Want to know more about how Sequel can help you meet your challenges in 2018?

Or would you like a bespoke presentation for your team to drill down to your specific challenges based on this report?

Talk to Paul Jones (paul.jones@sequelgroup.co.uk) or Nick Andrews (nick.andrews@sequelgroup.co.uk)

trends

What's changing, what's adapting, what's different in the world of internal communication in 2018

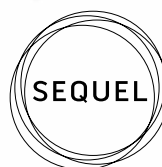# THE MANY HATS OF THE MODERN COMMUNICATOR

As the scale of our audiences grows, what does this mean for our approach to content?

SEQUEL

We create better employee experiences through inspiring content, strategic insight and intelligent technology that transform your business

www.sequelgroup.co.uk

SEQUEL

Introduction

As we were preparing to sign off this edition of our annual Trends book, an Oxford University professor predicted that artificial intelligence (AI) could overtake humanity by 2045.

In other words… within 30 years, machines will be able to do everything that humans can. The possibilities of that landmark event are too much to comprehend… in fact I'd go so far as to say we need computers to help us make sense of them. And it's exactly this 'augmented intelligence' that IBM thinks will make the difference for communication, as we all become 'cognitive communicators'.

In this year's Trends book – our fifth such publication – AI is just one of the on-trend topics we consider. We also review the growing importance of ethical communications, rejoice in the development of Microsoft Office 365 (yes, really) and riff on the challenges of chatbots.

As a full-service agency we're in a privileged position, able to compile information from our client work, our active role in industry associations and our attendance at industry events. These Trends books give us an opportunity to share our thinking with our clients, and to work with you to make your communications and employee experience count.

We hope this year's edition inspires you and your teams to try something different in 2018. Have a great year.

Paul Jones
Associate Director – Strategy, Sequel Group

About the writers:

Nick Andrews is Business Development Director at Sequel and he has more than 20 years' experience in IC. A former journalist, he works with clients to help make their important interesting.

in nickandrews1/

Paul Jones is Sequel's Associate Director – Strategy and works with clients to help them improve their comms strategies and channels. He tried to use AI to write his chapters but the stupid robot just glared at him, so

he ended up having to write them himself.

in pauljonescomms/

Becky Leonard is Sequel's Communications and Content Manager and recently completed the IoIC Advanced Diploma. Forever singing the praises of powerful IC, she finds the meaning in her work comes from showing others the meaning in theirs.

in rebecca-leonard-comms

A seasoned storyteller, Content and Communication Executive **Christina Papathanasiou** works with clients to deliver valuable and compelling content for their internal audiences.

in christina-papathanasiou/

Sequel MD **Suzanne Peck** had a lucky fall into internal comms after working as a journalist and then in M&S's press office. She's worked in-house and agency-side, creating communications that

connect with audiences, and is also helping to shape IC and build IC reputation through her work as president of the IoIC and a VP of the European association, FEIEA.

in suzannepeck1/

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Run! The killer robots are coming

Companies are spending billions every year on AI (artificial intelligence) R&D, so Paul Jones asks how we can harness this technology in a positive way to improve the way we communicate.

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Is it a job just getting to work?

How we experience work is the difference between feeling it's a place we want to be, or a place we just go in to. Suzanne Peck explains why creating the best employee experience has never been more important.

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Listen up: be cool, not creepy

Digital technology has opened up the ability for organisations to see all and know all about their employees. Becky Leonard sets off in search of the spot where personalisation crosses over into concerning…
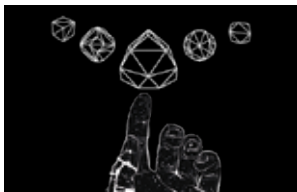
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The many hats of modern comms

Employees, customers, shareholders, potential recruits… the scale of our audiences is growing. Nick Andrews believes corporate comms has reached a point where there is no internal and external content: just content.

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Truth, lies and blatant guesses

This is the fifth annual Trends publication that we've produced for our clients. So we thought it might be fun to look back at some of the predictions we've made in previous years, to see how accurate they turned out to be.

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From foe to friend: love the Cloud

In an increasingly tech-driven age in which companies are being told to embrace digital transformation or face becoming obsolete, Christina Papathanasiou considers the benefits of Microsoft Office 365.

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Don't get left behind

Last year we said it was time to stop the excuses and actually *do* some of the measurement communicators always *talk* about. Becky Leonard explains how spending more time using the analytical left side of our brain can lead to success.

8_

Time to chat and find your voice

When you're asking Google to help you find information, do you type or talk? Paul Jones speaks truth to power and finds out whether virtual assistant-style tools can help your communications sing.

RUN! THE KILLER ROBOTS ARE COMING FOR US

Companies are spending billions every year on AI (artificial intelligence) R&D, so amid concerns about how this technology can reflect humankind's worst impulses, **Paul Jones** asks how we can harness it in a positive way to improve the way we communicate. *Illustration by Dan Howden*

Elementary, my dear Watson

I f you've been reading articles about artificial intelligence recently, you're probably wondering how long it's going to be before a robot takes your job. And then kills you. While hurling racist insults at your lifeless corpse (yes, really – more on this later).

So now's the time... prepare for the rise of the racist killer robots.

But before you decamp to a mountain hideaway in Idaho and stock up on tinned food, guns and ammo, there are some things you should know.

Most importantly, the term 'artificial intelligence' is a bit of a misleading one. IBM, big players in this area, prefer the term 'augmented intelligence'. That's because this technology is designed to be helpful by complementing what humans can already do.

Historically, computers have been built to store information. But AI systems can store AND learn. In fact they get better over time, and develop their knowledge through interaction.

This is where the augmented intelligence really comes into its own. For instance, a typical computer can store an MRI scan in 0s and 1s, but an AI system can analyse it – and even make an accurate diagnosis.

In one test, IBM gave its Watson AI system 1,000 patient records to analyse. The recommendations it made matched the doctors' analysis almost exactly. But, using its immense processing power, Watson also found 300 things that the doctors hadn't been able to see, including five genes linked to Gehrig's disease.

The same principle was applied in a cyber security test. Typically, security experts will find a threat within about an hour. Watson took just one minute.

These are, of course, very worthy examples – but not half as much fun as the one where Watson took part in an American TV gameshow and annihilated (not literally) the programme's best-ever players.

Biased data = biased robots

Developing AI systems with a capacity for fast learning isn't all good news, though. An article in the *Guardian* reported how these systems are learning from our worst impulses: "When we feed machines data that reflects our prejudices, they mimic them – from anti-Semitic chatbots to racially biased software. When the data reflects the history of our own unequal society we are, in effect, asking the program to learn our own biases."

This has led to high-profile incidents, such as a LinkedIn advertising program showing a preference for male names in searches, and a Microsoft chatbot learning from Twitter and beginning to spout anti-Semitic messages.

