

Hertfordshire County Council, Adult and Children's Social Care Workforce
Development Team (ACSWD)

We hired a digital apprentice, learned new internet skills and joined Twitter

This county council's workforce development team highlight how social media makes a huge difference to their communications - now more than ever they are 'talking' not 'telling'. The council is in daily conversation, listening to all the people in the children's and adults' workforce, people who need care and support and carers. And their learners are talking to each other through social media on e-learning programmes.

Background

In Hertfordshire's Adult and Children's Workforce Development Team (ACSWD), they aim to meet the learning and development needs of 25,000 staff in the local authority, and in the private, voluntary and independent sector (PVI).

The main challenges include a lack of consistent communications across all these complex organisations, lack of skills in using new technologies, and a lack of funding. They are constantly under pressure to deliver more for less money - and that means relying solely on traditional workforce development methods is no longer sustainable. In 2008, the council began looking to develop a blended approach where face-to-face learning would be enhanced by

e-learning on the internet.

An e-learning website (called a Dynamic Learning Environment) is now used by more than 20,000 people from council staff, PVI care providers, care workers and people who need care and support, as well as people in the children's workforce, the police, and the health service. Their e-learning programmes are very successful with, for example, doctors and dentists able to complete a basic safeguarding course online, in their own time and at their own pace.

However, the council realised they were not using all the tools available to their learners on the website. These included 'wikis' - or web pages where everyone can add, edit or delete content in collaboration with everyone else (the most famous one is Wikipedia); blogs where people could share their stories, real time discussion forums, and podcasts, which are a series of audio or video files available to download, and web conferencing programmes called webinars.

The council wanted to make the most of the new technology available to them and their learners. More and more social care staff are online, especially with the introduction of assistive technology in the work place. They wanted to help everyone improve their digital skills and enjoy the benefits of the internet. They wanted to introduce QR codes, which can be scanned by mobile phones to link websites. We saw there could be opportunities in using social media like Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook.

“ Our Twitter page has grown and recently celebrated over 160 followers. We are now working with our communications team and customer services to support staff with ‘introduction to social media’ sessions across the council. Twitter is now a valuable communications tool within workforce development. ”

Tara Webber – E-learning & Technology Learning Development Officer

What we wanted to achieve

The team decided to recruit a digital media apprentice to help increase familiarity with, and use of the new information and communication technology.

They wanted to improve the workforce’s access to e-learning and improve their skills, ability and confidence in using the new technologies, with the ultimate aim of improving the quality of life of people who need their care and support.

The council also intended to raise its profile, and communicate with more people in a cost-effective way. They planned to develop and implement a digital media strategy which would help them share information with partners and expand networks, particularly in relation to the health and wellbeing strategy.

They wanted to launch a successful Twitter page which would become a link for press releases, for example, publicising guidance on falls prevention for homecare services.

Overall the council wanted to produce and implement innovative ideas for improving and expanding e-learning and digital communications.

What we did

First the council planned the main areas of responsibility for the new post of Digital Media Apprentice. The job description included supporting new approaches to learning, contributing to improving people’s technology skills, building online resources, reviewing and updating the contents of the existing e-learning website, creating e-newsletters, and implementing digital marketing strategies including creating and maintaining a Twitter account.

They next wrote a plan of work which set out clear objectives, success criteria and dates for completion, and linked it to the digital inclusion strategy and action plan for the council as a whole. They also engaged with a local training provider which was already running a successful digital apprenticeship programme with the Digital Youth Academy.

The role was advertised and this brought a great response. The successful candidate really impressed the council with his initiative – including bringing to the interview a website he had created.

Following this, the council wrote a digital media strategy and action plan which included the naming, personalisation and launch of a Twitter account, how to maintain their Twitter presence, use of hashtags, identifying appropriate ‘others’ to follow and to promote their content through retweets, and what we would tweet including:

- Daily training events
- What people in the team are going to do, doing, and what they did
- Workforce events, conferences, workshops
- Appropriate observations
- Facts
- Retweet appropriate news
- Retweet our partners

The plan included responding within a reasonable timeframe Monday to Friday. They kept all staff involved, with opportunities to interact daily with the site – keeping up the conversation with followers.

The council also added a Twitter address to all our learning and development staff’s email signatures

and wrote a Twitter guide for social care staff who are new to social media.

This was followed by starting using the social network service Storify within the account. Storify allows you to easily create narratives, importing content from across the web and reordering it into a timeline. The council used Storify to collect and display all the tweets and photos of a conference, and allow people to comment on them.

Finally, the council put together a business case for a digital assistant role to be sustained once the 12-month apprenticeship finished.

What we achieved

As of summer 2014, the council had attracted more than 160 Twitter followers and the number continues to increase daily.

They have simultaneously reduced the costs of communications and reached a wider audience. Previously the team communicated through a monthly newsletter but now shares news and photos daily.

Social media enabled them to cheaply market and advertise training, and get instant feedback from delegates.

The apprentice assisted in the creation of forums, QR codes and web development. The council also introduced a Consultant Social Worker Forum, and an Assessed and Supported Year in Employment Forum – Children and Adults' Services, and the East Hertfordshire Social Work Peer Group Forum. Each forum enables members to post live comments, share resources, and access useful information. They created QR codes which will be published on all their calendars, and link straight to their e-learning website.

The council are now looking to build on this work by expanding its e-learning website, the Dynamic Learning Environment, to include apps for smart phones. The app will send learners bite-size tasks from the website to their smartphone. This is part of the blended approach – after a learner completes an e-learning course, or attends a workshop, they can receive ongoing performance support.

The Council are also planning to introduce Open Badges to their website. This will mean they can create, issue, and verify digital badges as recognition of learners' achievement.

What we learnt

Hertfordshire Council Council learned it is crucial to get everyone involved in updating and developing e-learning, including gathering ideas, and testing out new bits of functionality, e.g. demonstrating how to scan and use a QR code. This makes prospective users feel part of what's happening, and that the new technology belongs to them. This generates enthusiasm and ultimately increases uptake.

With the Twitter account it's important to be clear on the aims, and the topics on which you'll be tweeting. This makes it easier to choose a name. The team made tweeting part of designated people's role, and produced guides and toolkits to support them.

The council used YouTube guides to learn about using social media language appropriately, and how to tweet in 140 characters in plain English. With Twitter, it's key to have something to say, and regularly, and planning can help with this.

“ I helped create the site alongside Tara, choosing our name and pictures. We believe that our Twitter page is going to be hugely successful in helping communication in our team, the local authority and external organisations. So far the page has had a good take up from colleagues in the team who are continuing to promote our page and services. ”

Jamie Woolf – Social Digital Apprentice

For more information please contact

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Skills for Care Recommends

From digital literacy strategies, to e-learning opportunities to the wider benefits of assisted living technologies, Skills for Care produces various resources showing how technology is enhancing adult social care.

Digital Literacy

This website section includes highlights the benefits of digital literacy, as well as providing more information about digital working strategies and related research.

www.skillsforcare.org.uk/digitalworking

Learning Technologies

Skills for Care has developed guides about learning technologies in social care for employers and learners. We also have a range of case studies which show learning technologies in action.

www.skillsforcare.org.uk/learningtechnologies

Assisted Living Technologies

This is increasingly being offered to people who need care and support to maintain independence and promote quality for both themselves and their families. We provide information about such resources.

www.skillsforcare.org.uk/alt

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