



The Internal Comms Podcast – Season 8

Episode 68 – Host in the hot seat: Reflections on 250,000 plays

Transcript

Katie 00:03

This episode of The Internal Comms Podcast is brought to you by my very own Friday update.

Katie 00:11

Would you like to get a short email from me, never more than five bullet points long, giving you my take on the week's news from across the world of communication? This might be the latest reports, books, podcasts, conferences, campaigns that have caught my eye during the week. I always limit myself to just five nuggets of news, so you can read it in record time, but still feel hopefully a little bit more informed, maybe even a little bit more uplifted, as you end your week.

Katie 00:49

Now, this is a subscriber-only email, which was initially intended just for colleagues and clients. I don't post this content anywhere else. So you do need to sign up. But that's super easy. Simply go to abcomm.co.uk/friday, and just pop in your email address. It's equally easy to unsubscribe at any time. So give it a try, that sign up page again, abcomm.co.uk/Friday. And thank you very much if you do choose to be a subscriber.

Katie 01:38

Welcome to a special edition of The Internal Comms Podcast with me, Katie McCauley. In this show, I explore how we improve communication in the workplace, usually with the help of a guest from the world of comms business or academia. But not this time. This is a rather different show, a turning the tables episode to mark a major milestone in the show's history.

Katie 02:05

Just a few days ago, we hit 250,000 plays of the show. Now I am convinced that our success is a direct reflection of the growing interest in and importance of internal communication. Also, our success is purely organic. We do no paid promotion of the show, and yet this year alone plays have risen by an astonishing 630%. It's perhaps no surprise that most of our listeners are in English speaking countries. So the USA, UK, Australia, Ireland and Canada. But our stats indicate we have listeners in more than 55 countries around the world. So to all of you lovely listeners everywhere from



Malaysia to Mexico, South Africa to Singapore, I just want to say a very genuine heartfelt thank you for supporting the show.

Katie 03:09

So to our 68th episode, where I get asked some of the tough questions. My interviewer is Freddie Reynolds, a Senior Content Editor at AB. Now Freddie first joined AB in 2016. After stints as a copywriter, magazine editor and journalist roles that took him from The Shard in London to political demonstrations in Kosovo. While he was with us, he helped launch The Internal Comms Podcast, working with me to develop the thinking behind the show; editing our first season. And yes, you can also blame him for our title music. That was his choice. Freddie then left us to work for three years in comms in academia. But now he's back, and he is making his very first appearance on the show. He says, being asked to interview our Managing Director on her acclaimed ever-popular podcast is quite frankly, a little daunting. But nothing ventured, nothing gained.

Katie 04:20

Well as ever, the most important judge of any of our shows is you the listener. All I can say is I hope you enjoy this rare look behind the scenes at what inspired the show what we've been trying to achieve for the last three years and where we go next. So over to Freddie.

Freddie 04:43

So, Katie, I think we should probably start at the beginning. Go all the way back to Episode 1? January 2019, when the world was a potentially slightly different place. Can you recall now what your expectations were for The Internal Comms Podcast?

Katie 05:06

Oh, in two words: pretty low. There were a few reasons why I thought we'd end up doing one or two episodes that I'd bribe my mum and my sister to listen, and it would quickly fizzle out. I think, first of all, way back then AB didn't have a huge track record in producing shows. I mean, obviously, now we produce a lot of them, internal and external ones for clients. But our podcasting experience, we were on the light side of that experience back then. I think if you were to speak to my Senior Management Team, they would say that I've got a habit of jumping on the latest bright, new, shiny thing, and little bit get captivated by those things. But my captivation doesn't always last. But I think what happened was on that day, when we entered the new and noteworthy charts, and we ended up at the end of the day, at number nine, I think we all suddenly thought: hang on a minute, there's, there's potentially an audience here. Because we hadn't even done very much audience research. I mean, all the things that we would tell clients to do, basically, we hadn't done it. So yeah, expectations were low.

Freddie 06:30

As you said, it was a sort of a hump that, you know, we think this could have some sort of get a bit of traction be a bit of a success. But as you say, Yeah, I think we were a bit guilty of not asking the audience first. But that said, when it comes to sort of understanding audience needs, I think it's fair to say that, you know, do you broadly understand what the IC world looks like? So thinking about the sort of inspiration behind the podcast and the format and the topics that you would cover, to look at IC practitioners or professionals, traditionally probably being an isolation to a certain extent, they don't have a wider team, maybe they're on their own. Can you talk a little bit about why you think that the audience sort of needed this podcast? And also, why a podcast?

Katie 07:24

Oh, lots of questions there. I mean, I think the audience needed the show, I think, I think I needed the show a little bit as well, if I'm being really, really honest, I think there was some selfishness going on. Because I think my internal inspiration was partly driven by a fear and partly driven by a passion. So we all meet people don't we who say, I've got 10 or 20, 30 years experience in this field, and they haven't, they've got one year that's repeated 10 or 20 or 30 years, you know, and I, and I was worried for me, after that sort of three decade milestone, that there was a danger I might start relying on things that I already knew, rather than things I still had to learn. So there was a fear born out of the show, really, that I thought this would be a great way to reach out to interesting people, and keep my curiosity alive about the profession. And then also the passion. I mean, I've just been, you know, I've always loved asking people awkward questions, and helping to tell stories.

