



The Internal Comms Podcast – Season 12

Episode 105 – *Reaching the peak of success: IC at Iron Mountain*

Katie 00:04

Hello, and welcome to season 12 of The Internal Comms Podcast. I'm your host, Katie Macaulay, and every fortnight, I will be asking an internal comms practitioner, consultant, academic or author to sit in my podcast hot seat. Together, we will explore fresh ideas and insights for improving the way we can communicate at work. Sitting in the hot seat today is Neil Jenkins, a seasoned communications leader. Neil has led internal comms at British Telecom, Coca Cola, Vodafone and Siemens. Today, he heads up Corporate Communications at Iron Mountain, overseeing both internal and external comms. Now, if you think of Iron Mountain as purely a records management business, then think again. With 26,000 employees, or 'mountaineers', as the company calls them, spread across 60 countries, the scope and scale of this business will surprise you. When Neil joined the company five years ago, he was the only internal comms professional outside of its home market in the US. He was tasked with building an internal comms function, only to face a new challenge shortly afterwards, downsizing the team and developing a more streamlined and targeted operating model for IC, focusing on those really high impact internal comms activities. In this very wide-ranging conversation, Neil discusses how he reaches Iron Mountain's vast frontline workforce, most of which are not sitting behind a desk, how he forges strong relationships with senior stakeholders, how he gets leaders active on internal social platforms, the careers advice he'd give his younger self and much, much more. I love this conversation with Neil. His wealth of experience and actionable insights are invaluable for any IC pro, especially if you're aiming to make a more meaningful impact inside your organisation. So without further ado, it is my great pleasure to bring you Neil Jenkins. Neil, welcome to The Internal Comms Podcast. It's a pleasure to have you here.

Neil 02:39

It's wonderful to be here, Katie, and thanks for inviting me.

Katie 02:42

I'd love to start by talking about Iron Mountain, because I assume probably, like many people, that you mainly store company files, move them from place to place, office to office. But actually, the scan and scope of your work, what the company actually does, just blew me away. Can you tell us a little bit about Iron Mountain, and can you include its origin story? Because that's great, too.

Neil 03:09

Yeah. So you're right. We do have a big role with records management. That's really the origins of the company. But if I take you back to the very beginning, the company was founded in 1951 by a mushroom farmer, of all people, who grew his produce in an old iron ore mine in upstate New York in the United States. So that's where the company name came from. So in the early 1950s Cold War tensions were really high, and he saw an



opportunity to offer a safe and secure space for companies to store their records and other precious assets. And his idea actually came from the Second World War. He had sponsored immigrants who arrived in the US after the war with no identity, because they have no personal records. He wanted to find a way of protecting vital information from significant events. So that's how we began.

Neil 04:01

Our first sales office was in the Empire State Building, and today we've grown to be a global business to business information management company. As you say, there's probably more to us than meets the eye. We now operate in 60 countries. We employ 26,000 people who we call 'mountaineers'. Our market cap is around \$30 billion and we have about 240,000 customers worldwide. So that sort of records management and storage is really the foundation of our business. But we also have a growing digital solutions business unit, which really helps people get the most out of that information. We have a data centres business unit. We have something called asset lifecycle management, that's where we process, remarket, recycle IT equipment, and do that as sustainably as we can. And we even have a specialist fine art storage and logistics business and some very diverse and very different concepts how people can.

Katie 05:01

When we spoke in preparation for this show, we touched on how the pandemic impacted the business. Can you share that with us as well?

Neil 05:10

Yeah. So like everybody, we were touched by this pandemic. I think we were fortunate that our business proved very durable. So although some services dropped for a time, it did lead to new ideas and solutions emerging. So I can give you some examples of that. We were asked by a lot of our customers, who are government customers or government agencies, to help with a surge in claims that they were processing. This could be unemployment claims, if they'd been furloughed, or people seeing an opportunity to change their mortgage rate. So we really stepped in and were able to provide a much faster and high volume digitisation service, which has become a much stronger business line for us.

