

5 tips for building internal relationships

Excelling at networking is essential to grow your function and broaden and advance your role. However, failure to forge close relationships and partnerships constitutes one of the most common career mistakes that communicators make. Try these tips to leverage internal networks and build links externally.

BY **KATRINA ANDREWS**

1 Maximise face time with global headquarters

Direct visits to head office can foster valuable internal connections. At UBS, Tim Cobb, then the bank's chief Asia-Pacific communications officer, tied in a swiss skiing holiday with his first head office visit. Whilst in Zurich, Tim organised meetings with senior communicators and other departmental heads, developing internal networks that would have taken months to forge from afar. Within 18 months, he became global head of group external communications.

2 Build connections with global leaders

Asian offices can feel like regional outposts without daily interaction with global executives. Yet, there are unique opportunities to interact (and demonstrate your abilities) when CEOs and other executives arrive on regional visits. These opportunities allow you to be the knowledgeable and experienced 'sherpa' for the company's top management in unfamiliar terrain. Wesley McDade, managing director corporate communications at Morgan Stanley, credits these interactions with helping him gain his global position. It's a networking dream that's often overlooked.

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The first recruitment professional ever-listed in PRWeek's global Power Book 500, Katrina established Andrews Partnership, after four years as founder and board director of VMA Group Asia-Pacific. Previously, Katrina spent seven years as APAC managing director at Melcrum, global specialists in internal communications research.

3 Attend meetings together with other company executives

Many senior communications professionals recall misunderstandings about corporate goals stemming from staff in individual company departments or disciplines meeting separately with a regional CEO. Combat this problem by ensuring that you attend such meetings alongside heads of other

disciplines. This will provide you with a radar for internal company politics as well as helping build local connections with other function chiefs.

4 Make sure internal colleagues know the importance of communications

Don't assume that managers and staff in other functions appreciate what the group's communicators do for their individual

business units. Take a broad view of the role of communications in supporting such units, relaxing territorial boundaries between departments to win trust and friends across the business. Position your role as an enabler, not as the communications police. Remember to show your value at all times.

5 Stay connected to external networks

The longer communicators stay in senior jobs, the more isolated they can become, no longer attending conferences, missing opportunities and losing connections. One communications executive made redundant after 20 years admitted that he had few contacts after not attending external events for a decade. Attend industry gatherings, contribute case studies to trade publications and dedicate time for external networking. Always have at least one eye on your external world. ●