That's bad enough, but last summer a panel of leading robotics experts urged the UN to take action in order to prevent the development of 'killer robots'. They called for a ban on the use of AI in managing weaponry, calling it a Pandora's box that once opened, would be hard to close.

As a *BBC News* article explained: "These autonomous weapons could select and engage targets without human intervention. They do not currently exist but advances in technology are bringing them closer to reality."

AI in IC

So... assuming that we make it through the coming robot wars, what does this mean for the world of communication?

Once more, there are pluses and minuses. IBM believes that we will all become 'cognitive communicators', using this augmented technology to improve what we do every day.

Newspapers are already using AI to write articles more quickly than humans could: for instance, the *Washington Post* covered the Rio Olympics and the 2016 US Presidential campaigns using its advanced AI technology Heliograf. Editors were able to add information, analysis and colour to the bot-written text (and overwrite it if they needed to).

While ad agency Saatchi LA trained Watson to write thousands of ads for a new Toyota car. It took the platform three months to learn exactly what the copywriters were looking for, but it was ultimately able to generate thousands of pieces of copy that can be used to appeal to many different audiences.

Chris Pierantozzi of Saatchi LA explains: "Watson was finding these very deep, weird insights and it started to put it into sentence structures – things that maybe we in the advertising industry wouldn't be able to find on our own."

The writers among us may be getting nervous about the robots coming for our jobs, but Chris has some positive news: "At the end of the day, this campaign is still an idea that we came up with," he says.

At Sequel we're using Watson's unique skills to analyse our writing. We've been delighted to see that the system has recognised different tones of voice for different audiences.

We're also using Watson to review our clients' output as part of our measurement and comms audit activities.

Our next step is to use AI to help our clients segment their audiences more effectively. As IBM's Jon Iwata told delegates at the 2017 IABC World Conference: "Segmentation is crude at the moment – usually by role, site or 'all employees'. There is a huge amount of data that we can use to improve that process, but to make sense of all of it, we need technology.

"People are telling us their segmentation all the time. We can enhance data and technology to understand people as unique individuals and serve them, rather than sending something in the hope it's useful and received at the right time."

Stay in charge

We'll leave you with these three key skills for staying relevant in the AI economy, taken from a fascinating *Forbes* article.

Creativity:
"The flash of inspiration and the new ways of thinking involved in the creative process can't yet be well imitated"

Motivation:
"Leaders, regardless of job, are those that can motivate those around them to take action... AI is not there yet"

Managing:
"The emotional intelligence required of managers is very difficult to replicate with AI".

So while there are some elements of AI to be wary of, there are many more positives to be inspired by.

Last year tech companies spent up to £24 billion on AI, mostly on research and development, so this is a topic that we'll be hearing much more about in the coming years.

And anyway, there's no point worrying about the future of AI... because if the robots do start to get a bit uppity, surely we can quash their revolution by just pulling out the plug..?

> THERE'S NO POINT WORRYING ABOUT THE FUTURE OF AI... BECAUSE IF THE ROBOTS DO START TO GET A BIT UPPITY, SURELY WE CAN QUASH THEIR REVOLUTION BY JUST PULLING OUT THE PLUG..?

IS IT A JOB JUST GETTING TO WORK?

How we experience work is the difference between feeling it's a place we want to be, or a place we just go in to. **Suzanne Peck** explains why creating the best employee experience has never been more important. *Illustration by Joshua Harrison*

DON'T MAKE ME GO BACK!!!

THREE THINGS YOU'LL LEARN IN THIS CHAPTER
- THE ELEMENTS THAT MAKE UP THE EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE
- WHY HAVING A CLEAR PURPOSE CAN IMPROVE YOUR BOTTOM LINE
- HOW TO CONTRIBUTE TO AND IMPROVE YOUR ORGANISATION'S EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE

Happy days, happy ways

" *WORK SPACES MATTER TOO. GLOBAL RESEARCH FROM STEELCASE FOUND THAT WORKERS WHO HAVE CONTROL OVER WHERE AND HOW THEY WORK, AND ARE FREE TO CHOOSE A WORK SPACE TO FIT THEIR TASK AT HAND, ARE 88 PER CENT MORE ENGAGED AT WORK."*

If you're not yet considering employee experience on the same page as your customer experience, the chances are you're already behind.

Happy employees equal happy workplaces. The best employee experiences improve retention and attract future talent. Happy employees are more productive, less likely to be absent, more likely to work with colleagues, less likely to leave and more likely to recommend your company to others – helping you to improve your Net Promoter Score.

And now, it's increasingly employees' turn to be the stars of the show. The best organisations are creating a social, mobile, and consumer-style experience for their people, making it human-centred, personalised and memorable.

Three threads
So what do I mean by 'employee experience'?
• Employee experience is what happens when an employee interacts with your organisation
• It mirrors their best customer experience
• It's made up of the cultural environment (the feeling employees get working for your organisation), the technological environment (the tools employees use to get their jobs done), and the physical environment (the actual spaces where people work).

When these three threads of culture, technology and environment are interwoven successfully, people feel that they matter, that they work in a place they belong to, and that they are a productive part of the organisation. They have a voice and a real sense of purpose.

As communicators, I believe we have an important job to do. We have the right skills, knowledge and influence, and can help organisations to weave those three threads even tighter together to create a consistent and connected experience. I'm not suggesting that we start designing office spaces or hook up cables, but we can make a difference.

Not convinced it's important? In the Future Workplace and Beyond.com study *The Active Job Seeker Dilemma*, 83 per cent of HR leaders said employee experience is either important or very important to their organisation's success, and they are investing more in training (56 per cent), improving their work spaces (51 per cent), and giving more rewards (47 per cent).

Purpose is a key driver of employee experience, driving culture and people. According to research by consultancy Global Tolerance, almost half the workforce now want to work for an organisation that has a positive impact on the world – and around one in three people say they would work harder if their company benefitted society.

And what about the bottom line? The EY Beacon Institute and *Harvard Business Review* found that purpose-driven companies saw 85 per cent growth in their revenue over the past three years.

Top tech
As communicators, the employee experience thread that's firmly intertwined in our roles is 'technology'.

We're living in exciting times. What better time to be a communicator? We can use multiple channels, platforms and collaboration tools to engage people in ways that we never could before. We can measure our communications' effectiveness more easily, and better understand how to use the tools in practice. We can personalise messages, we can reach diverse workforces and we can communicate in real time. We are making the integrated digital workplace less a thing of the future and more a fact of now.

So why then do I read that employee engagement is an ongoing problem? We have the tools and the theory, but survey after survey shows that only around a third of UK workers say they are engaged – plus the UK is ranked ninth for engagement levels among the world's twelfth largest economies.

I believe that if we can help our organisations move beyond engagement and focus more sharply on the bigger picture of employee experience, making it the best it can be at every step of the way and mirroring the customer experience, then we will see a significant change in engagement.