Neil 05:54

We were able to offer digital mailroom solutions with no one being in the office really. We were able to offer a different way of managing mail for our customers. Specialty storage has started to grow. Our heritage has been to store boxes of records, but now we're able to offer storage for assets and things of all shapes and sizes. And in the pandemic, we were able, for example, to help some of our healthcare customers quickly create space for more beds, more wards, and move out what was being used until it was ready to come back. And now we also offer a service to really help companies to make the most effective use of their space. Really evaluate what they have, how they're storing it, what they need. So as they think about how they're going to use that place of work, they're using it in the best possible way. So it was a pretty big deal for everybody, as you might expect, but the innovation and



the ideas that came out of it was something we really noticed, and I think that's really spurred on some of the solutions that are now helping us grow as an organization.

Katie 06:58

It's a great case study of an organisation adapting and thriving to the times, isn't it? It's really, yeah, very powerful. You must have a very diverse audience, which must cause a few internal comms challenges, I'm guessing. Can you tell us a little bit about the makeup of your workforce?

Neil 07:18

We do. You're right. So of our 26,000 employees, about 75% of those work in operational roles. So they're on the front line, and they are drivers moving around our records. They work in the warehouses where we store those records. They are operating our data centres or working in our IT processing centres. They're rarely at a desk or in front of a PC, so we have to use a combination of channels to reach and there really is no silver bullet. So we use everything from regular team briefings and huddles, notice boards and posters... And we've recently introduced a new digital platform with a mobile app in the last 12 months, which is also helping, and that, in turn, has helped us manage and streamline the amounts of communication we send. so that that gives us a lot to think about. We're also in 60 countries, so that's a very diverse, multicultural, multi-generational audience that we're thinking about as well. And for those who don't work in operational roles, they're really now working either remote or hybrid, depending on their role. So we need to be really clear about what employees need to know or do. Be mindful of their role. Be mindful of what their working day and their environment looks like. And it's a real reality check to walk into one of these facilities, which we all try and do, and remind ourselves what that workspace looks like for our people. It just helps us correct and stay true to what we think we should be doing and make sure it's the right thing to do.

Katie 08:48

Yeah, absolutely no substitute for actually getting out and walking the shop floor, as it were. You mentioned that new mobile app solution. It's a very crowded space now, isn't it? The internal comms, platform tools space. How did you find that process of finding the right solution? Can you talk us through how you approach that challenge?

Neil 09:10

Yes. So we very much started with what the business need was, and that was to really make sure we were able to better connect those frontline team members. That was very clear during the pandemic, it was a priority. These are the people in our workforce who didn't go home to work because their place of work were our facilities, and in many cases, we were an essential service to our customers during that challenging time. So there was a need to essentially strengthen the way we make our connections with them, make sure they felt like they belong to the organisation. And that really drove our search for the right partner to then go forward and bring something into the organisation.

Neil 09:54



We also had a secondary priority, which was to cut the noise and make it easier for people to find. And using information, moving to one single source, in many cases, with all of the ability to engage a diverse, multi-language workforce that we have. So it took us some time to find the right partner to implement that in the way that we wanted it to work. We're about 12 months in. We're really pleased with how it's going. We've got more to do, always looking at ways we can bring people there. What's the content? What are the stories they're interested in? What are the best ways of catching them? We know they don't have a lot of time in their day. We know that connecting and finding time depending on what they do, can be difficult. So we really try and lead our approach by the data, the metrics, and then make sure that there's a strong connection to our overall business priority, so that we're again making sense of the organisation and our direction to those employees that are reading our content.

Katie 10:55

Listeners are going to be shouting at the phones if I don't ask you who you actually chose in the end, if you feel able to tell us?

Neil 11:02

Yeah, I can tell you, we partnered with First Up. So we looked at a number of offenders at the time, but felt that First Up were by far the best partner for us.

