

# Aiming Sky high: Six weeks to a dynamic new intranet

How Sky uses its intranet to improve internal messaging and keep employees in the know.

BY PHIL MCMANUS

Keeping a dispersed workforce of 16,000 connected with a company requires a powerful messaging process. At Sky, internal research indicated that this would be a new intranet that was dynamic and innovative, reflecting what the company strives for. Phil McManus, director of internal communications, recalls the six-week race to build the site that has improved engagement and is used by three quarters of the workforce.

During the period when Sky's intranet was under the microscope, the business had recently launched a number of new and innovative products and services, such as our high-definition television service and broadband internet access. This coincided with a new external advertising campaign called "Believe in better" and a corporate social responsibility initiative called "The Bigger Picture". Sky has nearly 16,000 people based all over the UK in contact centers, head office and in the field serving customers, and while we wanted these new offerings and campaigns to be successful, we also wanted every single employee to feel involved in the growth of this business. Both these objectives meant that employee engagement was made a top priority.

## The call for internal communication

We set up an internal communication team based in Osterley, (near London) and Dunfermline in Scotland. Before the team was set up, the culture depended very much on the line manager's

communication style and their interpretation of the brand. But we were aware that if employees were fully involved in the daily life of the business, they'd be better engaged, and could potentially be powerful advocates of the Sky brand.

Communication between stakeholders generally took the form of "all-staff" emails, which were sent out on an ad-hoc basis – sometimes several a day. Very often these emails were deleted without being read.

In addition, the internal stakeholders are diverse at Sky: the workforce covers a wide geographical area where not everybody has access to email. Sky has office-based employees in finance and HR, engineers on the road carrying out the installations, customer service employees in Scotland, as well as camera crew and reporters covering news and sporting events all over the world. Many of these roles are not nine-to-five but employees would still like to be able to access company information quickly and easily.

## The internal audit

One of the internal communication team's first tasks was to carry out an audit to review the existing communication channels. Focus groups, online surveys and phone interviews were conducted and more than 2,500 employees consulted. The internal channel audit sample was picked from three main stakeholder groups across the business: the central functions at head office, field-based and call-center employees.

The channel audit confirmed that employees:

- Preferred face-to-face communication with their line managers (this was being carried out



**British Sky Broadcasting** is the operator of the UK's largest digital pay television platform and the leading broadcaster of sports, movies, entertainment and news. More than 8 million customers subscribe to Sky's choice of on-screen entertainment.

- but not consistently enough).
- Wanted quick and easy access to the company information they needed to do their job.
- Were interested in general company news and the intranet was viewed as the best place to receive this.
- Felt there was a need to reduce paper wastage caused by printing many company emails.
- Felt there wasn't enough visibility of Sky's culture and brand values.
- Felt a sense of indifference about the current intranet.

The intranet was only one of a number of channels, such as printed internal magazines and electronic newsletters, that needed to work in harmony and complement each other. But after face-to-face communication, the intranet was seen as the most important channel for communicating to employees.

The audit also confirmed that the more junior the employee, the fewer the communication channels available to access company information. The intranet was therefore a key tool for engagement, and by focusing on the intranet as the main source of company news, we had to ensure that access was also companywide. A new intranet was needed which would cater for the immediate company requirements and would also offer increased opportunities for employee engagement.

In short, the internal communication strategy and tools didn't match Sky's ambition to be a dynamic and market-leading communication company. We wanted employees to feel proud and passionate to work at Sky.

### The intranet brief

Avvio, a digital communication agency, was enrolled to help develop an intranet that would start to meet these requirements. In particular, the aim was to:

- Deliver relevant company news in a timely and engaging way.
- Provide an effective business tool that could be updated with fresh content.
- Promote and increase visibility of our brand.
- Provide interactive feedback channels.
- Create a repository of searchable archived information.

Avvio had been one of our key internal partners since 2006 and understood the objectives and needs of the internal communication team. Together, they established that the new intranet needed to provide:

- Dynamic company information.
- Quick and easy access to the tools people needed to do their jobs.

- Advertising space for internal campaigns and promotions.
- A means for promoting our own channels and content.
- A content management system which would allow for content to be edited internally.
- A searchable archive facility.
- A ready-made edit suite for production of a weekly e-zine to replace many of the all-staff emails.
- Consistency with Sky's brand values and guidelines.

We had six weeks to create, plan, build and launch the new intranet. We began with a list of all the stakeholder functional requests and considered whether these could be met within budget. In consultation with Avvio, we settled on its final requirements and Avvio developed the back-end build of the bespoke system.

### The main challenges

While we knew exactly what we needed and had the experts on board to help, we weren't short of challenges.

- Due to the absence of a content management system there were difficulties with updating content quickly and easily.
- The intranet was a large and loosely regulated collection of sites, tools and applications.
- Many had been developed by external agencies and there was little consistency in terms of branding, architecture or structure – this meant that information wasn't clearly categorized, making navigation a cumbersome task.
- There was no search function.
- Information was presented in a static way.
- The overall presentation was uninviting and disengaging.



**Phil McManus** is director of internal communication at BSKyB. She joined the company in December 2005 from Vodafone, where she had worked for five years as global head of internal marketing. Prior to Vodafone, McManus worked as a director at marketing consultancy Added Value, where clients included Unilever, InterContinental Hotels and Barclays. She has significant experience in supporting businesses going through change.