Five things to think about

1. Think employee first: this is a great opportunity for functions like Internal Communications, HR and Marketing to sit together and discuss how they can combine their strengths. Map the employee experience. Look at each element. What can be improved?
2. Start simple: a good place to begin is the onboarding process. The interview process and appointment element might be fantastic, but what about the tone and style of materials employees receive on day one – or before? The first 100 days form impressions that can take months to unpick; welcoming a new colleague to the office and making sure that they are integrated in the best way possible not only benefits them, but also the employer.
3. Have a clear purpose: a poll of 14,000 employees across Europe has suggested that companies that provide their employees with a clear 'line of sight' when it comes to vision and direction tend to have a much more committed, engaged and productive workforce.
4. Be succinct: help cut through information and noise to champion clear and concise communication. Sharing a consistent message, tone and language across the business helps people remember the bigger picture and to share it outside work as brand ambassadors.
5. Understand comms technology and channel preferences, and share relevant content: employees can buy products and converse online in real time when outside work, so find it hard when internal business processes aren't as automated as they could be, or give them a poor experience.

LISTEN UP: BE COOL, NOT CREEPY

Digital technology has opened up the ability for organisations to see all and know all about their employees. **Becky Leonard** sets off in search of the spot where personalisation crosses over into concerning. *Illustration by Jamie McDougall*

Always watching…

" IT'S SIMPLE REALLY: DON'T BE CREEPY. THE BEST WAY TO TELL IF YOU ARE IS BY ASKING YOUR EMPLOYEES WHAT THEY'RE HAPPY TO SHARE."

In dystopian novel *The Circle* by Dave Eggers, there is a moment where the heroine is faced down by a couple of fellow employees who tell her that her absence on the company's all-encompassing internal social networks and at company events has been noted. Joining in here is not a matter of employee engagement, they imply; it's a matter of keeping your job.

I'd bet good money that in their alternate reality those pushy, omniscient employees belong to the Internal Communication team.

Admittedly this is an extreme vision, but thanks to advancements in digital technology, internal communicators do increasingly have the ability to see all and know all about their employees.

This has its perks. By monitoring and measuring our employees' interactions, we can cater to their preferences and arguably create and nurture more effective communications as a result.

However, with some companies using software to analyse employee emotions and handing out wearable trackers like sweets, you could argue that it's getting a tad Big Brother-y. Here's our ethical conundrum: when it comes to monitoring, collecting and using employee data, where do we draw the line?

The tech has eyes
If we were going to sing the praises of enterprise social networks (ESNs), we'd probably start by chorusing that they improve communication, aid collaboration and bridge the gap between disparate work groups.

Just look at Slack. The workplace messenger platform says it brings people and processes together to make companies 32 per cent more productive. But it's interesting to know that behind Slack's 'team spirit' approach is something a bit more clinical.

Slack actually stands for 'Searchable Log of All Conversation and Knowledge' (now, there's a definition that has a touch of *1984* about it). In a blog rather worryingly entitled 'The inevitable future of Slack is your boss using it to spy on you', one writer quips: "The true value of Slack lies not in its ability to enable productivity, but rather to measure it." I think the same could be said of Slack's ability for communication.

Of course we need to measure our communications to make sure we are best serving our employee audience. However, is having access to 'all conversation and knowledge' a step too far? Digital communication allows us to see not only who's logging on and when, but what they're reading, writing and sharing.

And perhaps what they're feeling too. Some companies are taking this granular insight even further by using sentiment-analysis software to analyse employees' written responses on internal channels – such as intranet comments and survey responses – to unearth their true feelings on everything from diversity to leadership. Is it only a matter of

time before Slack – and similar ESNs – offers us the same ability?

Putting the relentless monitoring to the side for a moment, there's also the ethics around the unspoken obligations that are often associated with digital platforms like Slack.

This is particularly relevant when you consider the number of employees embracing BYOD (bring your own device) and blurring the lines between their personal and private lives. They allow us the freedom to communicate at any time, from any place, but some employees find that means at 9pm, from their living room.

Points mean prizes
A few months ago, one IC peer shared a new intranet engagement tactic. Every time an employee interacted with the site – whether it was posting a comment or sharing an article – they received a point, which was displayed on their profile in a running total. Just like with Amazon's 'Hall of Fame' for reviewers, employees could become 'knowledge experts' and compete with colleagues to move up the social ranking.

Now, sharing information by 'working out loud' is one of the huge benefits of an ESN… but get the approach and related communications wrong, and it can seem like the company is keeping tabs on employees' activities and turning communication into a box-ticking obligation, where you can be pulled up for not toeing the party line. And do we run the risk of employees spending time embroiled in online conversations – whether or not they are useful – just to rack up more points?

As internal communicators, we want to be acknowledged as the facilitators for open, two-way conversation and collaboration. Therefore, acting as the office snitches, ready to publicly grass employees up for not liking the CEO's latest blog post, is not the right way to go. It's also hardly going to hold up to the International Association of Business Communicators' 'Code of Ethics', which stipulates that IC must support the "ideals of free speech".

With great power…
Naturally, these ethical conundrums have not escaped the world at large. France has recently passed a law giving employees the right to ignore emails outside of working hours. This May will see the introduction of the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and all companies – and the IC departments within them – will need to get in line.

A big change is going to be consent. Companies will need clear, concrete evidence of an individual's agreement for them to store and use their personal data (an opt-out box is no longer enough) and individuals will have the right for that data to be erased at their request.

Personalisation opens a world of opportunity for IC but we need to tread carefully. Research from professional services company Accenture showed that 73 per cent prefer companies who use their personal data to tailor their experience, but 88 per cent want control over their data and how companies use it.

To get around this, there are advocates of a 'sweet spot' when it comes to personalising communication, which is between 21–40 per cent of your content. For example, giving employees tailored newsfeeds that show information relevant to their role and location is a nifty trick. Using their iPhone's location services feature to send them the lunch menu of the office they're visiting could give them an uneasy feeling that they're being watched.

It's simple really: don't be creepy. The best way to tell if you are is by asking your employees what they're happy to share. Phoebe Moore, an academic who works with companies to devise codes of conduct for data collection, advocates complete transparency by actually inviting employees to help write data policy.

Finally, when you're faced with using employee data – whether that's for measuring engagement or creating bespoke content – the GDPR will act as a helpful guide on what's right or wrong. And if all else fails, remember *The Circle's* totalitarian attitude to communication surveillance – and then make Orwell proud by doing the exact opposite.

THREE THINGS YOU'LL LEARN IN THIS CHAPTER
• WHY ORGANISATIONS ARE MAKING EMPLOYEE-FOCUSED
  CONTENT AVAILABLE TO EXTERNAL AUDIENCES
• WHY EMPLOYEES ARE CONSUMERS TOO
• HOW EMPLOYEES CONNECT YOUR LEADERSHIP TEAM
  AND YOUR CUSTOMERS

THE MANY HATS OF THE MODERN COMMUNICATOR

Employees, customers, shareholders, stakeholders, potential recruits... the scale of our audiences is growing. As a result, **Nick Andrews** believes that corporate communication has reached a point where there is no internal and external content. There is just content. *Illustration by Jacob Phillips*

"You are now entering your office – please put your clock back several years."