Katie 11:11

Thank you. This episode of The Internal Comms Podcast is brought to you by the Internal Communication Masterclass. I've condensed more than 30 years of experience and expertise into this unique, on-demand learning experience. Gain the capability, confidence and credibility to turbocharge your career. There are eight work streams in this program, which you can buy individually or as one comprehensive learning journey. Each workstream comes complete with a downloadable course book filled with yet more resources and some compelling homework tasks. Visit icmasterclass.com. This is an entirely on-demand program, so you can learn at your own pace, anytime, anywhere, plus there's no expiry date, so you can revisit the content whenever you wish. That website address again, icmasterclass.com, and as a listener of this show, you enjoy a 20% discount on each work stream or the entire program. Simply use the code 'podcast20' at the checkout. Stand out from the crowd, gain that promotion and feel re energised and inspired. icmasterclass.com, icmasterclass.com.

Katie 12:45

You were hired initially to build an IC function. Subsequently, things changed. But let's start there. How did you approach that task? And I suppose there's an added question of, why did that task particularly appeal to you in terms of taking the role in the first place?

Neil 13:05

When I was thinking about my next role at the time, I had in mind going somewhere that needed internal communications building, where it wasn't necessarily fully formed. And when I joined Iron Mountain, which is just over five years ago now, I was joining a relatively



small internal communications team. I was hired as the only internal communications professional outside of the home US market. So I was trying to cover a lot of markets and a lot of people, and I did a lot of listening in those early days, it was important for me to get to know leaders that I was supporting their priorities, so that I could really focus on the things, as one person, that needed doing the most. But between me and my boss, we recognised that we could do more with more resources and work to build a business case for that. Now, like a lot of internal communications teams, I think we proved our worth in the pandemic that came along a few months later, we needed to rapidly increase the leadership visibility virtually. We needed to improve our digital platforms, as we've been talking about, and we needed to keep that connection to our frontline teams as they continued to go into work. So that gave us a strong foundation to make a case for more dedicated support for each part of our business, and to build a team that included team members in each of the regions around the world where we operate. So we were able to get closer to the business in that respect, and then also build a channels and production team to develop the ecosystem and maintain it, that we've been building. So there was an appeal there to really see what was possible and to make some progress, again, supporting the business with its own goals, getting closer to the organisation in terms of how we were communicating, building that relevance and building a team to help with that.

Katie 14:56

And then business priorities changed, as they so often do, can you tell us what happened next after that?

Neil 15:04

Yes, you're right. So having grown the team, last September, we underwent a pretty significant reduction, as many teams do. I'm sure this is going to be familiar with lots of people listening. Business priorities change, and so did our team. But a few months on, now it is working well, and there were a few things we had to do very quickly, though, to adjust and pivot. So almost overnight, we had to say no to a lot of things. So things that we were supporting as a bigger team, we had to very quickly develop some self-service resources for the organization. We had to develop a new operating model as a team and involve everybody who remains to build that. And so now we are a much, much smaller team that is really focused on telling our company-wide story and bringing together a much more consistent narrative about Iron Mountain that helps people understand, again, how they fit in, but what the overall purpose and priorities of the company are. So now we support our CEO and our executive team's communications directly, and we're driving a more consistent approach of how we communicate with our most senior leaders, our people managers and our frontline teams – they're our now main audiences. So that's been a real change, but we've embraced it. We often support the business to go through change. We went through it ourselves this time, and I've been really pleased and proud of they've responded to that and how quickly we were able to put in place a different way of working that is now, I think, giving us a stronger foundation to really respond to what the business is looking for from communications.

Katie 16:43



You talk there about an operating model, and I love that idea, because it creates that transparency about how your team operates, what it does, what it doesn't do. Can you talk a little bit about some of the component parts of that operating model? Am I right in thinking it's got those elements in it about what's in scope, out of scope, roles and responsibilities? Would that be accurate?

