



The IC Space

Case Study: How you find out what staff are really thinking

The team working on the review of the DVLA's current operation, service offering and change portfolio planned to keep staff fully involved and updated on the review as it progressed. One of the review team members tells us how they dipped their toes into the world of web chats for the first time and what they learnt from it.



As one of the three Swansea based staff making up the small team asked to support a fundamental review of the DVLA operations, the team quickly realised that we needed to involve staff as much as possible and keep them updated on the direction of the review as often as possible. A planning session with our communications team provided us the background on the available communications tools. We quickly got to work on the standard electronic messages for our intranet, face to face sessions with small teams and individuals and the open feedback option on our home page. There was however one intriguing option that none of us had ever tried, a "web chat", which had recently been rolled out in the Agency.

The communications manager was supportive and explained the benefits and the risks of the live web chat and we were sold! We originally planned for all three of us to participate, allowing us to share the load and utilise our various backgrounds to allow us to give the best answers possible. If I was honest I was also glad that one of my experienced policy colleagues was available for me to check what I was saying wouldn't upset or offend anyone.

On the day our policy colleague had to attend a separate meeting, leaving two of us to handle the web chat. It was a bit daunting but the opportunity for live interaction with all staff at the same time was a bit of a buzz. The questions quickly came flowing in and it was refreshing and rewarding to be able to respond to what was really worrying people at that point in time. I was surprised at what the real issues were and how unrestricted people were via this channel. I'm now getting accused of



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being a web chat salesman as I pronounce the benefits to everyone I come across.

If you really want to know what people are thinking and you cannot get out to talk to them face to face, or think they may be a bit nervous asking in a face to face session, web chat is the way forward. However, be prepared to be honest and be careful what you wish for, because if you don't answer the awkward questions, people will not use the channel in future events.

Kevin Rees

Head of Group,
DVLA

A comms view

From experience we have found that people are less shy in asking those difficult questions whilst behind an anonymous avatar.



It gives the host opportunity to :

- consider an answer and briefly discuss with colleagues before responding and it automatically provides a written transcript of the answers that people can refer back to.
- This is peer-to-peer conversation comms. People always trust someone they know more than a faceless corporate comms. This puts faces to the people saying what they say, adding credibility, and accountability. Interestingly, the answers provided in the webchat are very rarely challenged showing this trust exists.



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- The trick to the webchats is to keep answers short and honest. Answer where you can, be honest if you don't know and face the difficult questions head on. It often helps to invite a few trusted peers into the room where the hosts are. Not subject matter experts, but trusted colleagues from any grades that aren't afraid to give a view. As well as creating a vibrant environment that encourages pace of answer, they also act as a sounding board to run your answers by before you start typing.

I can't think of another type of comms channel that is as effective in getting under the skin of how people in your organisation really feel about complex and difficult topics. Even if their questions aren't answered in the chat (maybe because they are too contentious) it still lets you take them away and consider them for future comms.

Chris Elias

Internal Communications,
DVLA