Katie 08:35

From the audience's perspective, though, you're right, isolation, I think is the key driver, because we know, don't we, that many IC folks are in a team of one, if you can have a team of one, or very, very small teams. So they don't necessarily have lots of colleagues to share ideas, test out ideas. So that's one reason I think the show might have resonated. I think, also, we talked about IC being still quite a young profession. I think that's slightly a little bit of a red herring, but I'll come back to that. But there's no doubt that internal comms looks quite different inside different organisations. And because of that, I think senior leaders in particular aren't always sure what the IC team is really there to do. And so there's, there's a continual need for us to explain our value, explain what we bring to the room. And so having a show that helps you articulate and think through that is probably helpful too.

Katie 09:42



The truth is, yes, IC is failure is a fairly young profession. But I don't think that matters, because I think every single profession is evolving. You know, I mean, it doesn't matter if you're HR you started off in personnel. Maybe now you're in Human Resources, in the future are going to be about leading and attracting and retaining talent. If you're if you're in finance you might have, once, the finance teams might have been about bookkeeping now they're about modelling scenarios and helping inform management decisions. So IC I don't think it's any different. And we can talk about how the professionals evolved. But, you know, keeping abreast and keeping up with the evolution of our discipline, I think is another driver, potentially for people listening in.

Freddie 10:30

Do you think also, because a lot of the work, by its very nature, is internal, it doesn't get shared externally. It's a way of kind of pulling back the curtain to what other IC teams are doing? And it kind of gives someone an insight into, "okay, yeah, now I understand how they're approaching this particular challenge, or how I can overcome this particular issue with my piece work. And maybe I can use this almost as a case study to apply to what I do". Because if you work in external comms or PR, it's very obvious sometimes what other people are doing, you may not know exactly how they got there, but at least you can see the end product. Whereas with IC, there's less of that kind of external sharing.

Katie 11:08

It's so true, that work stays within the walls of our organisations so often. So you're right, we don't get that ability to share best practice and really see what's going on. I had a really interesting conversation with a listener this week, I was fortunate enough to actually meet face-to-face. And she said, one of the reasons that she listens in regularly is because I'm having the kinds of conversations that she would love to have with her boss, or another senior stakeholder, but no one's really got the time. So I think it isn't just the fact that we're able to share things you might not always see, we're also dedicating the time to have a really in depth conversation. You could probably have that yourself if only you could find the time to diarize it in somebody's diary, get it and get it done. And that's so often quite difficult. So I think that eavesdropping into a conversation is also maybe potentially a bit of a driver as well.

Freddie 12:10

And you've essentially been able to ease drop into, you know, how many guests we have now? Over 60?

Katie 12:16

Over 60? Yes, yes, we're over 60 guests is incredible.

Freddie 12:21

You know, to be curious, let's put it in a nice way of what other people have been doing. Have you seen IC change dramatically in that time? I mean, obviously, there's been a pandemic, which was a challenge, to say the least. But have you seen anything else about the industry change? As, you know, as the last three years, eight seasons of the podcast have gone along?

Katie 12:46

I mean, I think there's some immediate challenges in terms of what to do with our workspaces, for example, I mean, obviously, this doesn't apply if you're working in a hospital or on the retail floor or a factory. But for knowledge workers, what do we do? What is the role of communal workspaces? I read a stat the other day that said, since the pandemic, in terms of office occupancy rates in London, they're at a half of what they were. So I think, I think IC's got a role to play in: how do we use office space, and create those moments of collaboration, connection, community? How do we create that together? And I think IC's got a role to play in it. We haven't worked any of this out yet. I actually think it's a big problem and it will come down to job design, not just environment design, but and I don't want to go down that rabbit hole. But I think it's a it's a big question, but we've got a role to play in it.

Katie 13:45

The other thing that's really engaging people at the moment, I think that's very much top of mind, is this war for talent. We've got a hyper mobile workforce now, I don't think there's a an executive committee in the world but isn't worrying about: how do I hang on to my good people? How do I attract good people? And this all comes down to everyone's talking about EVP, the employee value proposition, and thinking about creating one. The bad news is you've got one already, you might not like it, but you've definitely got one. What role are IC folk going to play in helping to create and develop those EVPs? And then I still think there's merit in thinking about the value of people inside organisations, and I know I've been banging this drum for some time, but I genuinely believe that when we look at the assets a business might have people genuinely are the only appreciating assets. So you know, basic accountancy says that all assets devalue over time, largely because of wear and tear or because they become outdated. If you can genuinely develop your people, then you are developing probably the most expensive asset you own. And you're just making your business stronger as a result, as well as doing the right thing for the people that you are employing. And I still don't think we've properly worked out how to do that. So that's an ongoing challenge. I would just say that, again, you know, bright, shiny new thing and new trends and let's, let's talk about that, but the basics are still really important, how we do the basics of the job. And I think that's why in the beginning, I had guests like Bill Quirke, Dr. Kevin Ruck, Sue Dewhurst, and Liam

FitzPatrick, Rachel Miller, the kind of stalwarts of the profession that really helped develop the modern discipline with all their thinking and their models and their best practices. And they're known kind of, they're known for certain methodologies. So I think it was important to cover those bases. And as we've gone on, I think, what I've done then is thought, well, could we look at the outer edges of our profession a bit as well? So behavioural science with William Leach, neuroscience with Hilary Scarlett, or even something left field that we can learn from Harry Hugo who runs one of the world's biggest social media companies, for example, Stephen Waddington is one of the, you know, most well known names in PR. So I think there's lots we can learn from other comms disciplines as well.

