

## Background

Pindar Set processes all the adverts and pages that make up Yellow Pages and Business Pages in the UK and Yellow Book directories in the USA. In the UK it employs over 400 people at 5 sites.

In April 2005 Pindar established a Communication Forum for its employees to facilitate information and consultation within the business across the 5 UK sites. The original idea came out of an internal communication plan prompted by feedback from employees that demonstrated the company was not doing enough to inform and consult them.

In setting up the Communication Forum Pindar followed the outline of the Information and Consultation Regulations. The company formally recognises the trade union Amicus for the purpose of pay bargaining, and took on board comments they made on the proposed arrangements. At the same time, a lot of information was given to employees about what was proposed in order to raise awareness and generate interest.

## Information & Consultation practices

The Forum comprises 10 delegates from 8 constituencies which are both site- and function-based. All delegates are nominated and elected, and there were no fewer than 50 nominations in total. The impressive level of interest was due in large measure to a high profile publicity campaign announcing the setting up of the Forum, seeking nominations and then publicising the results. Representatives are elected for a two-year period, and choose one of their number to act as a spokesperson.

Meetings were originally scheduled for twice a year, but there proved too much material to cover, so they are now held quarterly. They have also moved to holding three of the four meetings by video-conference in order to save time and money. They are chaired by the UK General Manager supported by the HR Director, with other managers attending on an ad hoc basis who have suitable expertise and responsibility for the subjects to be discussed.

The aim is to keep to bigger business issues that are meaningful to employees, and not just local "hygiene" matters. Subjects covered include the company's economic and financial situation; the development of its business and activities; company policies applicable to the workforce;

substantial proposals or developments regarding the company's pension scheme; equal opportunities; company rules and values regarding business culture and behaviour; training, development and the performance appraisal process; initiatives to support staff welfare, such as occupational health and employee assistance programmes; corporate responsibility; and substantial changes to the organisation or to contractual relations.

The agreement establishing the Forum draws a clear distinction between its role and the role of trade unions in collective bargaining. It makes clear that the Forum will not be involved in considering pay and benefits and terms and conditions of employment, and that it does not replace, but operates in addition to, any information and consultation with trade unions.

The chairman will circulate a proposed agenda for the Forum meeting at least two weeks in advance, and Delegates can then request the addition of any other topic within the competency of the Forum. There is provision for a pre-meeting of Delegates chaired by their spokesperson to enable them to study any information supplied by management, formulate an opinion or otherwise prepare for consultation. Special meetings of the Forum may be called by the company as and when developments require them, or at the request of at least half the Delegates.

Project Teams made up of Forum members may be appointed to consider particular issues within scope of the Forum, for example, where only some constituencies are affected by a particular issue, or to act as a focus group for an issue or proposal that needs more detailed consideration.

After each meeting minutes are drawn up and agreed with the Delegates and a PowerPoint presentation produced by the HR team for Delegates to brief their constituents. There is a dedicated Forum site on the company Intranet accessible by all staff. Maintaining visibility and interest in the Forum among employees remains a challenge though and something the company does not feel it has cracked yet. Following a first year review, Pindar will begin producing a regular Company newsletter, which will include publicising meetings in advance, and looking to improve the post-meeting presentations for delegates to use. The Delegates themselves are very positive about the Forum and keen to see it continue and develop.

### Business benefits

Pindar believes that the Communication Forum has helped get its people more involved in the business, and has also encouraged managers to think about issues they should be communicating at Forum meetings. In the past they have been used to holding local team meetings only, so the new

Forum has been of benefit by helping managers gain a broader understanding of what is going on in the business and the issues and concerns that employees have. It has also helped fill a void by creating a structure in which senior management and employees can look at issues together. The company attributes the success of the Forum to the upfront planning and publicity campaign at the initial launch, the training provided to delegates, and critically, the support of senior management. The decision to move to quarterly meetings was important in helping to keep information fresh and relevant, and has also contributed to the Forum's success.