



Collaboration Tools

Building Management and Collaboration Tools for Communications Teams

By John Schweizer



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Efficiency in content production and media relations can make the difference between being heard and being forgotten. More Efficiency = More Time and More Pitches = More coverage. Management and Collaboration Tools for Communications Teams improve workflow and get greater results.

What are Management and Collaboration Tools for Communications Teams?

This practice area focuses on building new business processes and tools to make modern communication teams more efficient and more effective. Tantalus does so in a way that eliminates redundant activities, such as costly duplication of content and multiple content archives. What's more, our management and collaboration tools for communications teams provide the foundation to enable people to work better remotely and provide solutions to help teams learn more from each other and improve the way they communicate.

Why Communications Collaboration Management matters

Marketing and communications teams are wasting millions of dollars per year through duplicative and uncoordinated work because they lack the right collaboration tools. As large international teams grow, their regional and functional teams become more siloed — often coupled with a reluctance to invest in standardized internal tools and processes that are sometimes perceived as unnecessary “over-engineering,” and detrimental to the creative process or, at worst, something that will slow people down.

In fact, the opposite is true. Modern, easy-to-use collaboration tools make it easier to eliminate redundant activities, such as managing multiple stand-alone calendars and content archives at headquarters and in the field. Most importantly, they reduce redundancy in costly content creation.

Where communications managers lost productivity

- People were unable to plan or prioritize their time because there was no “pipeline” to identify upcoming announcements and activities, nor was there any formal planning guidance.
- It was difficult for communications professionals to find content they needed, and in many cases, it only existed as email attachments, not in a shared online content library.
- Content was delivered late and via different distribution methods, without advance warning, making people less dependent on a centralized source.
- Different teams scheduled conflicting external activities, such as announcements and events occurring at the same time, sometimes even for the same journalists, because no one knew what others were planning.

88%

Hunting for information

12%

Other duties

80%

50 hour work week

20%

Time spent looking for information

What's more, since our tools are generally built within an organization's private and secure network, we've recently seen how these same communications collaboration tools and processes are enabling people to work remotely, wherever they are. Our experience also shows that as communications improves, new relationships develop across large teams and deeper connections develop among managers.

Tantulus can help you benefit from communications collaboration tools in three areas: Planning · Content Sharing + PR Guidance · Measurement + Recognition

1

Planning – Searchable Calendars

One of the easiest and fastest sources of cost savings is the reduction of duplicative work in multiple regions. Without a common planning calendar, it is all too easy for different regions each to develop their own independent calendars and to create similar stories and content assets. With a searchable calendar, someone who wants to develop a certain kind of story can look at the calendar to find others already working on the same topic and thus reduce the risk of expensive duplication.

One of the first tools we recommend is an online, confidential planning calendar for the communications team. The key is to create a very simple tool where we minimize the necessary information, but at the same time, require enough information so that others can search the tool and find what they need.

- Moving calendars online means the process to add and update items eliminates the need for a centralized function to maintain current versions, because each person can make changes themselves.
- The current version is, by definition, updated at all times and reduces the likelihood for mistakes.
- It's easier to identify possible scheduling conflicts with others.
- Exporting online data to an Excel file makes it easy to organize, filter and analyse information by region, activity, audience or topic.

Reducing redundancies

Moving online and consolidating tools will increase efficiencies. At one company, we were able to eliminate more than 20 independent and redundant work calendars and move that information into one single confidential tool. Within one year, 39% of managers reported pitching a story that replicated someone else's idea they found by scrolling through the new calendar, and an additional 31% reported pitching a story based on someone else's idea after the introduction of an internal social media tool.

2

Content Sharing + PR Guidance

It is an art to inspire and manage remote teams, and one of the most important tools we've mastered is the internal "PR Advisory" process. Weak content sharing processes are often fragile and informal, where content is ad hoc, inconsistent and not shared broadly, resulting in reduced media coverage and weak or conflicting message pick-up across the world.

Tantalus and PR Alerts

Our PR Advisory process anchors on something we refer to as a PR Alert. These are usually built around confidential emails, sent to some or all of a communications team, and from time to time, depending on the subject, also sent as a heads-up to senior execs. Creating a PR Alert system means building and maintaining email lists so that it is easy to confidently share messages with a defined set of people.

