UCB Podcast Transcript, Part 2

Robin Neidorf:

Welcome to the Springer Nature podcast, Reaching Senior Decision Makers: New Approaches to Communication, the second of two parts exploring the topic of how information professionals can connect with, and influence, senior decision-makers.

We continue our conversation with Andrew Clark and Barbara Reissland of UCB, a global biopharma company based in Belgium. UCB's primary focus is on neurology and immunology disorders. Andrew manages the scientific information and intelligence team and has led its transformation into the data and digital world. Barbara is an information scientist, supporting the team as an expert in licensing, information discovery, and project management.

I'm Robin Neidorf, the director of research for Jinfo Limited. We're a global analyst firm focused on the business information industry, and we are proud to be the research partner to Springer Nature for this podcast series.

Robin Neidorf:

Barbara takes the lead for the information team on communicating with stakeholders around their digital and data capabilities. We asked her about that process.

Robin Neidorf:

Is there anything that you've learned about communicating with and supporting decision makers that you feel is substantively different from working with more of the end-user population?

Barbara Reissland:

A few years back, our main tool of communication was we sent out a newsletter, which was already something innovative because, as the team, you just didn't send out a newsletter, we did it. Now, what we do is we just send out Yammer posts, which is definitely a very much focused type of communication. You need to be a lot more focused and a lot more specific to actually show you're an expert in what you're trying to achieve with the end user.

We've all had to build our own skills and our own knowledge to not feel intimidated by the researchers. I'm not a scientist, so I tend to be very easily intimidated by researchers if they come across with chemicals formulations, whatever. This really has also helped me to improve my communication, my own skills, because I had to learn, myself, a lot.

Robin Neidorf:

What other forms of communication specifically with the decision-maker level, do you find to be effective that maybe you're experimenting with, or that you've found that aren't as effective?

Barbara Reissland:

We tried a few executive briefings, which proved successful at the time when we sent them out, but because they were really just one-offs, they just tend to be forgotten. You'd have to do it more regularly to use this as a real form of showing your expertise.

Robin Neidorf:

What advice would you give to other information teams who are thinking about or really trying to make an effort to communicate and to work more directly with decision makers, but perhaps it's taking longer than they want or they're not getting the results they're looking for?

Barbara Reissland:

Start experimenting, testing, working maybe with one user group and see what works best with them, probably also look at professional communication tools. We do have a newsletter tool now in place, which enables us to check which parts of the newsletter have been clicked on most so that we can adapt our communication. It also allows us to work with two different headlines, just to decide which one works better with a special community.

This is really just a very experimental approach, but I think it's not something that an information scientist would usually do, from my knowledge and experience.

Robin Neidorf:

In addition to Barbara's perspective, Andrew brings in a view from department leadership, the bigger picture of what information teams can be called upon to do for their organizations, serving a role that no one else can serve.

Andrew Clark:

From my perspective, it's continuing to retain an awareness of what's happening within this digital space, because that's obviously a big priority for the organization right now. We want to continue to do some of the external scouting about how the STM world around us is evolving so that we can kind of start to position ourselves for continued evolution and things like this.

But I think it's also to try to really elevate some of those more machine learning-driven approaches in the context of the organization. We obviously found ourselves within a data science organization, at the time it was actually quite a daunting thing for us. We have an information science team that hasn't historically been associated as being data scientists and things. Suddenly, you're in part of this new world of really highly regarded and well-educated domain experts in the data field. We spent a long time trying to find our value position within this world of data and digital whipping.

We were able to really just step back to some of our core competencies and just look at them through a slightly different lens that really elevated us significantly having the conversation today and saying that our priorities will now be around the application of machine learning and AI-driven tools to further information services is, at least for me, something quite transformational, because I wouldn't have expected to have been saying that as being a core focus area two years ago.

We're just open to exploring new opportunities, whether it's with ourselves, with external players in the market, or whether it's just partnering up with other cross-functional teams internally and coming to the table and just saying, "Look, guys, this is what we can offer you. We're not sure if it's really going to be relevant, but hey, if you want to, we'll come and we'll come play on your project with you." We've had so many of those types of conversations just since the start of this year, it's been really, really exciting. Some people come back really excited and say, "Hey, can we pull you in and can we just see how we can take some simple journal feeds and plug it into this algorithm that we're exploring for some kind of business development opportunity or something," which is a nice win for us.

Robin Neidorf:

Barbara and Andrew, thank you. That was Barbara Reissland and Andrew Clark of UCB speaking about the transformation of the information center to a core asset in UCB's digital transformation process and how they communicated with stakeholders along the way.

Listeners, thanks for joining us for Springer Nature's podcast on key topics in information strategy and management. Learn more about this project by visiting Springer Nature's resources for information professionals.