Freddie 16:36

Yeah, that's really interesting. And I think that thing about sometimes bringing it back to: why do we exist as a professional, what are the simple building blocks, you know, it's really valuable, because as you say, it can, it can be endlessly complicated, you have endless opportunities, whether that be to do with new approaches, or new disciplines, or whether it's about new channels that you can pursue, especially in this kind of hybrid world of, and it's not just when we talk about, you know, working from home, it's not just hybrid working, it's also dealing with organisations who don't want their workforces to work at home. So how are, how are the workforce responding to that? Yeah, I think that's really interesting. And certainly over the last eight seasons, we've certainly seen that kind of journey. There's real enjoyment and listening to the kind of nuts and bolts of how does IC work, and then focusing on a bit broader thinking.

Freddie 17:30

I was wondering, so I've been away from AB for three years, and I've come back. And in that time, or the time that I've been away, I've definitely seen now that there has been a bit of a shift. When I left, there definitely was a focus on: what channel are we going to use? And how are we going to populate it with some engaging content? And I come back now and there's still, there's still a bit of that, and there's definitely still value there. But it's much more kind of strategy, how do I better understand my workforce? How do I better engage them? How can I learn as much from them as they can potentially learn from us? So the focus has changed, hasn't it? The industry has changed. And why do you think that is? Has it happened in three years? Or was I just a bit blind to it before I left?

Katie 18:21

I definitely saw the change coming. But it was easy in a way. Because AB's been around since 1964. So in a way, we wouldn't have been able to be around for that long if we weren't able to spot what's coming next. And you're absolutely right. The biggest strategic question we would have asked in the 60s or the 70s, or probably

the 80s, is a client would come to us and we'd say: would you like that A4 or A5? I mean, that would be the biggest creative strategic question because they were only reaching people through newspapers and magazines. And that was it. So obviously, mobile technology has changed the game. So I think, and I went to an IABC conference many, many years ago, when I came back into AB, we had an all staff meeting, I got my iPhone out. I was, it was we hadn't long had iPhones, and I held it up and I said, "if we don't work out how to engage people on these things, we are dead in the water". And there was that tumbleweed moment in the room. And I thought, Oh, I've spoken a bit too soon and a bit too early. Because at that stage, all our clients, the most sophisticated they were getting was a new intranet. There was no talk of we didn't have Workplace by Facebook, we didn't have Yammer. No one was thinking mobile, but you could see that, you know, boulder rolling towards us. It was inevitable. So I think there's that. I think there's also, social media changed the game in terms of people's expectations. So this idea that everyone could become have their own publisher. And obviously employees have views and opinions, they want to share them, we don't put a different hat on, or we shouldn't put a different hat on when we come into work. So if I've got a view or an opinion, why can't I share that in a way that I would do outside the organisation, in fact, the best organisations want to get the best ideas out of their people.

Katie 20:22

So I think there's a kind of social driver for the change, as well. And I think a recognition, coming back to sort of people and assets and the rest of it. As technology progresses, almost every single organisation in every sector knows they've got competitors biting at their heels. Someone could come in tomorrow in your sector, and steal your competitive advantage, your competitive advantage, really doesn't lie with features and benefits and your latest tech, it's, it's relying on the ideas of your workforce, your intellectual capital. And that comes back down to people again.

Katie 21:04

So if IC wants to stay current, then it needs to play that game, you know, it needs to understand: where's this business going? How do people inform, you know, inform the future of this business? What role do people play in the equation of this business's success? Great, I understand that. Now, I know what I need to go out and ask questions about, listen, talk about, ensure conversations flourish about. So we've become more business-focused. And you're right, we've become extremely channel agnostic. I think that's a really good thing. And the question is never "A3 or A5?" It's a much bigger question than that. And in fact, in some ways, you could say, channels almost is the last question, because we want to get the idea, right, first, we want to get the concept, right first, we want to do the insight. How we actually engage

people, well, you know, a great campaign probably uses every channel that you've got in some way or another. So that was a very long answer.

Freddie 22:10

No, that was good. Again, there's this kind of, because of the way that people are communicating, living their lives external to work, relating to social media, and the kind of, I suppose to a sense that that kind of hunt for authenticity that people have through that particular kind of medium that has changed inside the workforce. And therefore, and again, I remember talking about it three or four years ago, this blurring of the line between internal comms, external comms talking about it a lot and talking about all those famous examples usually linking to someone like Patagonia as we like to pull that one out the bag every so often. But is that still the case? Do we really want to blur the lines between external and internal? Or is it something that we just like to talk about? Is it as important as we think it is? And has there been any sort of progression over the last four years? I guess, thinking back to your conversations on the podcast as well. I mean, how many times have you spoken to someone about, you know, that blurring of the line, and how many people are actually doing it? Or are they doing it well?

