World Changers Podcast

Season 3, Episode 7

Digital dark age

Elle Bradley-Cox – 00:15
Welcome to World Changers, a podcast exploring the trends making an enduring mark on our world of work, and how business leaders, HR teams and internal communicators can stay one step ahead.

When almost everything's in the Cloud, and the amount of data we're storing is reaching hundreds of zettabytes each year and growing, what happens when the servers crash or our Cloud storage becomes full? How do we organise information and make sure that institutional knowledge isn't lost and that our people have what they need to work collaboratively?

This is a topic we'll be exploring with our head of creative consultancy and veteran scarlettabbotter Craig Bentley, who, at this point in his SA career – 17 years and counting – is basically a walking server.

Later in this episode, I chat with Craig to find out if we've got our heads too far in the digital cloud, and what our reliance on tech might mean for knowledge sharing. But first, we had a few questions for our colleagues and comms friends. What is your biggest file-saving bugbear or solution?

Lydia Edwards-Massie – 01:14
Hello, I'm Lydia Edwards-Massie, head of project delivery, and my biggest filing bugbear is, indeed, a lack of filing. A sensible and consistent folder structure where things are saved logically, with a consistent file naming system, that brings huge efficiencies.

It cuts searching time massively and helps new starters, or those who may not be as familiar with the work, to access files with ease. Also, version control and folders for old or redundant work are your friend. Use them!

Jim Munday – 01:42
Hi, my name is Jim. I'm the office manager at scarlettabbott. I like to look after the building and the people in it.

Keeping your data safe and readily available in the event of a disaster is crucial, as is the speed at which you can gain access to those files, making use of the Cloud and on premises for backups as part of your three-to-one principle, and using one of the many service providers to ensure safe and quick access to your data.

Tony Stewart – 02:06
I think my bugbear is just how physically fragile our data can be. I was backing up my photography projects archive the other day, and I pulled a wire and the hard drive, in seeming slow motion, crashed to the floor. And that was it. The drive no longer reads.

I usually have everything in my online Dropbox but larger volumes of data stored in the cloud are just pretty expensive for consumers. And I tried to save money and store it locally. That was a big mistake.

Pete Fletcher – 02:34
Hi, I'm Pete Fletcher, creative consultant at scarlettabbott.

Now, we've all experienced something like this. You're looking for a file on the server, on the Cloud, and you go to the folder where it should be and it's not there. Or, there are multiple files and you have no idea which is the latest. Or even worse, it keeps erroring when you try to open it. This can be infuriating. But I've got some tips to help avoid these situations, which may just save your bacon one day.

Number one, name your files consistently. The three essentials are client reference, job code and project name. If you do this, it will stand out if it's in the wrong place, and it will be easy to put back where it should be.

Number two, create a clear version control numbering system – the basics are to give the latest file the highest number. There's automatic version history with Office 365 and across Teams, however, PDFs and other files don't always have the same level of safety. So it's worth having a fallback.

And finally, number three, avoid punctuation. Punctuation in filenames can cause lots of problems: systems and servers not saving the files correctly, file errors, files failing to open, or security software marking them as dangerous. Commas, hyphens, dashes, symbols, glyphs, avoid them or stick to letters, numbers and underscores.

Miles Murphy – 03:58
Within the film team at scarlettabbott, we are always dealing with huge file sizes. Now our solution for this is to go entirely Cloud-based.

Now, I've been in the industry a long time and we've since storage solutions and backups change dramatically, gone are the days of having backup hard drives and backing up the backups on the physical tapes and then backing up the physical tapes into more backups. Now, because we're Cloud-based, all of the backups automatically are off site. So it takes that worry in that process away from us, which means we can focus on doing the create fun stuff.

Elle Bradley-Cox – 04:29
When we want to find a single source of truth on scarlettabbott lore and legend, we turn to Craig Bentley. With 17 years tenure, he's the longest serving member of the team and he's seen a lot in his time. From processes to platforms, projects to pitches, Craig's seen it all and the institutional knowledge is gold.