Neil 17:02

Yes, absolutely. So we had to be very clear about what we were now responsible for and now what we were not, because many parts of the organisation knew us for providing support for certain things, which with a much smaller team, we were no longer able to do as easily. So we didn't say we're disappearing completely. What we said is we may be moving to a place where we're advising rather than supporting or delivering directly on a lot of things. And then it was about redefining, as a team, who we would support to bring to life the vision of the company for what we were there to do, and in telling a more cohesive story about Iron Mountain, we really as a team, thought about who we needed to reach the most to do that, and that's where we landed on directly making sure that our executive team and our CEO were well supported to share their vision of the company and its direction, and for people to trust that and follow it.

Neil 17:57

It was really our senior leaders who can have a massive role to play in translating vision and giving it context. Our people managers, who are the first line of response for our employees, and then given the scale of our frontline teams and the fact they are the face of Iron Mountain to our customers, they were important to keep in scope as well. So now we've been much clearer with the business about that being our focus, reworked some of our communication routines and channels to support that approach. Introduced a few new things from the beginning of the year, but very quickly, helped people understand what we were no longer able to support, but how that could be supported.

Neil 18:41

So that's been a real challenge, I think, but maybe counter intuitive, and you might think, with a smaller team, there's too much to do. We've never been asked to do the work of a bigger team. The business has been very supportive. The team are finding they're actually focused on more value-adding work. Yeah, that's been a real difference, that some have said I didn't think I'd actually have as much time as I do have to think or to plan, to be more creative. And that's been a real benefit, I think, which has, I think, told us we've made the right choices in what to focus. But still much more to do. It's still early days. That's the picture.

Katie 19:20

I know some IC teams find it hard to push back and say no, but obviously you've created a kind of guide, so upfront you're saying what you're doing and not doing. But did you have to create handy hints and tips and how to guides and DIY guides for people so that you weren't in the weeds as much? Was that part of the solution as well?



Neil 19:39

It was, that was one of the first things we did. We said to ourselves, the sooner we make this available, the more capacity and breathing space we will have to then think about how we operate as a team. So within a few weeks, we were standing up that content, that sort of resource hub, and pointing people towards it, but also proactively reaching out to parts of the organisation we had partnered with closely to say, this is what's happened. This is what we're now going to be focused on. Here's how we can help you in the longer term. But right now, as we work things out, this is where to go if you need something more urgent. And clearly, if there's anything of more significance, we are here. And the business respected that. And you always wonder, is there going to be a period where it will gradually creep back? But actually it's stayed pretty true to how we like it to work, which is an indication that the resources are hopefully helping, also that as technology improves, as things like AI become more prevalent. There is more confidence in the organisation to do some of the things they make may have turned to a communications team for previously.

Katie 20:48

You talked about supporting senior leaders there, you must have supported many over the years. What advice would you give someone looking to build a stronger relationship with their senior executives?

Neil 21:02

The first thing I say is, listen, a lot. I think you've really got to understand where they're coming from. You've got to put yourself in their shoes and understand their challenges, their goals, their priorities. You've really got to learn the language of their business, whether that's sales, finance, operations. And once you've done that, then you can start talking about how communications can help them. I also think you need to work out pretty quickly who else influences them, or who manages access to them. So is that an executive assistant, is that a Chief of Staff, is that an HR partner. You can help those people understand the value of communications, what you can do to help the leader that they support, and where you can join forces, where you have common goals, and then you've got to deliver really well. That's another thing. I think that's important. It's no good getting your foot in the door, and then under delivering, you've got to deliver really well. And then I think once you've established that relationship, have an opinion. Be ready to back up what you think is the right thing to do, or what you're hearing with evidence and with data. Be curious. Be prepared to ask questions. And I think especially if you're invited to join their leadership team, that's something we often all strive for. So when that chance comes along, I would say, don't wait for communications to be the topic of conversation on the agenda. Ask about finance, ask about the sales strategy, ask about operational performance. Everyone has an opinion about communication, so why shouldn't you about other functions? That curiosity is often what business leaders are looking for. You're demonstrating you have an interest in everything to do with their business, and then you can make recommendations for how to help communications bring that to life and help them achieve their goals.

