

# Using Yammer to engage Gatwick Airport staff during the London 2012 Olympic Games

Caroline Thorpe shares her experience on using internal social media to inspire staff and create energy around the Olympic Games.

## How did you start using Yammer?

As the UK's second busiest airport, Gatwick was responsible for welcoming thousands of passengers during the Olympic Games. The eyes of the world were on us and we had to deliver an excellent level of service, at what was already our busiest time of the year. Our CEO wanted all employees to be informed and involved in the preparations. In order to maintain a sense of celebration, recognition

and community spirit, we decided to give Yammer a big role within our channel mix.

The main reason for using Yammer was to empower all of our employees to share their own stories of the Olympic Games. It was also an opportunity for the project teams to share regular updates and to answer the questions asked by our employees in a more efficient and timely manner.

I only really started using Yammer in November 2011. At that time, 600 people had already signed up without us doing any promotion at all. We started using it as part of our channel mix and promoting it

actively. For example, we ran stories on our intranet or in our employee magazine and encouraged people to ask a question about it or to comment on it on Yammer.

So we never launched it officially – I know some companies do. We simply positioned it as a place where people could have their own voice and tell us what they thought as opposed to just being recipients of information. We asked staff volunteers to share their experience of preparing for the Olympics and Paralympics to inspire others and to create excitement around the Games. It started growing slowly from there; then the Olympics was a big turning point.

### **What are the main benefits?**

One of the main drivers for using Yammer during this critical time was the ability to share photos. This was obviously a highly 'visual' event and our frontline staff could share photos and videos of the teams arriving – quicker than we could ever get an official photographer out there! For most users, being able to 'like' a picture without having to think of a clever comment made it much easier to join the conversation.

We had people from across the organisation – including our CEO, Operations Director, 24/7 security staff, engineers and terminal staff – using it, over 1,000 comments posted and 650 photos uploaded. There was no way that we could have reported as much through our traditional channels. There were so many teams arriving, so many stories to share... We could never have kept up with

it. The front line employees were doing it themselves, and they were doing a much better job! It was also more credible because it was coming from the people who were really involved in the Olympics. So for us, it was obviously an incredibly efficient way of sourcing relevant news stories that we could then share in our weekly update and on our intranet.

There are many other benefits to using Yammer. Most of our employees are not sitting at a desk and can be difficult to reach through traditional electronic channels. But they can use their personal mobiles to log into Yammer and stay connected to the business. As an IC manager, it also provides valuable insights into what your audiences are interested in or concerned about. You can't be everywhere, especially when you're a small team, and using Yammer really helps you stay on top of things.

It's also a brilliant way to encourage innovation and collect feedback. One of our engineers recently posted a comment suggesting giving a free ID pass to all the charities working with the airport. Before I could even think of who I would forward this comment to, someone from the Finance department replied saying it was a good idea and they'd look into it. A couple of days later, the team announced they were going to implement this.

Another example was when our COO came to me one day and told me he needed to present a business case for opening a staff restaurant in the North Terminal. He asked me whether we could run a poll on Yammer to see how many people would use it. Not only did we collect many positive votes, but comments also gave us feedback on what they'd want from it – regarding the opening hours or the fact that it should have hot food.

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#### **How does it affect your role?**

With Yammer, your role changes slightly. You need to be comfortable with the fact that you won't be in control of all the stories or won't be the unique 'voice' of the organisation as is the case with traditional channels. It is your role to keep the conversation alive and to help grow its popularity among people who may not 'get it' at first. One thing I like to do is give people a little bit more if they visit Yammer – for example, we might share two great photos on the intranet, and tell people there are ten more on Yammer. This way you give people a reason to head over to Yammer.

Keep in mind that Yammer is also only one element of your channel mix. You will always need to use your other channels as they each have their own clear purpose. Plus I don't think you'll ever convince everyone to be on Yammer. And that's fine.

#### **What tips would you give to someone getting started with Yammer?**

Take the time to explain the value of using social media to your main stakeholders. Start identifying two or three topics that people want to hear about the most and go talk to the teams who can help you start an interesting conversation. Make sure that the relevant parts of the business are onboard, trained properly, and know how to make the best use of the platform. Allow some time for it to catch on: unless you're a tech savvy business where everyone is online all the time, it will take time for people to really see the benefits. So give it a good year and develop a clear plan.

You also need to recognise that not everyone is fond of social media. Don't force people into it, and address their concerns. For example, some people may be suspicious of these sorts of social media channels because there's a risk that the

wrong information will be shared on there. I think it's important to remember that the wrong information is shared every day in businesses through word of mouth: but at least with an open forum like Yammer, you have the chance to rectify things and direct people to a reliable source of information.

**What are your plans over the coming months?**  
After the Olympic Games, we are still using Yammer. We are still encouraging people

to post pictures of new shops opening or new airport buildings going up, to ask questions and to provide feedback. It remains a great way of recognising and praising individuals for their efforts. One thing I'd like to explore – and something we are starting to look into – is to open this up to our 'extended community', that is, everyone working at Gatwick but not directly employed by us, such as airline staff and partners. ■

## Biography \ Caroline Thorpe

After starting her career in a PR agency, Caroline Thorpe moved in-house working in media relations and external communications roles in Government and the public sector. Internal communications caught her eye a few years back, and she is now a Communication Manager at Gatwick Airport. Gatwick won the 'Best internal social media programme' prize at the #insidestory Awards from CIPR Inside ([www.ciprinside.co.uk](http://www.ciprinside.co.uk)).

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