

2019 Peter Williams HR Technology Award

WINNER: The Hoyts Group

Picture perfect communication and collaboration at Hoyts

Origins and principles

The HOYTS Group (Hoyts) is one of the leading entertainment companies across Australia and New Zealand, comprising of HOYTS Exhibition which includes 51 cinemas as well as Val Morgan Group, the advertising arm offering solutions for both cinema and outdoor screen advertising. Hoyts is the second largest cinema group in Australia with about 25 percent market share.

Employing over 3,200 people (90% in locations across Australia and New Zealand), HOYTS didn't have an easy way for everyone to communicate and share their ideas. Cinema-based employees are mostly part-time crew members who work 15 hours per week on average. Eighty-three percent are between the age of 16 and 24. The workforce is largely seasonal – over 90 percent don't have a work email address. Before Workplace, that meant they had no direct line of communication outside their own site. Each location was effectively operating like an independent cinema.

These employees couldn't get regular updates on key business events and there was a real communication gap between stakeholders and front-line crew members. Cinema managers were the central point of communication, cascading information down to employees at the front-line of the business. This meant real-time communication was non-existent. Business leaders realised this had negative implications.

It was not possible to have visibility on some of the great work that was being achieved at an operational level, that could be shared as best practice with other sites. There was a company newsletter with reasonably high readership and an online intranet, but these were largely one-way communication channels. These platforms allowed for formal communication to be dispersed throughout the business, however business leaders didn't have a platform that allowed them to regularly and consistently communicate essential information about the business, share upcoming events or celebrate business achievements.

The goal was to bring employees closer by opening communication and empowering them through a platform where they felt valued and connected to the entire business.

To truly enable engagement, enhance performance, and find the right balance between technology and the human factor, an internal communication solution was required that was already integrated into the culture. There was a need to not only share important business updates, but to use this opportunity as a driver to improve company culture.

With a primary demographic of millennials who are well-versed in social media, Workplace by Facebook became the natural choice. Built for the world of work on an easy to use collaboration platform similar to Facebook, the key driver behind the initiative was to share organisation-wide updates and instantly communicate with colleagues from across the company. Hoyts were seeking a platform that allowed for frictionless and organic communication in a field-based environment where employees did not have a work email address.

Implementation

Employee feedback identified that internal communication was becoming an issue. Each cinema was only getting updates for their site, not the bigger picture about the whole business. Senior executives investigated several potential platforms. The key criterion was seamless integration with free-flowing communication. With 3,200 employees, accessibility was at front of minds. By reviewing the feedback from employees across different sites and analysing how teams and managers were communicating with one another, it was determined that the most effective platform would be one that simplified and encouraged continued communication.

The project team embarked on a two-month implementation plan, armed with a communication and launch strategy. Following the initial implementation phase, Workplace was introduced to a small group of senior leaders and cinema managers, then the larger business.

In a phased test at the national operations conference, a first trial of Workplace by Facebook was spearheaded by Director – People, Performance & Culture and a small team of key individuals. The project team used this as an opportunity to launch Workplace in a contained environment where access, engagement and functionality could be closely monitored. It also allowed for buy-in from senior leaders to support and encourage the use of Workplace and be responsible for getting their teams onto the platform as quickly as possible.

Many questions were raised about how inappropriate content could be monitored. Hoyts wanted to empower employees and not censor any user-generated content. The view taken from the very start echoed core values – if you are the most senior person in any group, you are the moderator of that content, and you are responsible for ensuring it is work-appropriate.

The team were also conscious of system-fatigue. The project team wanted a fast and seamless transition from static to interactive communication. The biggest challenge for full-launch was getting all email-less crew members onto the platform. A third-party partner, Enable, provided claim codes via SMS to integrate with payroll data.

The most important job was making sure pre-planned communication made employees aware of the platform and its phased rollout into the business. Instructions on the claims process needed to be clear. The team actioned many queries in regard to Workplace in the initial stages, developed an instructions toolkit to provide clarification around the set-up process and commonly asked FAQs. It was a steep learning curve, not only as administrators but curators of content, especially in the early stages.