Katie 22:48

That is such brilliant advice Neil, thank you, and I love that idea of influencing the influencers. I hadn't really thought about that before, but who is influencing them? And that might not be obvious just looking at the hierarchy or the organogram, you've got to get close to them to find out who's got their ear, as it were, yeah, really interesting. In your current role as Senior Director of Corporate Communications, you're responsible for communicating both to internal and external audiences. Is it challenging to address the needs of both groups? And I'm curious about what aspects of your approach you think have to change depending on that audience.

Neil 23:27

So fundamentally, I think it's about knowing the outcomes you need to achieve. That's a core communications principle, whether that's internal communications or external communications. Once you know those outcomes, then you can work out what you want to say, how to say it, when to say it, where to say it, and to whom. And I think those are core principles, as I say, across both internal and external. I think for internal, you've got to remember your employees know your organisation inside out. So if you attempt gloss, nine times out of 10, they are going to see through it. External audiences maybe don't know your organisation as intimately, but you still need to be credible, I think. So that's important. Don't just assume that because your external audience isn't as familiar, that you can still gloss things. That's, I think, a difficult thing to achieve. Maybe one big difference internally is you may have a bit more leeway to experiment, and you can change pretty quickly if an approach isn't working as you'd hoped. I think with external communication, you probably have to be a bit more short footed. You have to think about everything and anything that could go wrong and choose an approach that... don't be low risk, maybe, or if it's feeling like it's too high risk, think about something else. So I think there's maybe sometimes more to consider with what you want to do externally, and you've got to be really clear and go into that with your eyes open.

Katie 24:49

In terms of planning and content development, how much content is shared across both audiences? I've got one client that aims to have 50% of their Internal comms content able and perfectly poised, if you like, to be shared externally. Are you seeing that sort of blurring as well?

Neil 25:09

Yes, and we also follow the golden rule that anything internal equals external. So we're always producing internal content with that, you know, with in mind that it could go external. But yes, as we communicate about key themes internally, think about how they can translate and support our external narrative, and often our own people are at the heart of that story. So where possible, you know, we're looking to externally as a corporate communications team tell the story of Iron Mountain through the lens of the people who bring our business to life, the people who produce and develop the solutions we offer to our customers, the people who support their local community and so on. And that's then giving us a chance, I think, to make the content work harder for us in different places. So it is an aspiration of ours to do more of that and to really, again, be transparent with how we do

that, because we've got to remember, externally, we're looking to reach a number of different audiences, customers who may want to buy from us, journalists, who may be interested in writing for us, but also people who may want to work for us, or who we need to attract to grow in the way we'd like. And so giving people a sense of the company we are, what we stand for, our values and the people who work for us is important so that we can, you know, attract the right attention and the right calibre of people, often to help us grow.

Katie 26:33

Yes, absolutely. I remember visiting you many years ago now at Coca Cola, and at the time, you had great success encouraging senior leaders to participate on what I think might have been then quite a new internal social network. What's your advice for listeners who've got a social platform but are just not finding it's really gaining traction with people? How did you do it at Coca Cola?