Katie 23:18

Oh, this is such an interesting question. And I can come at it from so many different angles. So on one side of the coin, there is definitely a blurring of the line. And in fact, we have one client who I'm afraid I can't mention, but they want to ensure that 50% of all their internal content is able to go externally. Because they want it to be brand building, they want to create brand advocates and ambassadors externally, as much as internally. So there's a deliberate blurring of the line. And also because I've read the term "radical transparency", I don't know if you really want to call it that, but we know what goes on inside organisations never stays inside organisations anymore. Organisations would have this idea many years ago, and I don't know if it was even true, but they thought that potentially they could control the message. And we know they can't control the message, or they thought, if there's a mishap or a misstep, you know, we can keep it in our basement. And unfortunately, I'm sorry to say your basement's made of glass bricks, and everyone can see what's going on in your basement these days. So that's not really possible.

Katie 24:33

So yes, there's definitely a blurring of the line. I will also add to that we are definitely using, when we talk about designing campaigns, for example, we're using some tools that marketing have been using for years. So the development of personas, campaigns driven by audience insight, all the things that marketers have been using for years. So that's another way that it's blurring. Having said all that, a few years ago, and we'll put the link in the show notes, a few years ago, I wrote a piece for

LinkedIn, posted it, went on a holiday, got off a plane, turned my phone on it was ping, ping, ping, ping! I thought: what have I done? And I'd written a piece that was called 'In defense of the difference between internal and external comms'. And my whole point was, you can't market to your people. You simply can't treat your people as if they're your customers or even your investors, because, and it's the point you made earlier, people see under the bonnet, they see behind the curtain, and they just cannot be marketed to in that way. So there is a difference. I still think the internal audience is special and discreet. They are I think Shel Holtz calls them informed insiders, which I think is a brilliant term, and we should think of them in that way. And I think that's possibly what's kept me so excited about this part of the comms discipline, because I've worked in media relations and investor relations, and brand. But there's something about the internal audience that is so nuanced and sophisticated and challenging, that I think that's what's kept me so passionate about the discipline.

Freddie 26:22

Well, interestingly, though, I think sometimes we think about this blurring of the line, we think of it as how can the professionalism and brilliance of external comms kind of integrate into our internal work, whereas actually, if you flip it on your head, you talk about the workforce, seeing under the bonnet, not being able to, therefore you can't sell them, you know, crap, as it were, you know, it's got to be honest, it's got to be authentic. So actually, there's, there's much more really, that our understanding of the internal workforce can teach an external comms person about how to sell something authentically, than perhaps it is the other way around. So it's interesting, I guess, it's you know, it's internal comms' constant feeling of being, you know, the young person and the, you know, the person in the room that doesn't quite have their voice heard in the same way as they think they should. And maybe we should be flipping it and saying, you know, it's not about us inheriting your external values, it's about you using what we do internally to reflect better on your external work.

Katie 27:27

Our audience are really harsh critics. So either they are disengaged, for whatever reason, and are deeply cynical because maybe they've only seen propaganda in the past. So they're unwilling to take that leap of faith that we mean at this time. Or they are real advocates of their organisation, and so that they're for that reason, yes, they're supportive, but they're going to be our harshest critics if we say or do something wrong. So when people join AB, and they've come from an external comms world, I always say, "Listen, this is not the soft option. If you think this is easy, if you think this is the soft option, I'm very sorry, no, you're gonna need every tool in your toolkit to do this work". And I still believe that's true.

Freddie 28:17

That's interesting. Let's talk about values, Katie, because I know it's values and culture, because it's a buzzword, and I was thinking as well about, you know, nowadays, especially with Gen Z, consumers really want their brands to align with their values. They want them to take a stand when it comes to particularly issues that they care about. Your guests over the last eight series, have you seen them focus more on values? Or have you seen the focus changed in that time at all?

Katie 28:51

Yeah, I mean, the word that we haven't used yet in this is purpose. I think, if I've heard one word used more than any other at the moment, it is that search for meaningful purpose. And I think you're absolutely right, by the way, I think as consumers, and I have heard guests say this a lot, actually, particularly younger generations, really keen to understand more than just, you know, the, again, the features and benefits of the product, but actually what sits behind it in terms of, and we can come back to what Patagonia's Chief Executive's done recently, but oh my goodness me, you know, that's, that's really incredible. Unfortunately, I think we're going to see quite a little bit of purpose washing like we've seen greenwashing because I think lots of organisations are going to struggle to come up with that beautifully defined authentic, meaningful purpose. I think they are going to end up with the kinds of things we have actually seen around values programmes, if I'm being honest. So, you know, what we what every listener will recognise here, is they'll have worked on a values campaign where, yes, they've been beautifully crafted these values, they're strategically aligned to the business strategy. But nevertheless, probably the comms folks have had to rush to the frontline of their organisations and say, integrity, you know, what does integrity mean to you? And we've tried to sort of impose a set of values that weren't truly organically grown, as it were.

Katie 30:32

Now, I think what's changed through my conversations with the guests I'm definitely seeing this, is a better understanding of how we genuinely influence people to behave differently. I think there's a much bigger, better understanding. I mean, we've got things like now the COM-B model, if people aren't familiar with that the B is behaviour, but the COM before it is capability, opportunity and motivation. So, you know, if I want to change somebody's behaviour, are they capable of doing it? Do they have the opportunity, the chance to do it? And even if they have the capability, and the opportunity, can they be bothered to do it? You know, is the motivation bit.