The corporate workplace doesn't always have a reputation for being leading edge when it comes to communication; up to now, the channels used to share messages with employees have often been pale imitations of those used by the mainstream media outside the factory gate.

More worryingly, perhaps, the messages contained within those channels have also been different for internal and external audiences. But times change. Sure, there is a need to be audience specific when it comes down to the finer details of a message, or indeed confidential information relevant to individuals.

But with employees increasingly recognised as brand ambassadors and customers, my experience is that the 'inside out / outside in' approach to communication is gaining traction within corporate circles.

The catalyst and lead vehicle for this approach is, of course, social media.

More organisations than ever before are blurring the lines of communication through Twitter, Facebook et al. Two years ago, perhaps, they were using social tools internally to communicate with employees and externally to promote their brands and interact with customers. In 2018, these feeds are increasingly being targeted at both sets of consumers (note this word – employees are consumers!)

I think a great example of this is HSBC's Twitter feed – @HSBC_Now – which is accessible to all. HSBC says the feed is about the people who work there: "These are our stories. Ordinary people doing extraordinary things."

Through one platform, HSBC engages employees by focusing on them as people, while promoting a positive external view of the company as a diverse and interesting business. As a side note, HSBC's internal video programme is also available via YouTube.

Another financial institution, Nationwide, has adopted a similar approach with its @NBSemployees Twitter account, which regularly highlights the great work (inside and outside the office) its people do. Employees across the business can tweet (and they do) – anyone can reply or interact with them.

The description of the purpose of @NBSemployees does, however, make it clear that for customer enquiries and the press office, there are separate Twitter accounts.

You may also have seen the Royal Mail's public employee-focused website myroyalmail.com which has a combination of information that's only really useful to RM employees – things like a uniform ordering guide, safety footwear tips and so on – but also content that might appeal to external audiences, such as updates from the CEO.

The lesson from these businesses (and others, like Asda who produce a similar site to Royal Mail) is the same; essentially there is no internal and external content. There is just content. A lot of the time what is suitable for an internal audience will work externally as well (and vice versa).

At the world's largest telecoms company, AT&T, the Corporate Communications team has made a conscious decision to connect with customers by giving them stories about their employees via a freely available podcast, Life at AT&T.

The podcast gives customers – and any other interested stakeholders, including employees – an honest look at how their people are contributing to the company's overall mission; to connect people with their world everywhere they live, work and play.

The programme also acts as a recruitment tool and, aside from the feel-good factor for communicators of treating employees and customers to great content, there are also sound business reasons why 'inside out' communication is a 'must' rather than a 'nice to have' for organisations.

As Liz Ryan, CEO and Founder of Human Workplace, wrote in a *Forbes* article: "Your employees are the only real connection between a CEO and their leadership team at the top of an organisation, and the customers in the real world. If that connection is weak because the top managers don't trust their employees enough to listen to them, the leadership team will lose touch with its customers and competitors will swoop in to take advantage of the situation."

And employees themselves are stakeholders – they have the ammunition (through word and deed) to influence customers. The more they see the bigger picture, the more they can help shape the direction of a company.

Inside out. Outside in. In 2018 they are one and the same....

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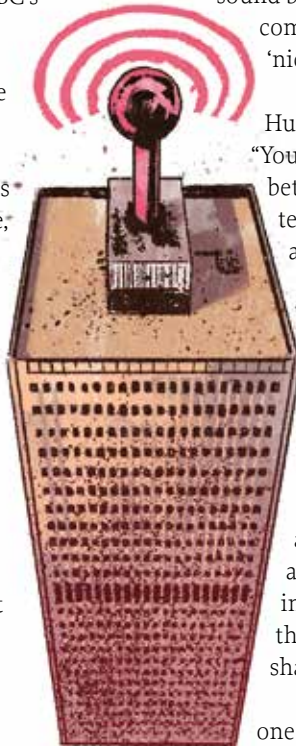
TRUTH, LIES AND BLATANT GUESSES: HOW DID WE DO?

This is the fifth annual Trends publication that we've produced for our clients. So we thought it might be fun to look back at some of the predictions we've made in previous years, to see how accurate they turned out to be. So, on a scale from 'Nostradamus' to 'Michael Fish', how did we do? Clue: you might want to buy a EuroMillions ticket this week*

Illustration by Anastasia Sichkarenko

*please gamble responsibly
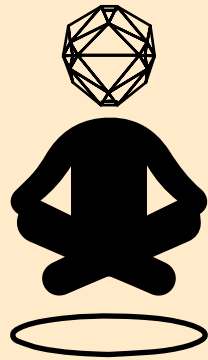
Millennials

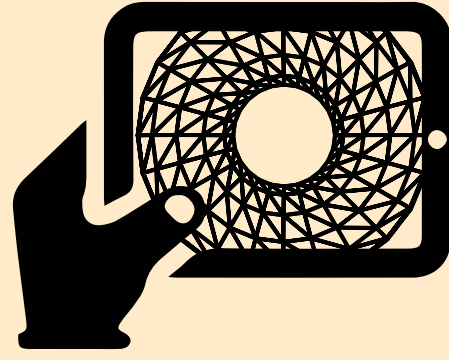2014 Trends book:

"Millennials want to make a difference: they want to feel as though they matter, and that the work they do plays an important role in society."

Millennials are the largest age group since the baby boomers. In fact, Deloitte predicts that millennials will account for three-quarters of the global workforce by 2025.

Our prediction certainly holds true at Vodafone, as its former Head of Future Talent Eleanor Tweddell confirmed in our AQ Aspic special issue, back in February 2017: "In our recent recruits, we're seeing a group of people who care about so much more than the bottom line. They are driven by citizenship; they want to know how you're contributing to society as a business. And more than ever, young employees are asking whether you offer a rounded environment that supports their health and mental wellbeing."

Eleanor's description mirrors our own experiences... and as Suzanne Peck reports in Chapter 2, one global survey found that almost half the workforce want to work for an organisation that has a positive impact on the world.

Mobile / integrated IC

2014 Trends book:

"The BBC enhanced live pages with improved integration of video, audio, text commentary and data across mobile, tablet and desktop. We think employees will soon be expecting a similar level of service from their organisations."

No prizes for guessing we were right on this one: integrated internal communications are now the norm. Employees expect to be able to access information wherever they are, 24 hours a day, and from a range of devices. It has to look polished. And anything less than 100 per cent availability is a source of frustration.

