

Communicating effectively

In a series of articles, NACD introduces the various teams that each play a key role in chemical distribution. In this issue, communications team members share insight into their busy work schedules

Yana Palagacheva Sofia, Bulgaria

Gone are the days when a business could solely rely on a solid commercial strategy to be successful. Corporate responsibility, business integrity, and employee wellbeing are all essential prerequisites for a company to attract talent and keep its customers.

Chemical distribution is a sector that is particularly scrutinized when it comes to environmental impact and social responsibility. It is therefore vital that each business contributes to a collective positive image of the industry. It is down to the communications teams to build and nurture that reputation.

They are the ones who ensure all stakeholders,

from employees and investors to customers and prospects, are informed about – and satisfied with – a company's overall performance.

From drafting press releases and interviewing company seniors to building a successful digital strategy, communication teams play a key role in making a business transparent, trustworthy, and respectable. ■

TALITHA POORE, SENIOR GLOBAL COMMUNICATIONS SPECIALIST, BRENNTAG NA

Talitha Poore has been part of Brenntag's communications team for close to four years. Her duties as a communications specialist vary considerably depending on the projects in which the company is currently involved.

"No two days or work weeks are the same. It really depends on what is going with in the organization externally and internally," says Poore.

Most of her days start with answering emails and curating internal company-wide emails. Some weeks, Poore's focus will be on press releases, interviews, and media monitoring, while others will see her handle internal campaigns and intranet content. Poore would also regularly host company townhall meetings or train employees on the Brenntag's communication strategy.

"Each day varies and could include any of the above work tasks. That is what is great about these roles. They are so versatile," she says.

Her job became even more dynamic as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to an increased number of communication campaigns.

"After the start of the pandemic, internal communication rose as we were trying to make sure our employees were well aware of our COVID-19 protocols, supply chain disruptions, and ensuring our employees had

everything they needed to work from home, if possible," says Poore.

"Externally, we were tasked with ensuring that our stakeholders were aware of the challenges we were facing."

More recently, a lot of Poore's duties have revolved around her company's global transformation program, called Project Brenntag. The organization launched the program at the start of 2021 and is implementing two global divisions as part of it – Brenntag Essentials and Brenntag Specialties.

Poore's team plays a key role in keeping stakeholders informed about the various stages of the transformation.

"We have seen an increase in internal and external communication. Stakeholders from all sides are looking for more openness and transparency of what the organization is doing and how we are doing it," she says.

The increasing importance of the communication team has also given Poore and her colleagues a chance to assess and improve their own internal processes.

"Over the last two years, and since the start of Project Brenntag, we have taken a look at all of our processes and tried to determine what would help us streamline this to be most effective in all areas."

Poore enjoys the dynamic nature of her role but acknowledges that it takes a lot of hard work and precision to juggle multiple communication projects at once.

"One of our main challenges is making sure that all our communication cascades are done

effectively and strategically to ensure the highest optimum of visibility to both internal and external stakeholders at all levels," she says.

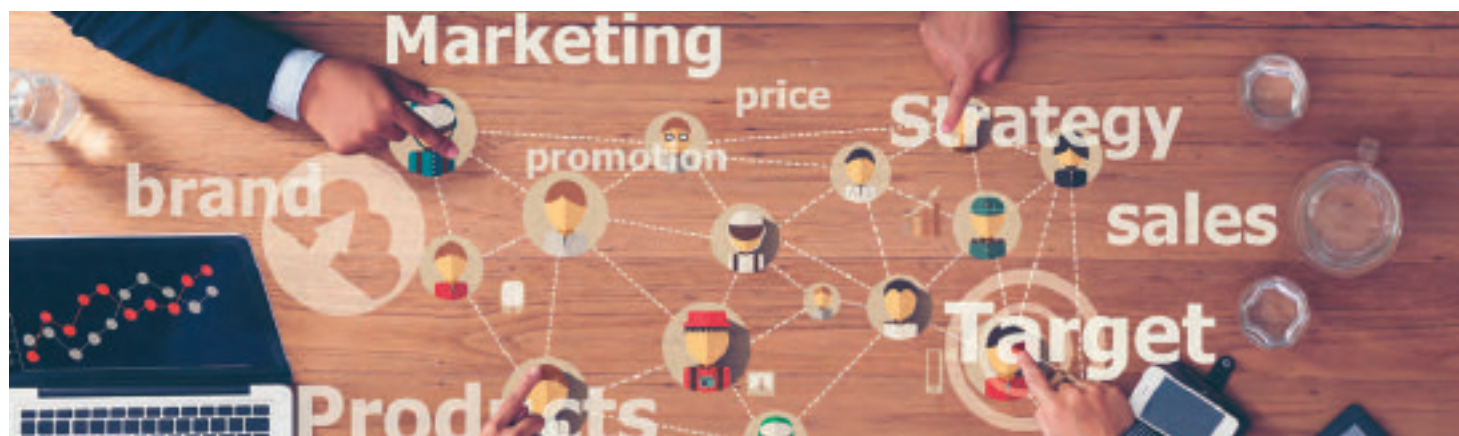
"That is why being a global team is so great. We are able to help make sure we represent our organization strategically by being highly collaborative."