Katie 31:13

So, you know, we're having discussions with guests now that going much more into the weeds, as it were about what drives behaviour. And I've even I mean, listeners may know this, but I've got a sort of weird interest in hostage negotiation, because,

again, and had Chris Voss, the ex FBI negotiator on the show, because, you know, hostage negotiation, obviously, about the very sharp end of getting someone to change their behaviour, you know, trying to get someone to put the gun down. But what's interesting about how hostage negotiators sort of tackle that challenge is that they don't ever, ever impose a set of values on anyone, they're just listening. And they're not listening because they're trying to make someone feel good, or because they're trying to sympathise with someone, they're listening out for that person's values, what's driving their behaviour, their set of beliefs, because as soon as they've understood what's driving their behaviour, they can use that to influence then what they actually do.

Katie 32:10

I was lucky enough to meet another hostage negotiator for the book called Richard Mullender. And he was full of exactly the same advice about listening first, before you then try to influence, so the listening comes up front. And I was with a researcher from AB, who was helping me write the book, and he sent us a test, which was fascinating, which we failed, by the way, but he said, Look, he said, I'm gonna give you a real life situation. And I want you to tell me, you know, what's happening here. And he talked about being a real situation few years ago, where a husband who suspected his wife of adultery, had literally tied her to a chair and poured petrol on her head, I mean, an absolute nightmare scenario. And this guy did not want to talk to him at all, but he was clearly very emotional and very angry. And Richard said, "I kept asking him questions, and eventually just shouted at me, you work hard every day, you look after your family, you come home, and this is what you find." And then Richard looked at us, and he said, "What has this man just told me?" And we were like, well, you know, he's clearly angry, and he's frustrated and maybe feels a bit powerless. And Richard, sort of looking at us to say, you've got that totally wrong. You've missed the point of what he's told me. He's just told me he's a family man. You know, he's just told me he loves and cares for his family. So what do I say to him next? I say, I don't want to speak to some guy who's got some woman tied up. I want to speak to the husband that loves and cares for his family and of course change you that changed the whole nature of the conversation that then ensued. So it may seem like a very ridiculous example. But I think that's fascinating. We could do more to listen to the values in the room on the shop floor, on the factory floor, we could play into those values more and I don't think we're quite there yet. With that.

Freddie 34:11

I think it's a bit tell at the moment. "This is what we think we are and this is what we decided our values are as an organisation", rather than "we're going to, you know, better understand what our workforce care about before we start dictating to you what we feel like you should care about."

Katie 34:28

That's a really good question because I do wonder— I was thinking of a classic example the other day where we and I'm not going to say the name again, but I'm probably going to give it away but we were working with an organisation with a very large frontline workforce that had particular characteristics. So it was male dominated, hierarchical, long serving and unionised and it was threatening strike action. And the corporate centre wanted to go to the front line with messages that were absolutely accurate, that were around, we need to change and transform to remain competitive in an ever-changing world. I mean, these weren't the wrong messages, but they just weren't resonating. And our suggestion was, should we do it a different way? Because if you went into focus groups with these guys and gals, they all talked about camaraderie. And they were proud to wear the shirts, not because of head office, but because of the service they delivered on the front line. And they loved teamwork. And they were really motivated by camaraderie and teamwork. So we came up with this campaign in response to the possibility of strike action, which was 'no sides, just pride'. And we loved it. I mean, I think the organisation wasn't ready for that kind of nuanced approach. It was all about, you've seen it, all listeners will have seen it, get the message out, repeat, have it on repeat. And hopefully, if we say it enough times, it will get through and I'm just not sure that's clever enough if I'm being honest.

Freddie 36:08

Yeah, can create more of a divide rather than a single banner under which you can all feel a part of, we could probably talk about it forever. So let's, well, let's be very meta, and talk about podcasting on a podcast. I wondered if the experience of 68 episodes – are we on 68? – Let's say 68. If that kind of over time, I think we call it sort of slow content, almost, you know, we're not looking for the quick fix here. You spent the last four years investing a lot of time and a lot of energy and a lot of research into finding out more about the industry and you know, learning more from, as you say, people that don't necessarily sit directly inside it. And do you feel like that content, as a whole has almost kind of appreciated over time?

Katie 37:01

Such a good question, isn't it? My sons love those life hack videos, you know, in 30 seconds you're going to change your life with this thing you didn't know you could do. And I, my show is the kind of complete antidote to the life hack.

Katie 37:16

So I just love the weeds. So I love doing the research before a show. And I love asking that kind of supplementary question. Which means you're right, it's slow content, it really is exactly that. And I do worry, I'm going to be honest, I worry about that. Because I do pay particular attention to what Apple call consumption rates. I

always think of Victorian novels and ladies dying of consumption whenever I use that phrase, but I'm trying to check that with the long shows there's no earlier drop off than the shorter ones. So in other words, if I'm enjoying the conversation, and I asked the supplementary question, and it goes right up to the hour, or maybe even over the hour, do I carry my audience with me? And on the whole I think I do. So that's what the stats are showing me, which gives me the confidence, I guess, to keep following the format and the kind of *raison d'être* of the show and not turn it into 'five ways to shake up your IC today', you know, because I don't think it's ever really going to be that. And if I'm honest, that's not really me anyway, I guess we're helped by the medium. So, you know, I do know, obviously, we all know that podcasts fit in very conveniently into people's lives. And I love getting those messages where people say, the bizarrest one was "You really helped me clean my bathroom floor today". So I was there with her as she was cleaning the bathroom floor. Normally, it's a dog walk. Yes, I suppose we are helped by the fact that we don't have to fill a certain number of minutes. And also the convenience of the media, I guess, for the audience, as well has played into our hands in that respect. But yeah, I like slow content, it's very me.