Mobile has become a hugely important channel. And that's not altogether surprising. Analysis by Statista's Digital Market Outlook revealed that the amount of time people spend on their smartphone has rocketed: in Britain, the average person spends two hours and nine minutes a day on their smartphone.
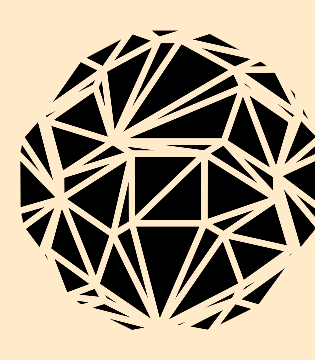
Infographics

2014 Trends book:

"Infographics aren't a new idea. They've been around since at least the 17th century but we expect to see many more of them in 2014."

We were spot on with our prediction: data from Google confirms that 2014 did indeed see a sharp rise in interest in infographics on the web.

We're all deluged with words, facts and figures every day, so infographics continue to be hugely popular for employers looking for a way to present complex information to their people in an engaging, concise, easy-to-understand and memorable way. Here at Sequel, we've certainly experienced a growing demand for infographics among our clients over the last four years.

It's interesting to note, too, that Hubspot's visual content marketing statistics for 2017 stated that infographics were three times more likely to be 'liked' or shared on social media than any other type of content.
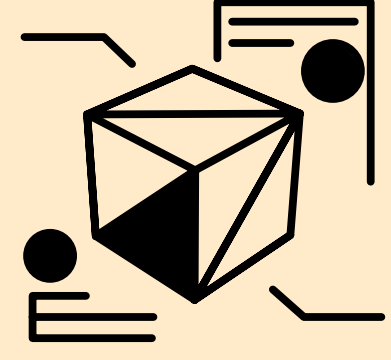
Measurement

2015 Trends book:

"There's a clear opportunity in 2015 for communicators who are brave enough to use big data to help their businesses do 100 things just 1% better."

We'll give ourselves half a mark for this one, as the picture is mixed. According to Gatehouse's State of the Sector 2017, a mere six per cent of IC practitioners say they don't measure the impact of their communications. Yet at our quarterly Aspic events, people still tell us that they think measurement is important, but don't necessarily give it the priority it deserves. Also that they still make many decisions based on instinct and 'gut feel', rather than measurement.

So, while things are certainly better, we think there is still considerable room for improvement. We haven't quite cracked it yet as an industry.

On the plus side, though, we've definitely noticed a trend away from annual, lengthy surveys to more frequent, shorter pulse surveys, including some that are monthly.

2014

Millennials
"The 'meaning quotient' outlines how companies that create meaning can increase productivity."

Visual comms
"Messages are no longer 'text complemented by an image': the image itself has become the message."

Engagement
"Gallup figures show that 72 per cent of people are essentially 'sleepwalking through their day' because they're not engaged in their work."

2015

Mobile
"Millennials are used to getting constant feedback from their phones, whether that's likes on Facebook or scores from video games. So how will they feel about a PDP process where they sit down with their manager once a year?"

Storytelling
"Stories can help your colleagues to understand where your organisation is going, why, and how it's going to get there, plus what they can do to contribute."

Data-informed decisions
"Creativity has traditionally been informed by instinct, but that's changing – now we're seeing creativity being fundamentally informed by data."

2016

Digital workplace
"There are still sizeable gaps between what technology offers, what more than half the workforce wants and what organisations are doing. Step in the communicator."

User experience
"Getting UX right is a crucial part of developing an interaction-rich experience that will help to make employees' lives easier and bring them back time and time again."

ESNs
"It's easy to get caught up in the technical aspects of building an ESN but your audience should come first."
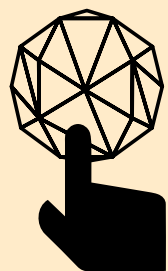
Engagement

"Perhaps the biggest challenge for communicators in 2014 will be working to raise levels of engagement across the board. We see social media as part of the bigger picture."

Back in autumn 2013, when we made our prediction, engagement levels were very low indeed. The CIPD/Halogen Employee Outlook research measured the proportion of engaged employees in the UK at 36 per cent, down from 38 per cent the previous year. However, by autumn 2014 this figure had been restored to the 2012 level.

The CIPD/Halogen research no longer uses a single measure of employee engagement. However, the spring 2017 report was reassuring: "There has been an increase in job satisfaction and an increase in our engagement measures of employee influence over job, use of skills, motivation and effort."
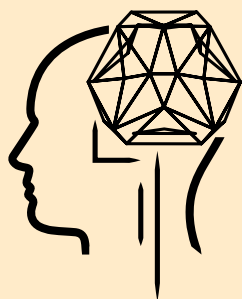
Storytelling

"The organisations that bring together mobile technology with storytelling will be the ones that are successful."

Thanks to advances in neuroscience, internal communicators now have a much better understanding about how and why storytelling is such an effective form of communication.

We know that stories 'light up' our brains and fit the way our minds work. So it's crucial that we use this knowledge to reach our audiences effectively.

As Kunal Dutta of Shell told our Aspic delegates in October 2017: "The backbone of any corporate newsroom is the ability to tell a powerful story: we must produce quality content with a human angle."
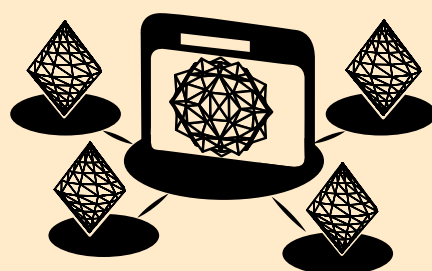
New technologies

"Internal communicators are increasingly creating the communication environment to suit the business culture. We're connecting the organisation, supporting strategy and creating content."

Technology is a core element of the employee experience, along with culture and environment. Things are improving, but with researchers finding that only 13 per cent of employees use their intranet every day (and 31 per cent saying they never use it), there is still work to do.

We've been working with many clients to help them refine their digital employee experience and benefit from established approaches like creating user personas to increase their success when launching a new digital channel. The recommendation we made in the 2016 Trends book still holds good: start with your audience, with content second and technology third.

2017

Neuroscience
"By knowing how our brains receive and react to information they'll make sure their messages are more specific and better understood."
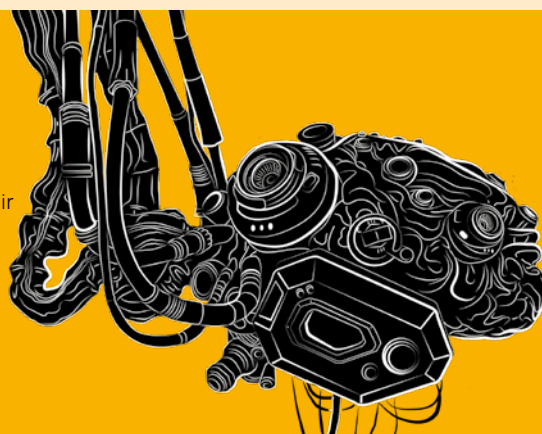
Employee brand
"Employees will decide which stories they want to tell – whether online or at the pub – so make sure you keep them informed and inspired."