## KEY POINTS

- Sky's internal audit of 2,500 employees revealed that people wanted a change from existing communication channels.
- With the help of digital communication agency Avvio, the internal communication team had six weeks to create a new intranet site which incorporated web 2.0, the latest news, opinion polls and a more streamlined search function.
- To maximize engagement, efforts were made to ensure that the internal messaging around the new site was aligned with the external brand campaign that was running simultaneously.
- The site now has 12,000 unique users and future plans include better audience segmentation and social networking functionalities.

---

“OUR INTRANET MANAGER ATTENDED A NUMBER OF ‘BRAND HUB MEETINGS’ – THE INTERNAL BRAND CONSULTANCY FOR ALL SKY COLLATERAL TO VERIFY THAT INTERNAL COMMUNICATION WAS CONSISTENT WITH THE CUSTOMER MESSAGE.”

◀ **Key features**

The new site was named “Sky Hub” and it needed to be as lively and engaging as possible. A key feature to achieving this was to focus on using as much dynamic content as possible. Apart from refreshing our news stories frequently, we incorporated video clips, and data feeds and RSS feeds were also used to pull information from a variety of different sources. This meant, for example, that share price information could be displayed, along with the latest Sky job offerings, news headlines from Sky Sports and Sky News, notice board advertisements and canteen menus. A poll to allow Sky people to vote on topical issues was also implemented.

Another key feature was to make it as easy as possible for people to find the tools and applications they needed to do their jobs. This meant introducing a new and streamlined navigation system that listed departments, tools and other intranet sites.

To allow all of this to happen seamlessly from the users’ perspective meant that quite a complicated back-end system had to be engineered and integrated into Sky’s existing infrastructure.

**Roll out**

Within our six-week timeline we had to include a three-week internal teaser campaign. A further requirement was to engage and brief HR business managers to inform them about what was coming so that they could in turn communicate the developments to their areas of the business.

Prior to the launch, senior executives were consulted for final approval of the site and,

following a green light from the board, we set about promoting the new intranet across the company.

The new intranet was a channel that had to be communicated positively with maximum employee engagement from the launch. We had to demonstrate right from the start that we’d taken on board the views of Sky’s employees in the building of this channel.

Also, the external brand campaign “Believe in better” was ready to be launched and everyone understood that a simultaneous internal and external brand launch would have greater impact. Our brand team had been very supportive throughout the intranet project, and Sean Zintl, our intranet manager attended a number of “brand hub meetings” – the internal brand consultancy for all Sky collateral to verify that internal communication was consistent with the customer message.

The system was launched with an email marketing campaign and an intranet guide was produced which showed everyone how to make the most of the site. But more importantly, staff needed to be informed that the site could be adapted for their own use: their homepage could be partly personalized and arranged according to their preferences.

**Measuring progress**

Since its launch, the new Sky intranet has had in excess of 12,000 unique users, with more than three-quarters of them seeing it as a useful and valuable tool. Necessary processes have been put in place in order that the intranet meets its true potential and is continuously updated.

For example, to keep my finger on the pulse, I meet with senior executives on a quarterly basis to determine the significant forthcoming company news and policies. This information is broken down into a weekly planner to determine potential departmental announcements.

To maintain steady consultation with its employees, Sky has a forum (Sky Forum) which includes some members of the original channel audit focus group. These “communication champions” are now consulted on a regular basis on any new internal communication campaigns and forthcoming events. As a result of these meetings employees are kept up-to-date with company news and information. For example, advertising campaigns are shared internally prior to external circulation, this helps to maintain a sense of inclusiveness, leading to staff motivation and a feeling of real value to the business.

**The future**

What Sky would really like to achieve with future intranet and IT development is to:

---

Figure One. Sky Hub video as presented on the homepage



- **Communicate.** Facilitate communication with all BSkyB employees using the most appropriate channels.
- **Reach different target audiences.** Allow segmentation to identify target audiences in real time, and to deliver and receive compelling, relevant and engaging content via the most appropriate channels.
- **Collaborate.** Promote information sharing, document sharing, content contribution, easy access from many points and integration of core applications and tools.
- **Maintain governance.** Ensure standards are set and enforced, the overall strategy is known and communicated, the business architecture developed and adhered to and the business value is realized.
- **Build communities.** Promote the Sky brand and engage employees, be inclusive, be interactive and facilitate social networking.

We know we've only scratched the surface with our new intranet site, and overall we need to continue to widen our engagement and try to accommodate as many needs as possible. Although this was a project created, promoted and managed by the internal communication team, the success can be attributed to the "just get on with it" attitude inherent at Sky, the unfailing support of the board and the overwhelming goodwill we encountered with our fellow brand believers. scm

Figure Two. Screenshot of the Sky Hub intranet homepage



“SINCE ITS LAUNCH, THE NEW SKY INTRANET HAS HAD IN EXCESS OF 12,000 UNIQUE USERS, WITH MORE THAN THREE-QUARTERS OF THEM SEEING IT AS A USEFUL AND VALUABLE TOOL.”

#### CONTACT DETAILS

For further details on this article please contact  
[sona.hathi@melcrum.com](mailto:sona.hathi@melcrum.com)