Neil 26:59

So I think for senior leaders and particularly encouraging them to be active and visible, you've again got to work out what's in it for them. So how would being active and visible on a platform like this support their own business goals when their days are slapped? They have next to no time, often or it's heavily diarised. So make the case for why they should be investing precious time in your internal social network. And then when you have that and you've got their ear and their attention, build some supporting strategies that make it easy for them to keep their activity up. So that could be hints, prompts, nudges, reminding them that it maybe only takes five minutes a day to think about what they'd like to say. There may be a time of the week that's best for them to do that. It may just be a reminder that when we're get out and about meeting their teams, a quick photo and a couple of sentences is all you need to bring to life what you want them to say and what you want people to see. And I always remember back to the time at Coca Cola an example of one of our field marketing leaders in the UK. So this was around the time of the Olympic Games in London, and Coca Cola was a key sponsor of the Olympics and the Olympic torch route. One of the benefits of that sponsorship was that Coca Cola could activate the route with all of its products across the UK for the time the torch was being carried across the country. And this senior media very quickly worked out that by showing what good looked like in terms of an activation in a store on social media, the next town he was due to visit was watching, reading and realising what he was looking for and upping their game or changing their approach before he even arrived. So he got the idea that, essentially, this would help raise the bar and demonstrate what good looked like before he even arrived. And that is still one of the best examples I've got of a leader who suddenly got how this could be helpful for his own goal.

Katie 29:07

Oh, that's such a great example. Thank you for that. You have had a really amazing career. You've worked for some very prestigious organisations: BT, Coca Cola, Vodafone, Siemens, I'm just wondering what's guided your career decisions.

Neil 29:26

I think I've always wanted to challenge myself and not get too comfortable anywhere. So I joined Siemens for corporate experience. After beginning my career at agency side and spending four years there. I joined Vodafone for people management experience. I joined Coke for international experience, get to work with colleagues in other countries more than I was doing in some of the other organisations I'd worked at that point. I joined BT for leadership experience. I ended up running a team of 30 people in BT. The internal comms functions was vast and the organisation was vast compared to where I'd worked previously, and as we've talked about, I joined Iron Mountain because I wanted to help build an internal comms function, so the best organizations and managers I've worked for have always recognised that and given me additional or different responsibilities, and those have often been the organisations where I've stayed the longer.

Katie 30:20

Yeah, that's so interesting. You've had a very deliberate intention with every role that you've taken on. You've been very clear around the challenge. Is there any particular careers advice you'd give your younger self when you look back on your career, what would you tell your younger self, I'm wondering?

Neil 30:40

I think I'd tell my younger self to be a bit more bold. So really, yeah, I'm a self-confessed introvert. I tend to listen a lot more than I speak and I guess it's getting back to that point around getting out of your comfort zone. I would tell the younger Neil to say what you think a bit more. I think that probably would have helped me a little bit more in my early days. So yeah, that would be my advice to my younger self.

Katie 31:03

I'm also curious. You've had to build that IC function inside Iron Mountain. You had 30 people reporting to you at BT. You must have done a lot of recruitment over the years, I'm sure, supported by HR and others. Do you mind sharing your approach to how you might interview somebody, and what you're looking for, because I think that could be really useful to listeners as well.

Neil 31:26

I think I'm often looking for what they are like as a person, and yes, the skills they bring to the table, the experience that we need for the role. But I'm also looking for what perspectives can they bring? And I'm always very careful to avoid using the words or giving feedback that they weren't quite the right fit, because actually, often we are looking for somebody who is going to come in and be a bit disruptive and shake things up a bit. So I always try and really get to understand what drives the people we're looking to bring into the team, and through the conversation, I start to get a sense of how they may interact with the stakeholders or the leaders they support, or what they'd be like as part of the team, and how they could help move us forward or unblock and very often, there's been occasions where I finished interviewing somebody and I've thought to myself, I don't think they're quite right for this role, but actually this other role that we think we need, they'd be perfect because that part of the organisation's got a very different challenge, or they've got a skill

set that meets that needs perfectly. So taking the blinkers off when you're interviewing and thinking about what else you might need. Even if that's maybe not a role that's active yet, that's helpful. So that's often how I look at it, is make sure that you understand the person and everything they are, and don't restrict yourself to just thinking about the role in question.