Mobile
"This year, if you want to increase the percentage of traffic coming from reading on mobile, you have to make it easy for users to access your site."

6_

FROM FOE TO FRIEND: MAKE THE CLOUD YOUR COMMS HERO

In an increasingly tech-driven age in which companies are being told to embrace digital transformation or face becoming obsolete, **Christina Papathanasiou** looks at how adopting Microsoft Office 365 can help your organisation refresh and improve its internal comms.

Illustration by Denis Avdic

THREE THINGS YOU'LL LEARN IN THIS CHAPTER
- WHY THE SHIFT TO 365 ISN'T JUST ABOUT EMAIL AND SHAREPOINT
- HOW TO FIND THE LINK BETWEEN TECHNOLOGY, STRATEGY AND PEOPLE
- WHAT YOU NEED TO DO NOW TO GET READY FOR YOUR MOVE TO 365

Collaboration is the battle cry for change

Microsoft Office 365 is taking over the workplace. Following a surge in adoption over the last 24 months, there are now more than 85 million users, and that number only continues to grow. So it's safe to assume your organisation will soon be making the move to Microsoft Office 365, if it hasn't already.

While Exchange Online and SharePoint may be the biggest reasons for the uptake of Microsoft Office 365 Cloud services, that's only part of the picture. We're starting to see a trend in companies shifting from email to other tools for achieving better communication, collaboration and connectivity across a diverse range of employees, from office workers, to part-time, to remote.

A Deloitte study titled *The Future of Work* revealed that 76 per cent of executives surveyed predicted a move away from email and towards more sophisticated digital tools. By harnessing the suite of products available from Microsoft, your organisation can dramatically change how work gets done.

But how can you make the most of your investment in Microsoft Office 365 to improve internal communication?

Planning is crucial
Digital transformation isn't just about the technology. It's about finding the link between technology, strategy and people. But problems can occur if you roll out Microsoft Office 365 tools and services without careful planning and support from all departments.

Charles Fenoughty, our Digital Media Director, explains: "Too often we see technical teams roll out 365 and then the Comms team and other stakeholders trying to figure out how it works in line with the business strategy, after the fact.

"The trouble with not planning ahead is that a lot can go wrong – the proliferation of bad behaviour and increased costs for instance."

There is no one-size-fits-all approach when deciding which tools to implement, so it's important to consider how your employees work, company culture and any workplace processes and policies already in place.
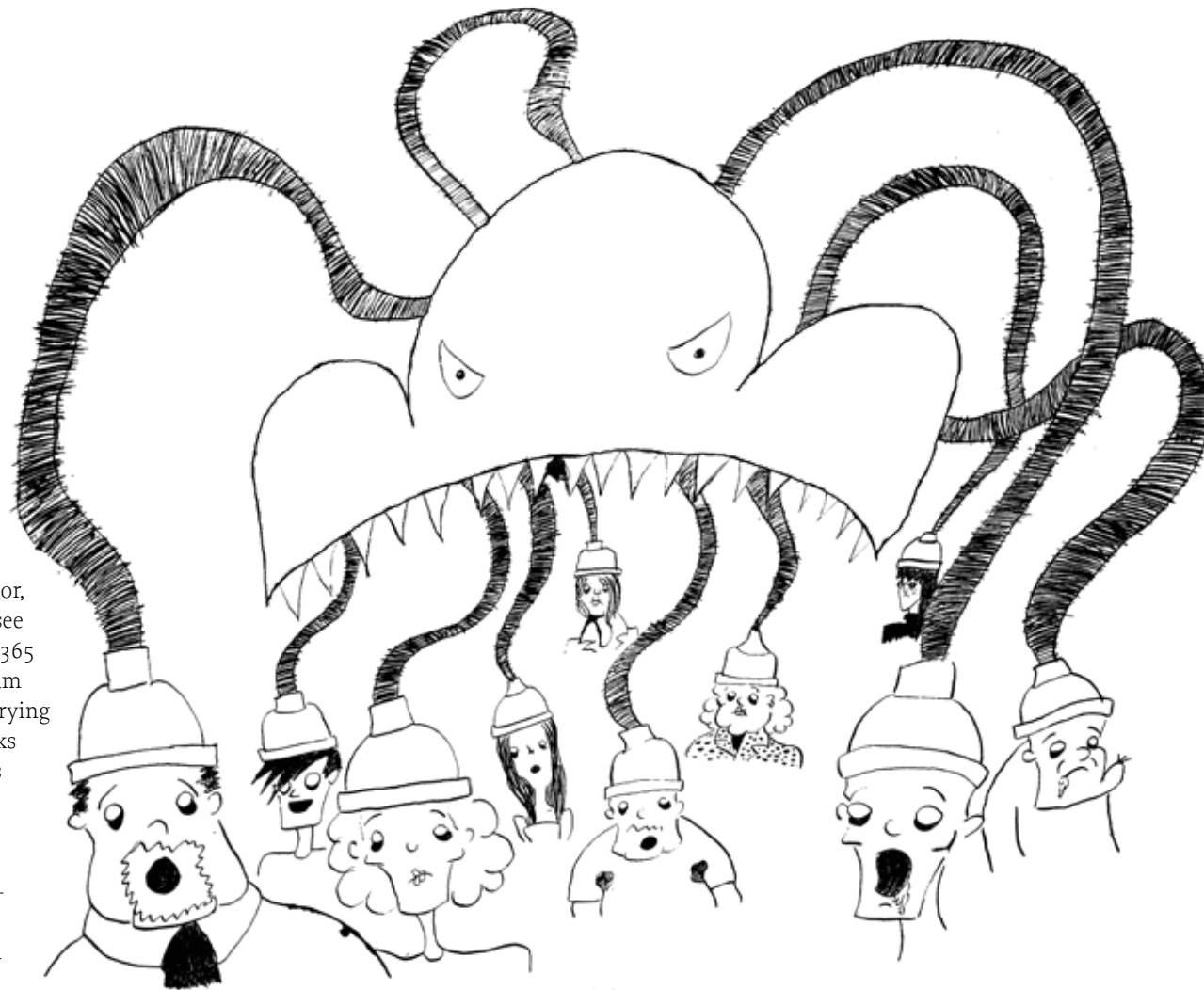
In addition, and perhaps most importantly, you need to establish where Microsoft Office 365 fits into your broader business goals.

Inform and inspire
But planning is only half the battle. Once you've agreed the specific collaboration and communication tools there are still hurdles to overcome – from leaders underestimating the benefits of social tools at work to a widespread mistrust of Cloud services. This is where senior and middle management should be leading by example and setting the tone from the very beginning.

To do this you need to help them understand how the Cloud works and how to use the tools.

Equally important is raising awareness by communicating the benefits of improved communication, collaboration and connectivity to the everyday working lives of employees.

