being easy to use and intuitive. Some also identified trust as a barrier to using the technology.

Effort is being put in to encouraging more colleagues to sign up. Eric promoted Yammer at the company's business conference in December. Yammer has featured in the colleagues' magazine, and has been promoted on posters. Nampak is now looking to roll out 'champions' for Yammer at each site, to encourage their site teams to sign up and promote the benefits of the tool.

Eric is a passionate advocate of social media. He uses Yammer regularly himself, updating employees on his own activities and the latest developments in the business, as well as engaging with other users, giving public recognition and thanking colleagues for outstanding work.

Yammer is used to share updates on the business - including new customers and contracts, changes in manufacturing processes, and other developments. Colleagues are kept up to date with ongoing construction at two new factory sites, including through a time lapse camera. As Laura Buckthorpe explained: *"People have seen the site going up in Stirling – our future if you like – and they're part of that journey."*

On this, one recent joiner explained, *"I think it gives you a bit of a buzz and it makes you feel more than just a number and makes you feel valued."*

Whereas some employers have had reservations about using social media internally, Nampak have been relatively relaxed about it. Laura Buckthorpe said: *"We're quite an open company. We encourage everybody to have a voice, whether that be negative or positive, and we believe that will help us go forward. So we weren't very apprehensive about it."* Questions and indeed challenges of senior management are welcomed.

Although Nampak is keen to encourage open discussion, the business also wanted to ensure that there were some basic and clear guidelines in place to minimise the chance of misuse. On introducing Yammer, a one-page guidance document was sent around explaining very simply some of the ground-rules of using the technology.

As Greg Ward explained, the aim was not to be restrictive and *"corporate"*, but to ensure that *"There was an element of responsibility."* This included making clear that colleagues shouldn't post anything that they wouldn't say to them in person. As Laura Buckthorpe explained, *"it's nothing prescriptive, it's just general common sense, and being respectful to colleagues"*.

In the first few months, there have been relatively few negative postings, and when they do appear, managers ensure they do not *"knock anyone down."* Eric Collins commented: *"I wouldn't criticise anyone for having a view on there... if it's someone saying 'I don't*

agree with this' or 'I don't think this is working', that's exactly what we want to see, so we can pick that up and build on it."

There have been no posts that have been seen as inappropriate or potentially abusive. However, managers still recognise a continuing need to encourage employees to use Yammer, and to normalise it as an employee voice channel.

What have the results been?

One of the key challenges was to ensure effective and consistent communication to Nampak's entire workforce. This was seen as being particularly difficult given the organisation is based across nine sites, and the fact that most of the workforce work on the factory floor and on shift patterns. There was feedback from their regular focus groups that communication was not reaching down to the frontline and visibility of senior managers was limited.

Social media is seen as offering a more effective way of getting consistent messages out across the organisation. As Laura Buckthorpe explained: *"Because our sites are so remote, it's really hard to communicate a consistent message to different sites. This way, everyone's getting the same message in the same way"*. This was echoed by colleagues who saw Yammer as being effective in sharing information, bringing a sense of togetherness and teamwork without having to meet face to face. A member of the warehouse team said that Yammer *"bridges the gaps between the sites as well. I think it makes it more of a compact unit, it makes it more together."*

Yammer is seen as a more real time method of communication across the organisation, allowing managers to share information and assess colleague views in *"real-time"*. Whereas the employee survey gives them a detailed picture on a twice-yearly basis, Yammer allows Nampak to keep a finger on the pulse in terms of colleague perceptions.

Social media is also seen as supporting visibility of senior leadership. This was a challenge identified regularly through focus groups with colleagues who often didn't know who the senior leaders were. According to Laura Buckthorpe, Yammer is seen as *"a way to get them quite visible and to interact on a personal level."* Employees echoed this, with a member of the Quality Control team saying that Yammer *"breaks down the 'them and us' barrier as some people still perceive it like that."* This was seen as particularly important for colleagues who didn't work at the head office site and had less direct contact with senior managers.

Nampak encourages colleagues to submit ideas for process improvements, and if they are taken up, they are rewarded with five per cent of the net savings. The company recently held an Innovation Conference which identified improvements in processes and potential new products.

Social media is seen as a vital tool in supporting innovation. There is an innovation group on Yammer where staff are starting to put forward ideas and interact with each other's suggestions, and the existing suggestion scheme is going to be moved on to Yammer. As Laura Buckthorpe described: *"It's like brain-storming. You put an idea out there, you get other people commenting on it, and naturally they bring fresh eyes and new ideas. You can go from what starts as a fresh idea, to a fully developed one and a new product."* Employees suggested that social media could help share best practice and ideas across sites, enabling them to learn from each other.

Where are they now and future plans

"My own view," explains Eric Collins *"is that I want it to be totally interactive so it's coming from the bottom-up as well as top-down."*

Similarly, the early use of Yammer has been relatively “corporate”, focusing on business issues only. There is a willingness to change this. There is a social committee on Yammer and Eric is keen for colleagues to share more personal and informal posts as well as business-related information: *“I’d like to see that here, so that there’s a bit of community spirit and people feel a sense of belonging from being at Nampak.”*

Nampak are currently using the free version of Yammer which, while seen as being effective, has limited functionality, for example not allowing documents to be uploaded. Consideration is being given to upgrading to the full paid-for version.

Whilst in the early days of using social media internally to promote employee voice, Nampak is already starting to see some of the benefits. There is an eagerness to build on these early successes – and to address the challenges and teething problems they have experienced – in order to better promote employee voice, innovation and engagement at Nampak.

Key Lessons:

- Social media can support real-time communication across multiple sites
- Social media can promote the visibility of senior managers and allow employees to engage directly with them
- Social media can support employee-led innovation, through collaborative and iterative work
- It can be difficult to encourage employees to engage with social media, but they are more likely to if it is used in a genuinely interactive way, with real dialogue, rather than just to communicate organisational news
- Senior leaders can play an important role in encouraging the use of social media, including by using it themselves
- Setting clear, simple and light-touch ground rules can prevent misuse of social media.