Freddie 39:16

Well, I think that's part of it. And you said at the beginning, you know, one of the reasons you wanted to do it was for you, for your benefit, for you to be able to go out and find out more about the industry around you. And the landscape. And, and also, you know, you have that journalistic impulse for, you know, being curious and wanting to ask that supplementary question. So, you know, in that respect it, it works because it works for you, you are audience member number one, aren't you? And we talk a little bit about, you know, people always talk about, oh, this day and age, everyone's got such a short attention span, but there's nothing that really proves that entirely and people dig into different mediums because they know they're gonna get a longer piece out of it, or they want to spend that hour cleaning their bathroom, and it's gonna, you know, it's gonna entertain them for that, that 60 minutes.

Katie 40:13

You're right, by the way about attention spans, because I actually, I did do some research on this not that long ago. And there are lots of studies that claim our attention spans have got shorter, and then scientists have come along and kind of rubbished the nature of the study. So I'm with Chuck Gose on this, who was a guest I had quite early on in the show who said, "No, our attention spans aren't shorter, the content is genuinely rubbish." That's the problem. And I think there's a stat out there that says, We scroll through the equivalent of the Statue of Liberty, in terms of the height of the Statue of Liberty, we're scrolling through that on our phones every day. So there's a lot of not great content out there. I think also, we're very bad at sort of



turning off notifications and other things that distract us. So I think we could have longer attention spans if we knew how to better manage our devices, if I'm being frank.

Freddie 41:14

So we've mentioned a few guests that are conversations that for you have been quite memorable. Have you got any dream guests?

Katie 41:23

So Obama hasn't said yes, yet. I have asked. And Seth Godin hasn't said yes, yet, either. So they would be two that I would have very much on my list.

Freddie 41:23

So you have asked, approached Obama's people?

Katie 41:39

I have, I have, not since reaching 250,000 downloads, so you never know, maybe there's an opportunity there.

Freddie 41:46

Now's the time. Now's the time.

Katie 41:48

I think what I've learned, though, through looking back when I think back on my most memorable conversations, and I do think back on them, and I actually do listen to them, because I continually want to get better at this. And I think the only way you can do that is actually, and it's awful, I hate it, but to listen back, is that some of the most memorable conversations, I haven't expected to be as good as they ended up being. I mean, I thought they would be great, but they've ended up really exceeding my expectations. Professor William Khan comes to mind because he's the organisational psychologist who, in 1990, I think developed the concept of personal engagement at work. And, you know, when I asked him questions at the end, like, "what would you do if you knew failure wasn't an option?" which is always one of my often one of my sort of closing questions. He threw it right back and said, "Why are you asking me that question, Katie? What's your fear of failure?" Yeah, he said, "I'm a tenured professor. There's, I can't do anything now that even looks like failure, or be frightened of it." Sally Susman, who's the VP of Comms at Pfizer, and she sat on the vaccine development task force, I thought that was all going to be about vaccine development and what Pfizer had to do to push that through and all the rest of it. But she really opened up about being a gay woman in comms, and how she thinks that's actually helped rather than hindered her career.

Katie 43:16

The other one I've got to mention is Steve Crescenzo. Not only because he gave such fantastic advice in terms of how to write better, I didn't know he was so funny. I mean, it's an hour of me giggling that show, essentially. And Bill Quirke. And the funny thing about Bill Quirke, and people will know Bill Quirke from books like *Making the Connections* that are the real kind of textbooks of internal comms. Right at the end, he talked about becoming the lay preacher, sort of very deeply involved in the Anglican Church, this was after an hour of conversations, like, oh, hang on a minute, there's so much more that we haven't even touched on here. So those conversations that you think they're gonna be about one thing, and they just blossom and bloom into something else.

Katie 44:04

So what I've learned is: have a very open mind when I go into these conversations, do loads and loads and loads of research, so that whatever avenue, you're taken down by the person, there's always something to explore, That's the theory. Freddie.

Freddie 44:22

Yeah. As we said, quarter of a million listens, it seems to have paid off. There's a ruthless consistency isn't there to the to the podcast, and certainly in that, that resets, it really comes through I have to say when I listen to it, you've really kind of you've definitely spent some time finding out who these people are understanding what the work is that they do. Yeah, no, it definitely it shows so we're not we you know, we're yet to go over a two hour long episode, but I'm sure we could get there at some point.

Katie 44:48

I might have part twos that I need to— I mean, Rachel Miller certainly is a two parter. I think about a year and a half apart. You're right about ruthless consistency. You know, someone asked me that the other day and I thought, Oh, my Goodness me. I'm not sure it's a lot more than sort of, you know, turning up on time, every time and, and just doing your best. I'm not sure. When you look, I mean, I know there are one hit wonders and you know, people are thrown into the limelight and suddenly become extremely successful. But I think that's really, really rare. And I think if you apply sort of a quality principle, consistently over time, unfortunately, it sounds like hard work, and it probably is, but that is more likely to succeed than anything else. That sounds incredibly dull. But yes, and I think the other thing about research is, everyone that comes on the show, is giving their time away for free. I think the minimum that I can do is show them the courtesy of having genuinely read their book, or listened to other podcasts they've been on, or read their blogs. I mean, I feel as much as anything else. That's just a human courtesy, if I'm being really honest, as well.