The global nature of Poore's role and the chance to communicate with various people on a daily basis are among the many reasons she enjoys the job.

"There are a lot of great things about my role. One of the biggest perks would be that I

get to network with lots of people all over the globe," she says.





DWAYNE ROARK, HEAD OF GLOBAL COMMUNICATIONS, UNIVAR SOLUTIONS

Dwayne Roark has 20 years of experience in the field of communications and public affairs. He has spent the last four of those at Univar Solutions where he currently leads the Global Communications & Government Affairs Team.

The list of Roark's responsibilities is long and includes overseeing internal and external communications on the executive, financial, employee and corporate brand level. His team also looks after the company's corporate media relations and social media outputs.

"I don't believe anyone who works in communications would ever have a typical week," says Roark.

"The average normal is made up of a steady drumbeat of communications that help inform, remind, and build awareness with your many different stakeholders."

The role of a communications team has grown in importance in recent years with businesses paying increased attention to their brand identity and market reputation.

"As a discipline, communications has changed quite a bit as it has evolved to a highly strategic discipline that helps enable organizations grow and thrive through the many facets of doing business," he says.

"Beyond the tactical execution, communications must be at the center of any company strategy as it takes into account all stakeholders relevant to the markets served."

Social responsibility is now at the core of each successful business. When deciding on their next commercial move, companies need to consider carefully its effect on the environment, community or wellbeing of its employees.

"Customers have gained a heightened sense of social responsibility that requires a brand not only to be more than a symbol of commerce, but also to represent a greater sense of purpose," says Roark.

"Many companies have struggled to find the right balance between commerce and purpose when positioning their own brands, as well as how to engage the employee base and elevate the brand conversation."

The role of a communications team is crucial in the process as communicators are the ones helping a business to successfully build what Roark refers to as a "brand community".

A strong internal communications strategy would boost the company culture and increase employee loyalty. Good external communication campaigns, meanwhile, reinforce the brand's name among investors, customers, and prospects.

Along with helping organizations build a reputable brand, communications teams are tasked with preserving and building on the company's reputation and market relevance. In today's world, this would be hard to achieve without a successful digital business strategy.

"With virtually everyone having constant access to pictures, due to smart phones and other similar devices, visual graphics have taken the lead role in the visual storytelling process," says Roark.

"The importance of visual storytelling has increased quite significantly. Think of it this way, a picture is still worth 1,000 words."

Communications teams in the chemical sector and elsewhere are increasingly relying on infographics, videos, and other visual representations to send a message across all channels.

It is important not only to choose the right type of content to share, but also to ensure it is able to be equally informative and able to keep the attention of the target audience.

"You only have a short period of time before the audience becomes bored or disinterested and moves to another topic," says Roark.

"This is where visual storytelling can be impactful, as with a solid objective and strategy it can quickly become rich in content and full of information that is interesting from multiple points of view."

The digital space offers a number of opportunities for Roark and his colleagues to get the right business message across. However, the excess of information that users are continuously subjected to makes grabbing and keeping their attention a challenging task.

"With the limited attention span and bandwidth of most audiences, the goal of preserving the awareness of the brand has truly become its own art form," he notes.

"From using targeted messaging to integrated and even interactive communications, the path to finding the right mix can be a daunting task."

Yet, the satisfaction after a successful campaign makes the effort worth it for Roark, who continues to truly enjoy his job two decades after entering the field.

"I simply love working in communications, so having the opportunity to perform at a high level in a discipline that I enjoy is the greatest perk any position can offer," Roark concludes.

