smartsheet

CRAIN

> " Smartsheet has helped us elevate our thinking throughout Crain as a whole, surrounding our processes and outcomes, and how we can work more effectively.

Kristine Francois, Associate Director of Business Projects and Process Improvement Initiatives, Crain Communications

Company
Crain Communications Inc

Industry
Entertainment

Company Size
Medium (50-999 employees)

Company Profile
Founded in 1916, Crain Communications is a privately held media company that produces trusted and relevant news and information to over 6 million decision makers and consumers in over 24 industry-focused publications.

Website
crain.com

Business Situation
Crain is unifying its process and project management across its 24 brands. The team handling business project and process improvement initiatives is tasked with building scalable and repeatable workflows, and shifting conversations and information gathering from email to a centralized work execution platform.

Solution
The team adopted Smartsheet, Control Center, and Dynamic View, and uses automated workflows to improve the flow of communications and collaboration, clarity around decision-making, and visibility for both internal stakeholders and third-party vendors.

Benefits
- Increased collaboration across business and functional units through automation reduced the time it takes to gather information, resulting in faster decision-making, reducing time to market and duplicative work.
- Improved campaign lifecycle planning and measurement from deployment through to completion using sheets, formulas, and automation.
- Streamlined visibility and handoff of communications between corporate teams, brands and third-party vendors.

Crain Unites Corporate Processes With Smartsheet Automation

Crain Communications owns many publications that deliver industry-focused news to over 6 million business leaders worldwide. As managing collaboration and workflows became more of a challenge, Crain's core business teams needed to unify 24 differentiated brands under their mission charter: One Crain. The team tasked with business process improvement initiatives works to build scalable and repeatable workflows, and shift conversations and information gathering from email to a centralized work execution platform.

Situation:

Crain's business projects and process improvement team was tasked with evolving existing workflows and scaling new processes across the entire organization. The reform effort requires a work execution platform with automated workflows to empower disparate departments and third-party vendors. In addition, they needed to gather feedback from stakeholders working on different brands, accustomed to operational silos.

"There was really no standardization in managing projects," says Kristine Francois, associate director of business projects and process improvement initiatives at Crain. "We are trying to implement processes that build upon how our individual publications operate while keeping the 'One Crain' company vision in mind."

"In the past year, it has become our goal to focus at begin-to-end processes and associated workflows, in order to really drive process improvements in a more holistic way," Francois stated. To facilitate this strategy, she turned to Smartsheet for its built-in automation to help streamline processes and standardize the company's workflows.

Solution:

With Smartsheet, Control Center, and Dynamic View, the team uses automated workflows to improve communications, efficiency, clarity around decision-making, and visibility for both internal stakeholders and third-party vendors.

As more Crain employees onboard, the process improvement team believes the Smartsheet platform will hasten project handoffs and reduce

the organization's reliance on email, resulting in more targeted, as needed communications and time savings.

Quicker Communications via Automation: "Before, the communications process email campaigns sent on behalf of third-party brands could take a week to deploy," says Sean McDuffie, project manager and business solutions architect. "Now, the information is captured in a Smartsheet form, streamlining the intake process cutting the time in half."

The team also utilizes Smartsheet automation and reminders to improve process. "There used to be more dead time where your request was stuck in someone's inbox," McDuffie adds. "Now, Smartsheet sends automated reminders and provides visibility for us to manage those stragglers, and catch gaps in communication earlier."

Furthermore, the team is reducing reliance on email communications aiming to eliminate miscommunication and the challenges of document version control. McDuffie believes the new process is more seamless. "When one group populates information in the sheet, the handoff is automatic," he says, "eliminating the need for email."

Another use of automation is in reforming the company's request for work ticketing system. "By reducing our reliance on an outdated system, we can reduce cost," says Francois.

"Again, automated alerts and reminders in our communication flow in Smartsheet is going to solve that."

Clearer Decision-Making Processes: Embracing automation also helps Crain standardize project and process workflows, accelerate next steps, and create clarity around how and why decisions are being made. "Smartsheet's automated workflows enables Crain to streamline communication and decision-making in for a project or request," Francois says. "This allows us to complete incoming tasks even faster."

For example, Crain's newsletter request process includes a form submission to kick off the project. The addition of the information triggers an approval request to stakeholders. As the project progresses, additional changes to key information in this sheet or on a particular date invoke communications driving additional work. By configuring this as a multi-step approval process, much of the manual work is taken out of submitting a request.

"As we build these Smartsheet solutions," McDuffie adds, "the automation helps reduce busy work." The team encourages stakeholders to collaborate using @mentions within sheet comments to ensure clarity around decision-making. "These capabilities really allow stakeholders to target communication to each other. Once we started using

distribution lists for assigning tasks, we realized we could greatly expand the reach of automated alerts."

Easy-to-Use Platform Speeds up Adoption: Teaching co-workers how to use Smartsheet has been a smooth process for McDuffie. "That's the thing about Smartsheet," McDuffie says. "I can build views and process for people, but more importantly, I can teach the individual to build these on their own. Their own workflow. Their own alerts."

"The fact that we actually have a tool that's so easy to use helps us standup solutions quickly and enables us to maintain a Crain standard," McDuffie says, "In addition, it makes it a lot more fun."

Getting Closer to One Crain: As the company continues to evolve workflows to match its mission of One Crain, Francois and McDuffie are able to be innovative. Using Smartsheet has made McDuffie the go-to expert for building business and communications solutions and has elevated Francois's role and professional growth while empowering them both to make a positive impact on Crain.

"I have shifted more to process-related issues as a result of being more involved with Smartsheet, instead of focusing only on project management," Francois says. "Smartsheet has helped elevate us to think through Crain as a whole, our processes, and how we're going to work more efficiently."

About Smartsheet

Smartsheet (NYSE:SMAR) is a leading cloud-based platform for work execution, enabling teams and organizations to plan, capture, manage, automate, and report on work at scale, resulting in more efficient processes and better business outcomes. Today over 95,000 customers, including more than 77,000 domain-based customers and over 70 percent of the companies in the Fortune 500, rely on Smartsheet to implement, manage, and automate processes across a broad array of departments and use cases.

To learn more about Smartsheet, visit www.smartsheet.com

✉ sales@smartsheet.com
☎ (844) 324-2360
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