Freddie 46:06

But it makes for a much better conversation. Definitely. And if we listened to, and it's possibly a bit of a leap, but listening to that emphasis on listening, that you were saying with the hostage negotiators, it always leads to better questions and, you know, a richer conversation in the end. How do you think that you have changed Katie, in the last four years? And that can relate to your understanding of IC, or it could relate to you as a person. Sorry to put you on the spot.

Katie 46:36

Yeah, there you go. That's the question that I always look for when I do my show. So I'm looking for that moment when someone slightly gets not necessarily uncomfortable, but you realise they have to think about the answer, and we get to hear their brain work.

Katie 46:54

I have changed. So it's definitely, if it hasn't made me love this profession even more, it certainly helped me stay in love with it. So I am as passionate about the importance of internal communications now, as I was, maybe even more since I began this whole podcasting journey. I definitely feel like I've got a broader perspective on the profession. And you know, I hope, I hope the listeners have too. I've had to accept that this is how my voice sounds. This is what my voice sounds like. So I really beat myself up at the beginning, but I didn't have one of those wonderful radio four voices. And I just thought, you know what, I'm just gonna have to suck it up.

Freddie 47:42

You're putting me off listening back to this one now.

Katie 47:45

No, you sound great. Don't worry about it.

Katie 47:48

But yeah, you just you just got to get over that. It's another thing that Chuck Gose said, actually, just get used to it and move on. I think the thing, yeah, so the real truthful answer to your question is something that I still struggle with. And this is me being really, really honest now, which is, if I think about my podcasting heroes, those shows that are my go-to shows. So Tim Ferriss, Sam Harris, Steven Bartlett, I love it, when for a moment, they really reveal something of themselves in the show. I love that. And I am always really uncomfortable, not really uncomfortable, but I hesitate to do them, I don't feel very secure in doing that. So I would like to think that I've got some way to go, I'm still learning, but to put myself into the show a little bit more



and to be brave enough to do that. And that's just me being complete, completely honest, I guess. That's what I'd like to get better at, if I'm being honest.

Freddie 48:55

So apart from that, that side of the show, where next? New guests?

Katie 49:00

Yes, new guests. So in my mind, I always work on a balance. So it's very easy to— often it's quite easy to get someone who's just published a new book, it can be quite easy to get a consultant because they've got consultancy services they want to sell. But I'm very conscious that we need to have, what I call 'real', but real practitioners people doing the job, ideally in house inside interesting, complex organisations to share their wisdom and their knowledge and their experience.

Katie 49:33

So yes, I do lots of research into potential guests before I actually land on someone that I think would make a great one if I'm honest. What's interesting, and I never realised this was going to happen, I get pitched a lot of guests now. So I get lots of PR companies coming to me and saying, "You really need this person on your show," and 99% of the time, they're wrong. They don't understand my audience. And I'm fiercely defensive of my audience's time. So I'm like, No, you don't meet the bar, I'm really, really sorry.

Katie 50:09

We've had some feedback from listeners, that means I think there are some innovations, but there's some changes we can make. So I would like a way to invite listeners to share a little bit more their kind of experience and feedback. So one listener suggested, she'd seen this on other podcasts, where there was a sort of a WhatsApp message group where you could literally record your message and those messages, or some of them would be played on the next show. And I love that idea. So maybe that's something we could look into. We do now have a dedicated group on LinkedIn. Again, I'll make sure there's a link in the show notes. But that will be a great place if people are interested in, you know, what we've got coming up, if they want to contribute a question, recommend a guest, that sort of thing. So I think that's that, again, was a suggestion from a listener and a really good one. And then someone else also said about a quick win would be to get better with our descriptions. So because we now have 70 episodes, and people might be thinking, I've only got an hour, I really want to make sure I use that, you know, well, just make sure those descriptions are really detailed. So that very quickly, you can say, "Yep, I want to dive into that one." So I think we could get better at that, too. So yes, we're not standing still, we're very much still listening and evolving, hopefully for the better.

Freddie 51:34

Lovely. So the final bit, and I'm sorry to say you're not gonna get away with not answering them. Oh, those quickfire questions, Katie. So shall we start with: What would most surprise people about Katie Macaulay?

Katie 51:52

It? It's a really interesting question. And I feel so rotten now. Because I pose this so many times and I'm jiggling up and down in my seat with nerves. It is funny, my initial reaction to this is that people are always really surprised by how nervous I get. John, our wonderful producer, knows this. But before every show, I just think I'm going to flop, I'm going to mess it up. I get incredibly nervous, and I'm not sure that nerve, those nerves are ever going to go away. And it's the same before I take to the stage as well. But maybe everyone's a little bit more nervous than they let on. So that's not really a good answer. I've never had a pint of beer that really seems to surprise people that I've never had a pint of anything in my life, of any kind of lager or alcohol or beer of any kind. But I'm not sure that's that exciting. I can often tell the country of origin of a glass of wine just by smelling it.

Freddie 52:44

That's quite impressive.