I believe we've reached the point where collaboration tools – apart from email and SharePoint – are profoundly shaping the workplace, and to keep up we need to ensure employee expectations match the new capabilities that are available. By carefully planning and creating harmony between new systems and employees, you are more likely to inspire a greater level of engagement and loyalty.

And when it comes to digital transformation the thing to remember is this: thanks to the rapid pace of change, you're never really finished.

In a nutshell
Microsoft Office 365 pulls together all Microsoft products and acquisitions – from MS Office to Outlook and SharePoint – into a suite that's available via a single log-in in an online Cloud-based environment. There are different subscription prices for different business needs and wants. Here are three of the core collaboration tools available within the suite.

SharePoint Online
Still at the core of business collaboration, using SharePoint Online team sites users can quickly find a familiar home page with a newsfeed, an activity feed, and document libraries. Thanks to a tight collaboration with OneDrive, it provides a place in the Cloud to store, share and sync work files. It also provides the ability to control the permissions (including real-time modifications) of documents and content being shared internally and externally.

Teams
This is a messaging and collaboration app that allows conversations between different groups within a team, known as 'channels'. It works well for smaller groups that need to go back and forth between conversations and quickly access shared files and collaboration tools such as SharePoint or OneNote. It can be used as an alternative to email because it combines the power of instant messaging with the reliability of emails.

Yammer
Users can discuss projects, share their latest files, gather feedback and share announcements to keep each and every member up to date. It provides the opportunity for employees within a large organisation to get to know each other – making a large company feel smaller.

In last year's Trends book, we said it was time to stop the excuses and actually *do* some of the measurement communicators always *talk* about. But what happened next? **Becky Leonard** makes a continuing case for research… and explains how spending more time using the analytical left side of our brain can have a big impact on our comms success. *Illustration by Dean Smith*

DON'T GET LEFT BEHIND WITH MEASUREMENT

Know your left from your right

" MEASUREMENT AND ANALYSIS ARE AS IMPORTANT TO COMMUNICATION AS MESSAGING AND CREATIVITY. BUT JUST COLLECTING DATA ISN'T ENOUGH. WE NEED TO REMEMBER MEASUREMENT'S PARTNER IN CRIME: EVALUATION."

I don't know about you but I thought I'd kissed goodbye to figures, sums and anything vaguely numerical when I dumped maths as I chose my A-Level subjects. Instead I said hello to the world of English, then writing, and eventually communication. It seemed the left side of my brain could switch off, while my right kicked into gear.

Nowadays, I realise that was foolish. Measurement and analysis are as important to communication as messaging and creativity.

But just collecting data isn't enough. We need to remember measurement's partner in crime: evaluation. It's not enough to note down that this month's newsletter got 42 more views than last month. We need to ask why: what was different this time and how can we repeat or better it next time?

Measurement guru Susan Walker put it perfectly when she rebuffed a colleague who thought the rows of survey results in front of her looked deathly dull. "Not at all," she replied. "This is the story of our company."

Desperately seeking stories
Looking for the meaning in measurement can be tricky. Particularly when most internal communicators (myself included) tend to rely on the more creative right side of our brains than the more analytical left side. Many of us would rather have a nice plate of blog than a slice of spreadsheet.

One way to get around this skills shortage is to call in the experts; professionals who can impartially help you run your measurement channels and identify trends from the data they spit out.

Whether you're doing the analysis yourself or asking a partner like Sequel to share their keen eye, the type of data you receive from your measurement has a large impact on how you evaluate it.

For example, say you're using PoliteMail to monitor engagement with a weekly emailer. The data shows you that 70 per cent of employees are opening the emailer, mainly between noon and 2pm, and nearly all on their mobiles.

What story does this tell? It suggests a workforce that chooses to use mobile, catches up with internal news in their lunch break, and on the whole is interested enough to open the emailer each week (so well done you).

But what can't you tell? You don't know what's appealing to the 70 per cent who are opening the emailer and, more importantly, what's turning off the 30 per cent who aren't. You don't know whether people actually prefer to use their phones, or if they're forced to because their computers are so slow.

And you don't know if they're connecting with the information they're reading. Repeat viewings do suggest a positive experience but, as Chris Tubb from the Digital Workplace Group says, a view "is not an idea understood, a behaviour changed or a user engaged."

Are your methods madness?
Now that we've really got on board with measurement, we need to make sure we're using the right methods to help us evaluate the impact and benefit of our communications.

The Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) lists channels, content, conversations, voice, sentiment, behaviour and return on investment (ROI) under 'what to measure' on its channel matrix.

Internal communicators cover the first two through tried and tested methods, like engagement surveys, intranet analytics and event feedback. Gatehouse's State of the Sector 2017 reports they're still the most frequently used methods, by 76 per cent, 68 per cent and 66 per cent respectively.

So how do we go beyond measuring channel activity and get to evaluating the impact on behaviours and culture? First things first, we need to try some new methods, following in the footsteps of organisations like Intel.

After sending an annual survey to its 106,000 employees, Intel's team found that it had 50,000 responses to sift through. The senior vice president and director of human resources said they were at "a point where we have a hell of a lot of data and not necessarily that much knowledge."

So Intel started working with perception software from Kanjoya Inc., which runs language-processing and algorithms on employees' answers to deduce their real feelings.

However, you don't have to bring the robots in just yet. You could also try some simpler methods, which slot neatly into your usual routine. CIPR suggests measuring sentiment and behaviour through content analysis (such as comments on blogs) or by organising pilot groups for certain programmes.

This isn't to say channel analytics don't have an important role to play. Of course they do, but without delving deeper into the 'why' behind them by analysing your company's culture and employees' behaviour, you're only getting half the story.

Telling tales
When it comes to using measurement to paint a full picture of your organisation, sometimes it can seem like we don't have enough paint brushes or indeed hands to get the job done. That's where a little innocent plagiarism comes in.

Borrow personnel information from HR, customer insight from Marketing, ROI figures from Finance and sales totals from, well, Sales. At Harrods, they map sales and service data to employee engagement levels to show the wider impact of their communications.

Like most businesses, your organisation is bound to be a treasure trove of statistics and reports that you can borrow from to support your own measurement story. Moreover, linking in with other departments will add credibility to your reports. Because let's not forget that, as well as helping us to make sure our communications are hitting the right mark, measurement also helps us demonstrate our worth to key business stakeholders – particularly those who may be suffering from a case of the 'Cosmos' (if this passed you by, *Cosmo* magazine published an (arguably tongue-in-cheek) article about how internal communicators mainly organise birthday cakes while claiming to be 'busybusyverybusy').

Just as we align our goals with business strategy, we should do the same when evaluating our communications. And by adding in these considerations, we'll be translating internal communication into a language our more left-brained colleagues can understand.

After all, as data consultant Stephen Few says: "Numbers have an important story to tell. They rely on you to give them a clear and convincing voice."