Katie 32:54

Yeah, be creative and imaginative with the person in front of you. I really like that. I can't help but not ask this question. Given your long experience over the years in internal comms, you must have seen it change fundamentally, I'm guessing, from where you started to where it is now. How would you categorise that development that change in our profession?

Neil 33:18

When I started out, which is now 1997, over 25 years ago, getting close to 30 would you believe? I found internal communications, a lot of people were ex journalists, maybe people who'd worked in production, people who produce really good content, and often publications based at that time, just as online was really taking off, and I think that's still fundamentally part of what we do, but I think it's importantly become just as important to have real business acumen and to position yourself not just somebody who can deliver good creative content, but who fundamentally understands the goals and objectives of an organisation, and can actively contribute to helping to achieve those. That's led to communications being seen as more strategic, and the onus is on us as a profession to keep pushing for that perception. So there can be a temptation, because a lot of us get attracted to the profession because of the creative and the content generation side, to revert to that focus and to think that's what the business needs. But often that's just the way to do it. The communicators, I think, today, need to fundamentally understand the mechanics of the business, the language of business, and be skilled enough to translate that into creative content and drive the agenda more, maybe, than they did 25, 30 years ago.

Neil 34:46

I think it's changed for the better. I think there's still scope for, huge scope in fact, for creativity, brilliant content and demonstrating the difference that makes. Fundamentally, we need to see ourselves as business people more than maybe we did previously.

Katie 35:04

I couldn't agree more. One final question before we head to those quickfire questions you talked about not wanting to get bored, setting yourself new challenges with every role, given what you've seen and what you've achieved, is there still a challenge? What's piquing your curiosity and interest at the moment? You're thinking, why I'd love to find out more about that. I'd love to learn about that.

Neil 35:26

As I get my teeth more into the external side of communications, I think integrating that successfully is a big near term challenge, and again, bringing to life the goals of the business through effective communication that is mirrored internally and externally, is a nut I'd like to

crack for the next few years at Iron Mountain, and really, again, make sure that, you know, our perception as an organisation is changing to support our business goals, so that our employees see us as a difference in transforming company, and so do our customers. They appreciate all of those things I told you we deliver/offer as a company at the very beginning of our conversation. They understand that we're more than a company that does records management. If we can succeed through communications, supporting that transformation, that will keep me busy enough for the next few years.

Katie 36:20

I think that's a really interesting area, because we've been talking a lot about the blurring of the lines and about content traveling. Everything I've seen suggests that I think they've done experiments, haven't they, where a piece of content has been shared from a corporate account, say on LinkedIn, and then from an employee, and the reach is always so much greater when the content is from the actual employee who wrote it. So people follow people, people like people, people want to know about people, but I don't see enough organisations really thinking about that co creation of content for both audiences at the same time. So I think that's, yeah, I think that's a really exciting area. I couldn't agree more. Come back and tell us about that, as you do.

Neil 37:04

I will. I will, indeed, I'll take you up on that.

Katie 37:11

This episode of The Internal Comms Podcast is brought to you by my very own Friday update. Would you like 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 communications? 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 a little bit more informed, hopefully a little uplifted as you end your week. Now, this is subscriber only content which was initially intended just for AB colleagues and clients. I don't post this content anywhere else, so you do need to sign up, but that is super easy. Simply go to abcomm.co.uk/Friday. We just need your email address, and it's equally easy to unsubscribe at any time. So give it a go, that sign up page again, abcomm.co.uk/Friday, and if you do choose to be a subscriber, I very much look forward to being in touch.

Katie 38:45

Let's head over to those quick fire questions. What skill or personal characteristic do you think has most led to your career success?

Neil 38:54

I think it's asking the right questions to get the answers, the information or the outcome you need, that might come from my training as a journalist. That's what I wanted to do as I was going through school and university and even into the postgraduate world. I've ended up applying those skills in the business world. And I think you've got to learn when to ask something at the right time in the right way, choose your moments as well as what you're



asking, because that can unlock, often, the information you need, the answers you need, either to get things done or just to fundamentally produce the results you're looking for.