Katie 52:45

That's a kind of party trick that I do. Yeah, I can always tell if it's old world or new world, that's for sure. So yeah, that's enough.

Freddie 52:53

There may not be, you saying you never drank a pint of beer, it may not be interesting, that fact, but I'm interested to know why that is? Sorry to sort of, you know, go off on a different angle. Is it a particular choice you've made to just you know, when you were younger, you said that's it? I'm definitely not going to do that.

Katie 53:11

I think I must have sipped a little bit of a bit of beer from somebody like my, you know, friends or dad's friend or something like that. A friend's dad rather, and thought, oh my goodness, why would you want to drink a whole pint of something that disgusting and it stuck with me, yeah.

Freddie 53:27

Well, fair enough. So next question, complete the sentence: world class internal comms communication is:

Katie 53:37

From my perspective, world class internal comms is participative, imaginative and analysed. That is such a Katie Macaulay answer. So participative is involving it's not one way, it's not a broadcast. It's bold and imaginative. It doesn't play safe. And we're going to look at, you know how it performed, we're going to analyse the hell out of it, did it do what it should have done? So sorry, a bit of a consultant's answer, but that's an honest answer.

Freddie 54:11

Oh, that was great. Is there a book? Maybe there's even a, you know, internal comms podcast you think that all comms professionals should read or listen to or what? Is there anything out there that you think every single person in this profession could benefit from?

Katie 54:32

This is gonna sound really left field, there is a book that no one knows about. And when I interviewed Stephen Waddington and asked him this question, he said, Oh, that's easy. It's The Cluetrain Manifesto. I was like, You're joking, because that's my book. And no one's heard of that book. And we could have geeked out for another hour about The Cluetrain Manifesto.

Katie 54:54

So it's written by four people. So we need to put the links to it but Christopher Locke, Rick Levine, David Weinberger, David Searles, I think. It was written in 1999, and then published in the year 2000. And why the book is so absolutely amazing is that the birth of the web, you know, just as the web is really getting established, it's really early days of the web, these people are imagining where it could take us and what it could be. And they had this really bold, exciting vision for this public square, this market ship square, where we were sharing ideas and connecting. And we all know, you know, what's happened with the web is that, but also other things that are less positive. But for me, when I read it, I am reignited by the vision of what a connected world could really be. Thanks to the web. It's just an incredible read. So that's one bit left field.

Freddie 56:01

That sounds great. And then the final one, what message would you put up on a billboard, for millions to see, or billions to see? Let's go.

Katie 56:11

I was— none of, none of my guests have said a cartoon. You know, I'm a big fan of those New Yorker cartoons. And there's so many of them now that are going through my mind, I've got to be really careful. There's, there's one, where there's two

guys looking up at a billboard that simply says, 'stop and think'. And one guy's saying to the other one, "it really makes you kind of stop and think, doesn't it?" And I like that because I think: ooooh, you know, if only comms was that easy that we could put a billboard up that says 'stop and think'. And I thought to myself, I really ought to come up with a good answer to this. And I, this is how sad I am, I even Googled good billboard messages just to see, this is how sad I was, am I missing a trick? And there was one that said 'Believe in every dream you've got. Yes, even that one', which I thought was good. But none of those are mine. None of those my real answer.

Katie 57:12

My real answer is that, and this is, this is the honest, truthful answer. And it's gonna sound really, really strange. Many years ago, when I was going through a tough time at work, I took a little break, went down to Cornwall, and walked into this lovely little kind of arts and crafts shop. And there was this huge framed poster on the wall. And it was purely typographic. And it said, 'One day, we'll look back on this and laugh.' And I just loved it. And I thought, you know, when you're going through a tough time, one day, you might look back and laugh. And I thought I still need, I wish I'd bought it, and I wish it had I had it on my wall. So maybe I'll talk to the creatives at AB, they can sort that out.

Freddie 57:50

Yeah, that's lovely. It's very much that sort of, you know, what would you tell your younger self? Often it's 'don't take life so seriously'.

Katie 57:58

Exactly.

Freddie 58:00

Katie, thank you very much.

Katie 58:02

It's a pleasure.

Freddie 58:03

It's been an absolute pleasure to interview you.

Katie 58:06

Well, thank you.

Freddie 58:09

And hopefully we do it again in 68 episodes time.



Katie 58:11

Absolutely. When we hit that half a million and thank you for being there at the beginning, Freddie. I really appreciate it.

Freddie 58:17

It's been, it's been it's been great to watch and a great listen too so, thanks very much.

Freddie 58:23

Thank you. So that's a wrap for this episode of The Internal Comms Podcast. For the show notes and a transcript of today's episode, head over to AB's website. That's abcomm.co.uk/podcasts. If you're interested in how we produce this show and our other regular podcasts for clients, we do have a step-by-step guide to launching a podcast. Just email icpodcast@abcomm.co.uk.

Katie 59:06

I always love hearing from listeners, so please do continue to reach out to me on LinkedIn and Twitter. I do try to respond to every comment. My thanks to Freddie, our producer John Phillips, sound engineer Stuart Rolls, and my wonderful colleagues at AB. All of you keep this show on the road and I am immensely grateful to you. Finally, my thanks to you for choosing The Internal Comms Podcast. Whether you are a long standing loyal listener, or a newbie, this show would be nothing without you. So until we meet again, stay safe and well. And remember, it's what's inside that counts.