



## **IOIC Awards 2026: People.**

### **Best Internal Communications Newcomer**

#### **Emma Bryan, Molson Coors UK&I**

Emma Bryan is a rising star in Internal Communications at Molson Coors. Joining the Corporate Communications team in late 2023 with no prior IC experience, she has rapidly become an essential part of the function – delivering high impact communications that strengthen culture, improve channel performance and bring strategy to life for 2,300 colleagues across the UK & Ireland.

Over the past year, Emma has transformed key internal channels, delivering higher open and click through rates and producing engaging content that resonates deeply with diverse audiences. She has driven major improvements in ESG engagement, supported leadership communications, enhanced Sales team enablement and helped shape the 2025 IC strategy and offline comms approach.

Emma embodies the passion, curiosity and craft of an exceptional IC newcomer. Her work is creative, rigorous, people centred and strategically aligned – and her impact is already helping shape the future of internal communication at Molson Coors.

#### **Ben Croft, Welcome Break**

Ben Croft has made an exceptional impact as an Internal Comms and Engagement Coordinator, rapidly establishing himself as a standout talent in his first internal communications role. Joining Welcome Break in May 2025 from a recruitment background, Ben has brought creativity, structure, and energy to a growing function.

He has transformed the visual identity of internal communication, producing high-quality digital, video, and print content that captures attention and drives engagement across a 6,000-strong frontline workforce. Ben also introduced and manages the internal communications calendar, enabling a shift from reactive delivery to proactive planning.

His work has delivered measurable impact, including over 3,000 clicks and a 10% increase in internal applications through “Job of the Week”, and increased engagement with employee benefits through targeted campaigns.

Ben’s rapid development, creativity, and ownership have made a significant contribution to the function, marking him out as an exceptional newcomer with a bright future in internal communications.

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**Amelia Erswell, QBE**

2025 marked Amelia's first year in Internal Communications – and it has been an exceptional debut. As a global insurer, we have a responsibility to champion responsible business practices and support the transition to a more resilient and sustainable economy. Recognising this, we created a dedicated sustainability internal communications role within our International business – a role Amelia has truly made her own.

As part of our graduate sustainability cohort and International Communications team, Amelia supports around c.3,000 colleagues. Her mission is simple but powerful: to bring our sustainability strategy to life through engaging, meaningful stories that connect colleagues to our purpose of enabling a more resilient future.

In just one year, Amelia has delivered outstanding results. Engagement on sustainability has increased by 87% year on year, with readership up 63%. Just as importantly, colleague understanding has grown, with a 13% year on year rise in positive responses to our sustainability communications survey question. Amelia's work is already making a measurable and lasting impact.

**Nicole Sarmiento Quevedo, Merck KGaA**

Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany is a leading science and technology company with 62,000 employees across 65 countries. Keeping colleagues connected to a shared purpose across this scale and diversity is a constant challenge – and one Nicole Sarmiento Quevedo took on brilliantly in her first role in Internal Communications.

Soon after joining the company's Internal Communications team in mid-2024, Nicole became Project Office & Campaign Lead and the youngest member of the Internal Communications Leadership Team in January 2025. In that year, she led three company-wide campaigns, modernized internal processes, and drove AI adoption that pushed the team's AI engagement. She did all of this while onboarding two colleagues and building governance structures the team needed.

What makes Nicole exceptional is the combination of skills she brings: Her scientific knowledge, commercial experience and project management discipline have made her an invaluable asset to the team.

**Freya Smithson, BDO UK**

In under two years, Freya Smithson has transitioned from HR and recruitment into internal communications, rapidly establishing herself as a highly effective practitioner and recently earning a promotion to Senior Internal Communications Executive.

What sets Freya apart is the speed at which she has built both confidence and capability across strategic planning, sharp editorial judgment, operational rigour and measurement. She takes ownership of complex, fast-moving priorities and translates them into communications that are clear, accessible and impactful for diverse, often senior audiences.

For c.4,000 Audit colleagues, she designed and embedded a repeatable multi-channel communication rhythm, strengthened leadership visibility, and enabled meaningful two-way dialogue through consistent leader moments and flagship events, including the Audit Leaders Conference (223 leaders; 88% attendance). Her communications deliver strong engagement, with 79–80% open rates, 16–19% click-through rates, and over 1,000 intranet views on priority content.

Now working firmwide, Freya continues to raise standards, using insight, measurement and thoughtful use of AI to improve clarity, consistency and cut-through, marking her as a standout emerging talent.

# Internal Communication Manager of the Year

## **Kieran Barter, Skewb**

Since joining Skewb in November 2022, Kieran Barter has played a pivotal role in transforming the organisation's internal communications, elevating quality and strategic impact during a period of rapid growth.

Kieran brought strong design expertise and a clear audience first mindset, quickly re-imagining the weekly business update as a standalone internal magazine that informs, inspires and connects Skewbers across the business. While raising visual and editorial standards, Kieran retained the core purpose of communication and the essence of why the weekly email began - clarity, inclusion and engagement.

Under Kieran's leadership, brand and communications has grown into a multi-disciplinary team delivering Skewb Life, an in-house podcast platform, and all brand, marketing and social content. He has been instrumental in embedding consistency, building capability within the team and enabling colleagues to confidently share their stories.

Through creativity, discipline and a commitment to continuous improvement, Kieran has established internal communications as a trusted, scalable asset that supports the culture at Skewb and long-term business growth.

## **Jacqueline Harvey, Related Argent LTD**

In a year of great complexity, Jacqueline led internal communications through one of the most significant transitions in Related Argent's history. Against a backdrop of geopolitical instability, leadership change and the transfer of King's Cross asset management to a new entity, her role was to maintain clarity, confidence and cohesion across the business.