Katie 39:33

Yeah, don't be afraid when something's not making sense, to say, could you just explain this to me? Because in my experience, if you're thinking I'm not sure that makes sense, or something has been left unsaid, you're not the only one thinking that, but you probably need to be the one brave enough to speak up. Is it also true that sometimes by asking the question you are getting particularly senior leaders to revisit a decision or a particular phrase that they're using that they might need to change. Is there something in our questioning that actually gets to a better answer, potentially, you must have seen that in your career.

Neil 40:14

Yes, I have, and often I will start a conversation saying I'm going to ask, ask some questions, maybe more as devil's advocate, just to make sure that I hear how you articulate the answer, because that's a question we may get from an employee, or it might need to go in an FAQ and hearing you say it is important. So yes, I think often you've got to play bad cop in those situations to cover all eventualities, but I do often make sure that the person I'm talking to knows it's not necessarily, my opinion, this is me helping to get you to articulate what it is we need to convey, and do that in the best possible way.

Katie 40:54

What book should all comms professionals read? A tough question, I know.

Neil 41:00

So this is on my list right now, and I'm going to go for *The Art of Explanation* by Ross Atkins, the BBC broadcaster. I'm only halfway through it, but I can already say it is essential for our profession. It's got really good advice. It's really practical. And quite honestly, if you watch Ross on TV, I can't think of many journalists who are as good as he does. He is an unbelievable communicator, so there's tons to learn, and his book is a brilliant.

Katie 41:28

What piece of bad advice or unhelpful thinking do you think has consistently dogged the comms profession?

Neil 41:35

I think it's feeling that communications deserves a seat at the table. That's often a debate we have. No one deserves a place. It's earned. So if it's not happening, we need to ask ourselves, why it's not happening. Not anyone else. The onus is on us.

Katie 41:52

Yeah, absolutely and finally, as we do always, at the end of the show, we give you a billboard for millions to see, and you can put on that billboard any message you like. What are you going to have on your billboard Neil?



Neil 42:06

So it would say: It's not important what people think when you come in, but what they think when you leave. And that's a quote from Jurgen Klopp. So I'm a big Liverpool fan. He said that when he became Liverpool manager, I'm still in denial that he's no longer Liverpool manager. I think he's an amazing manager and leader, and for me that means thinking about the impact you want to have, the difference you want to make, and how that's remembered when you're gone.

Katie 42:34

Yeah, I love it so much. Neil, thank you so much. This has been a lovely conversation. Thank you for your insight and your wisdom.

Neil 42:42

It's been a pleasure, Katie. Thank you ever so much for having me.

Katie 42:44

And so that is a wrap for this episode of The Internal Comms Podcast. As always, you can find all the links mentioned in today's show, including a full transcript on our website. Just head over to abcomm.co.uk/podcast. If you did enjoy this episode, I have a small favour to ask please. Could you take a moment to like, rate or review the show on your favourite podcast platform? This just gives the algorithms a little nudge and makes it easier for other internal comms professionals around the world to discover our show. We've got some fantastic guests lined up in this season, some of the sharpest minds in our field, so be sure to hit that subscribe button today so you don't miss a single conversation. A huge thank you to Neil for sharing his insights today, and a big shout out to the dream team behind the scenes. My producer, John, sound engineer Stuart, Content Manager, Madi, designer Rob and the rest of the incredible crew at AB who keep this show rolling. And finally, my heartfelt thanks to you for choosing The Internal Comms Podcast. I always enjoy hearing from listeners, so please continue to reach out to me on LinkedIn. Share your thoughts on the show, tell me what you want more of or less of. I genuinely want this podcast to be really, really helpful to you in your work. Until next time lovely listeners, stay safe and well and remember, it's what's inside that counts.