The Importance of a Single Shared Content Archive

To compensate for email's shortcomings, one of the most important tools we can provide is a single, confidential online space to share and archive content, where people can find up-to-date documents and digital assets. It is usually an internal website where all content is shared, with standard filenames so that people understand what a file is before opening it. Without a single content archive, people struggle to find desired content, and different regions are more likely to create their own duplicative internal content repositories, resulting in wasted resources and siloed content.

Gains from collaboration tools

Comms portals become an online “home” for other online tools to help manage day-to-day activities as well — from tracking internal and external company awards, to managing content development for an event, to scheduling executive interviews at events without the nightmare of hundreds of email requests and responses.

82%

Gain in comms managers benefiting from collaboration tools over 18 months

3

Measurement + Recognition

Isolation can be painful for smaller regions and countries. It's often difficult for people to know where to go for help and hard to find great examples of media coverage from others around the world, particularly when conventional PR measurement systems deliver volumes and statistics, as opposed to quality and outcomes.

Top Story Programs

We build on the well-known “Top Story” measurement and recognition program, where managers submit their best work and regional leaders validate the best. Submissions are judged as “Top Stories” or other notable coverage, forming the basis for annual awards across a broad range of activities.

Problem: We generally expect that the best coverage is the result of a proactive pitch that the company makes to a journalist, but traditional measurement programs that measure coverage volumes don't help identify how stories were landed or the impact they had.

Consequence: When we measure quantity, managers are motivated to chase volumes, not quality, with no guarantee that a company will be able to improve public perceptions and grow sales.

Solution: Once a leadership team defines the characteristics that define great coverage for them, we can build and manage a simple reporting tool and process where communications managers post their single best communications activity each quarter. Research tells us that coverage is 25% more favorable and believable when a third party — a partner, customer, analyst or thought leader — endorses the business in some way.

Things We've Learned

- **Ask questions:** Start with selected interviews across an organization to identify problems and establish interest in building the solutions.
- **Work with IT:** Work with a company's IT department from the very beginning to gain approval for software choices.
- **Keep it simple:** Tools and processes need to be simple, easy to learn, off-the-shelf, adopted quickly, and easy to maintain.
- **Training:** Ongoing training needs to be planned, since not everyone is equally comfortable with modern technology tools.
- **Build a culture that values great content:** Great content can be created anywhere, and the larger team is better served when content is shared, discoverable, and developed for everyone to re-use.
- **Get endorsement from leadership:** New tools must be endorsed and used by an organization's leadership team.
- **Be an evangelist:** This work is part of the larger practice of change management — showing people how new ways to work can build bridges instead of silos.

Conclusion

Understanding how to get the most out of existing processes and information technology can be daunting to communications teams, and trying to keep abreast of new technologies can be harder still. The Tantalus Group can help by providing our combined communication and technology expertise to make the entire journey more manageable, from concept to implementation and training. Embarking on such a project offers a rare opportunity to rewire how a team works.

John Schweizer

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John has 30 years of experience working at the intersection of communications, information technology and team leadership in North America and Europe. For the past 15 years, he has held global operations and change management roles in Paris, France at Microsoft and Renault-Nissan-Mitsubishi, where he served as an evangelist for integrating technology tools to build modern communications teams.

Prior to this, he was a writer on information technology, food and drink, and venture capital for The Economist Intelligence Unit, the research arm of The Economist Group.

Before moving to France, John spent the majority of his career in California, where he was chief of staff for the honorable Jackie Speier, representative for California's 14th congressional district. He also had a long career at Pacific Bell, California's telecommunications utility, where he last served as director of consumer affairs, focused on public policy, government relations, executive speechwriting and crisis communications.

John has a BA in History from Pomona College in Claremont, California and studied History at University College in Oxford. He speaks English and French.

““John built a backbone for what we do in communications, knocking down silos and setting standards for how our teams work together.””

Nick Maxfield, Global Corporate Communications, Nissan Motor Corporation (former); Communications Officer, Machine Learning for Healthcare, University of Cambridge.



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Let's talk collaboration: info@thetantalusgroup.com