TIME TO CHAT

When you're asking Google to help you
find information, do you type or talk?
Paul Jones speaks truth to power and
finds out whether virtual assistant-style
tools can help your communications sing.

Illustration by Elsa Frere

Finding your voice

Did you hear that charming story about the nan in Manchester who was using 'please' and 'thank you' in her Google searches? Yes: she thought there was someone at Google headquarters searching for information on her behalf, so being polite would put her nearer the top of the queue.

While this was an extreme example, researchers *are* finding differences in the way that people search for information online.

An article in the *Wall Street Journal* explained how, instead of typing searches, a wave of newcomers is using voice activation to connect with relevant content. The piece explained that the tech industry is calling this group 'the next billion'.

Verto Analytics tracks 'virtual assistant' usage on mobile devices: its latest figures (from last summer) show that Apple's Siri remains the most popular tool of its kind; but use of Amazon Alexa has been skyrocketing – jumping 325 per cent in monthly active users. Microsoft's Cortana saw an increase as well.

These results were published before Apple a) made significant improvements to Siri last autumn (building in AI to help the tool predict what you want and when); and b) launched the Apple HomePod, which will compete with Amazon's Echo and Google's Home.

Clearly, we're heading towards a scenario where users can have complex two-way spoken conversations with their virtual assistants. To hasten the journey, Amazon is running a £2 million Alexa contest for university teams. The challenge is to build a social bot that can chat "coherently and engagingly" with humans for 20 minutes. The winners were due to be announced as we went to press.

But while this is an area to keep an eye on, I think it will be some time until companies have their own Siri-style voice-activated intranet assistant. And I'm OK with that: I remember the time, a few years ago, when I was on holiday in the US and trying to book cinema tickets through a voice-activated system. Try as I might, I couldn't get the useless thing to recognise my request for tickets on "Saturday", no matter how I tried. My English accent was proving too much for it to handle. So I re-thought my approach, went all in, and said "Saturday" in the most over-the-top American accent I could come up with... and BOOM... it worked first time.

Can you imagine the chaos within your organisation as dozens of your colleagues try in vain to use voice activation to book a meeting room, claim expenses or pull up a news story? Best to let the voice-activated technology develop for a few years first, I think – or we'll end up with W1A-style Syncopatico systems everywhere.

Future chat

But let's not throw the baby out with the bath water. The principles of the 'virtual assistant' are at the heart of every text-based chatbot – and this most certainly *is* an area of interest for communicators.

As we reported in last year's Trends book, there are now more users of the top four chat apps than the top four social networks. Chat apps also have higher retention and usage rates than most mobile apps.

This is partly why more and more companies are using this technology to communicate with customers and employees: we've just built our first intranet chatbot for a client, and we expect to see more across the industry as the tools become more complex.

Here's one example of how chatbots are changing communication: Leeds Beckett University has launched one to help prospective students find the right course.

The university's Dougal Scaife told *BBC News*: "We know that our prospective students already use lots of messaging software for communicating with their friends, such as Snapchat, WhatsApp, as well as texting, so developing a chatbot was a natural evolution."

In another example, a piece in the *New York Times* described how a fan of Maroon 5 had enjoyed a conversation with the band's chatbot. The fan said afterwards: "Having Maroon 5 on Messenger makes you feel really close to your favourite artists."

The article went on to describe how chatbots can be harnessed to send news updates, push promotional content and even test new material. "50 Cent, Aerosmith, Snoop Dogg and Kiss have all deputised chatbots as their automatic, ever-alert greeters on Facebook Messenger, handling the flood of inquiries that would overwhelm any human."

Christina Milan, a singer and actress, helped to found Persona Technologies, a tech company that has built bots for musicians, actors, reality TV personalities and even movie characters. "I feel like it's personal," she said.

"When I'm communicating with my bot, sometimes I see something and I'm like 'Oh, that's so me!'"

Bot's next for IC?

From an employee comms perspective, there are many potential uses for this type of technology, including:

- *Providing induction information to new starters*
- *Linking to the intranet, to provide easy access to key information*
- *Sharing emergency messages*
- *Providing targeted news snippets*
- *Connecting to HR systems so employees can check their holiday allowance or query the status of an expense claim (in fact OCBC Bank has an HR chatbot for exactly this type of purpose).*

One of the big pluses of chatbots is that they provide two-way communication: you can send out messages to your employees, but people can also request information from the bot.

Imagine being able to send out three news headlines, with employees being able to text back for more details on the stories they're really interested in. Or a colleague being able to ask 'What's happening in the Leeds office this week?'

Another plus is the high open rate for text messages. Think about that pang you get when you hear or feel your smartphone announce a new message. Ignoring it is just too painful sometimes. In fact, research has shown that text messages have a 98 per cent open rate, compared to 20 per cent for email. Never mind talking about them: these are figures worth shouting about...

BRICK
BY SEQUEL

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BUILDING | REAL
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KNOWLEDGE

About our illustrators

In this year's Trends book we've taken a different approach to the visuals. This time, each chapter features graphics from a different illustrator. Our own Anastasia Sichkarenko created the striking illustrations for chapter 5; while the other sections feature the work of newly qualified graduates from around the country.

Chapter 1: Dan Howden
Dan Howden is an artist / printmaker based in York.
dan-howden.co.uk

Chapter 2: Joshua Harrison
London-based visual artist Joshua Harrison works primarily through collage. He has a particular interest in historical appropriation of image, informed by Dada photomontage and Situationist writing.
jharrisonillustration.com

Chapter 3: Jamie McDougall
Manchester-based illustrator and graphic designer Jamie McDougall uses a combination of minimal colour palettes and bold outlines to create simple but effective images.
*jamiemuck.com   Instagram: @jamie.muck*

Chapter 4: Jacob Phillips
Jacob Phillips is a freelance illustrator working in Manchester whose illustrations are created through a combination of traditional and digital techniques.
behance.net/jacobphillips
instagram.com/jacobphillipsillustration

Chapter 5: Anastasia Sichkarenko
London-based illustrator Anastasia Sichkarenko loves all things weird and unusual. She works in a lot of different styles but likes line drawings best.
anastasiasichkarenko.crevado.com
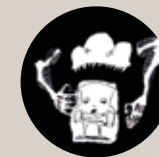
Chapter 6: Denis Avdic
Born in Bosnia, Denis moved to the UK at three months old. He has had a keen interest in art and drawing since he was a child, and has practised this medium throughout his life.
denisavdic1992.wixsite.com/denisavdic

Chapter 7: Dean Smith
Dean Smith is an illustrator based in Stoke-on-Trent. Dean manipulates paper in a playful and inventive manner to create engaging and exciting artworks.
deansmithillustration.com

Chapter 8: Elsa Frere
Elsa Rose Frere is an illustrator based in Bristol. Her playful illustrations are hand painted in gouache paint and then worked over with coloured pencil to create texture and detail.
elsarosefrere.com

Creative lead: Phil Steed, Sequel Group