As the company's sole internal communications lead, Jacqueline shaped a clear narrative for change - balancing respect for a 25-year legacy with a decisive shift towards the future pipeline and the RA 2030 Strategy. She played a critical role in translating sensitive, evolving information into communications colleagues could trust, ensuring people felt informed, supported and connected during a period of uncertainty.

Through business updates, all-staffs and everyday comms, Jacqueline strengthened understanding of strategy, elevated the internal profile of the leadership team and helped the organisation navigate a major transition with stability and care. Importantly, she achieved this while protecting culture and maintaining engagement, demonstrating that effective internal communications is not a support function but an operational one.

## **Leo Morgan, Welcome Break**

Leo Morgan has transformed internal communication at Welcome Break into a strategic driver of engagement, alignment, and business performance. Operating in a complex, frontline-heavy

environment of over 6,000 colleagues, Leo rebuilt the function from the ground up – introducing structure, governance, and a clear communication strategy.

At the heart of this transformation was the launch of Journey (Workvivo), now embedded as the digital front door for communication, tools, and colleague experience, achieving 95% adoption and more than doubling engagement. Alongside this, Leo has reshaped leadership communication, embedded a comms-first mindset across the Senior Leadership Team, and delivered high-impact campaigns that connect teams to business priorities.

His work has driven measurable results, including a 20% increase in communication scores, record engagement survey participation, and improvements in retention, stability, and EBITDA per employee. Leo has redefined the role of internal communication at Welcome Break – from support function to business-critical capability.

# Internal Communication Leader of the Year

## **Myriam Chikirou, Merck KGaA**

When Myriam took over leadership of Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany's Internal Communications team in August 2023, she inherited a function in flux. Today, she leads a high-performing global team of 30 professionals across six countries, built around a clear structure and a shared sense of purpose.

In 2025, against a backdrop of significant organisational change and the rollout of Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany's new company Vision, Myriam repositioned internal communications from a reactive function to a genuine strategic partner. Her team's work earned a SABRE Award for Best Intranet 2025 and an internal award for the Vision launch. Team engagement increased by 22% in just two years under her leadership.

Myriam's impact is not just in what the team delivered, but in how she built the conditions for them to keep delivering.

## **David Manning, Currys plc**

David Manning is an outstanding internal communication leader who has translated cultural belief into sustained commercial performance at scale. As Senior Manager for Culture, Change and Communications at Currys, David led the People, Culture and Mindset workstream of the Right First Time (RFT) programme, reframing it from a fragmented, compliance led initiative into a colleague owned cultural movement across a 15,000 strong operational workforce.

Grounded in deep listening and behavioural insight, David created the "Show Up, Step Up, Rise Up" framework, giving colleagues and leaders a shared language to embed values-led behaviours into daily work. Through creative, gamified campaigns, high impact leadership workshops and human centred frontline learning, he aligned behaviour change directly to commercial outcomes, even during peak trading.

The results are exceptional: £18.7m in profit delivered, £9m reduction in product damage, +8pt NPS uplift and top percentile global employee engagement. Most importantly, RFT is now embedded into leadership, onboarding and operations, ensuring lasting impact.

## **Nicola Marshall, Welcome Break**

As People Director, Nicola Marshall has positioned internal communication as a strategic enabler of engagement, culture, and business performance at Welcome Break. Recognising the need for more human, consistent communication in a complex, frontline-led organisation, Nicola brought communication into the People function and championed its evolution.

She has led the shift from fragmented, marketing-led messaging to a people-focused, accessible approach, underpinned by a clear employer value proposition and tone of voice. As executive sponsor of Journey (Workvivo), Nicola secured investment, aligned senior stakeholders, and embedded communication as a leadership priority across the business.

Her leadership has enabled a step-change in capability, with communication now more visible, consistent, and impactful. This has contributed to increased engagement, improved communication scores, and stronger alignment between strategy and frontline delivery.

Nicola has ensured internal communication is no longer a support function, but a core driver of how Welcome Break engages its people and delivers its strategy.

### **Misty Oosthuizen, internal communication and change leader**

In 2025, Misty Oosthuizen stepped into a two-year internal communications gap at dnata Catering UK, part of the Emirates Group, a 3,500-employee, multilingual aviation business operating across 17 sites. Initially engaged to support a major Workday rollout, she introduced structured multilingual communication standards and simplified operational guidance, stabilising delivery in a safety-critical environment.

She then led the UK response to engagement results previously flagged as concerning by Group. 2250 of 3000 eligible colleagues participated in the survey, significantly strengthening frontline representation and restoring confidence in UK engagement data.

Appointed Head of Transformation Communications in June 2025, she shaped the Phase 1 narrative, Mission Possible, delivered two Senior Leadership Team conferences and embedded communication governance at Board level.

In October 2025, a full-time Internal Communications Manager was appointed, formalising the function she rebuilt and ensuring sustainable professional capability.

### **Karen Sawyer, Lloyds Banking Group**

With nearly two decades of experience leading communication teams, Karen is a leader who builds belief, inspires others, and puts colleagues at the heart of everything she does. She's navigated the team through uncertainty, ensuring everyone feels supported to go further for their stakeholders.

Karen brings out the best in her team, trusting their judgement, empowering them to experiment and giving them the confidence to be bold. An expert in her field, Karen works with some of Lloyds' most senior leaders to help them engage their teams and build belief in the Group's strategy. She balances empathy with challenge, never afraid to try new things and adapt to the changes in our profession.

In 2025, Karen led the team to deliver a bumper year of activity, resulting in an uplift in colleague engagement, and a team equipped with new skills and experience.