At the launch party the CEO live streamed on Workplace to active users. This saw an acceleration of user content generation and engagement through the strategic communications plan. It was critical in getting senior managers and project teams to start interacting on Workplace. Important information started being communicated only through Workplace which meant that employees needed to be on the platform to ensure that they were up-to-date.

Before Workplace, Hoyts relied on a siloed approach to distribute information, now channels were open for even, two-way communication. Everyone in the business was contactable and accessible. Communication and engagement was encouraged with crew and senior leaders, who asked for feedback on current challenges or ideas for implementation from all across the business. For example, the Property team asked for feedback on how to better improve the recliner chairs that were provided in LUX premium offering cinemas.

The platform offers 1 to 1 and group text and video conversations. These features were important elements that helped Workplace become successful. A target was getting users on the mobile app, allowing for a faster and quicker response. Users are also encouraged to use the instant messaging service provided to stay connected with everyone in the business.

The phased launch strategy helped seamlessly implement Workplace into the business and aligned with the business goal to create clearer communication channels. The objective to create more free-flowing communication has been achieved and given employees better coverage across what the business is doing as a whole.

Benefits and Outcomes

Workplace was a hit with younger employees and brought together 51 cinemas and support offices. It was so successful Facebook used Hoyts as a case study. Staff usage and engagement was measured using Workplace's reporting suite.

Workplace is now the go-to channel for employees to learn more about each other, no matter where they work in the business. This new sense of community has boosted team morale and established a stronger, more productive culture.

Employees can easily access company updates from support offices in company-wide groups or in the News Feed or get in touch instantly via Workplace Chat. The Workplace mobile app makes it easy for frontline employees to stay in the loop by viewing updates and messages on their mobile devices from wherever they are. Millennials' familiarity with Facebook made Workplace a big hit with them, and meant no training was required.

The company hierarchy feels far more even. Leaders connect with frontline employees, and vice versa. Senior leaders are also more transparent, validating the way teams work together to deliver truly outstanding experiences for guests. Employees use photos, GIFs, videos, and live video to chat with each other adding another element of fun to their work.

Employees share tips, best practice and fun ideas through team and cinema-wide groups. Employees can now raise their ideas in front of a large audience, putting forward suggestions to the wider community and receive real time feedback and encouragement from their colleagues. This allows HOYTS to cultivate a culture of innovation, consistency and superior customer service across our sites.

This has even brought out a bit of healthy competition among cinemas. Sites often have employee-led competitions to promote new campaigns and movie releases. Employees can now put forward their ideas to promote movie launches, most recently for Rocketman. Several cinema sites created a promotional video ahead of the movie's release, highlighting the innovation now able to be accessed at a site level thanks to Workplace.

Workplace has empowered Hoyts in sometimes unexpected ways, as this example shows. Choosing the perfect moment to raise the lights when the credits roll is a fine art. Every movie is different. Before Workplace, every cinema had to work it out for themselves. Now, the first site that receives a movie can share their timings with every other site. It's a small change making a huge difference to efficiency and effectiveness.

Workplace can be used to ensure the safety of team members. This was clear in the recent attacks in Christchurch. During this time all employees based in Christchurch were sent a notification to mark themselves as safe or ask for assistance. Thankfully all employees were safe and those that did reach out for assistance were quickly contacted and offered support in an appropriate way. The level of centralised transparency hasn't only had significant safety enhancements but has truly delivered on fundamental values in a very real way to employees.

Success of Workplace by Facebook is measured largely using the platform's reporting suite. This covers employee signup, group and posting activity. The goal was 80 percent engagement in 6

months. This was achieved in two months. 12 months on 90 percent engagement is being maintained. This statistic surpasses previously recorded engagement levels, making Workplace the highest engagement activity ever seen across the organisation. The statistics show Hoyts is edging towards a daily average of over 1,000 messages on Workplace Chat and over 700 posts per week.

Based on the successes seen to date, Hoyts are now exploring opportunities to further develop the platform for business uses, such as recruitment and training and development.

Summary

Workplace has become a central collaboration hub for Hoyts. It's helped cultivate a culture of innovation, consistency, and superior customer service across all cinemas. There's now open communication across the whole business, from senior leaders to frontline employees. Teams work together to deliver outstanding service to guests.