But what if Craig walked out one day and never came back? What would happen? How much essential know-how would walk out the door with him? Would all the online processes fall down? I'm obviously joking and would never wish to see Craig leave, but it's a real concern for most organisations.

What happens to the knowledge we don't share? And even if we do share it online without a clear pathway to all that expertise, is it trapped in a digital no-man's-land? I caught up with Craig to talk about digital dark age.
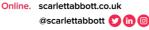
Craig Bentley, welcome to the World Changers podcast. It's a pleasure to have you here.

Craig Bentley – 05:19
Thank you for having me.

Elle Bradley-Cox – 05:21
Well, you're a pretty great example of institutional knowledge, Mr Bentley. I suppose, how does it feel to be a walking Wikipedia of scarlettabbott?

Craig Bentley – 05:29

A walking Wikipedia? Well, I guess that could mean I'm a walking fountain of knowledge, so that feels very good. But also, people say that Wikipedia's full of shit, so I think I'll go with the first one, you know, that's probably more me.

Elle Bradley-Cox – 05:49

The fountain of knowledge and the fountain of everlasting youth as well, I'm sure.

But yeah, you're right. Wikipedia is such, it's a strange one. Like, I don't actually, with our writing team, I always say never find your sources on Wikipedia, because it's open source, it can be changed all the time. Not always verifiable.

But I wonder with this legend, this reputation, does it lead to more 'can you justs'?

Craig Bentley – 06:13

Yeah, definitely. I guess like, I don't mind that either, because that's part of my job, like, it absolutely means more 'can you justs', or 'have we evers', or 'do we have examples of'. But that's all part of my role, and how I can help save people time, add knowledge, add value. That's what I do, so I'm happy to do that.

Elle Bradley-Cox – 06:38

And you know, it's funny, because I'll be doing something. And even if you've not been anywhere near the project, or touched it, and you just may be walking behind me, you might just say a little something just to help you sleep better at night. Am I right?

Craig Bentley – 06:53

You're 100 per cent right, yeah.

Elle Bradley-Cox – 06:57

I guess you are the kind of folklore of this business, because you've been there, seen it, done it all. But how do you protect yourself? How do you make sure people don't just ping you all day and ask you where stuff is? What's the best way of doing that?

Craig Bentley – 07:12

I think it's been hard because obviously, as the business grows, you can't answer everyone all day long. And there needs to be, kind of, procedures and processes in place so that everyone's clear on where to find stuff and where the first place to look is rather than always coming to you.

But sharing those processes with the team in different ways and having a consistency in how we restore files and name files and all that, that's key to this. And that's how I try and avoid being the person that everyone's reliant on, basically.
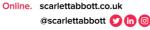
Elle Bradley-Cox – 07:52

Yeah, and I guess there's a certain pedantry that has to come with that. But I appreciate and enjoy that pedantry because, you know, someone's got to, someone's got to make the rules to organise the fun, right?

And I suppose, how do you end up not with like, 'version_version_version_final_final.2.0', like, how do you ... what's your benchmark best practice, I suppose?

Craig Bentley – 08:14

I guess, like clarity and consistency is the key to that, like, how we store files has changed over the years and recently with the increase in remote working, this has led to new ways of working, so new ways of saving and storing files.

So, for example, we've always had a work server, and up until a couple of years ago, we just saved files on the server, and all files were saved on the server. But then COVID happened and we moved into the world of SharePoint and Teams, and that got introduced. So everything was getting saved, here, there and everywhere, and then there was no rhyme or reason to it. And there's no rules in place.

But as Monica says on *Friends*, rules help control the fun. So you're not feeling frustrated and confused where to save things. So by implementing those processes, and matching up a way of saving, so that on the server and on Teams, it was aligned – that totally changed how we work. And now everything is more streamlined and can be found easily. People know where to look for things.

Elle Bradley-Cox – 09:28
That's nice, because otherwise it can be like a wild west of a job bag from personal experience.

Craig Bentley – 09:34
Definitely.

Elle Bradley-Cox – 09:36
Because that knowledge can't just be kept to you and it sounds like ... and I know, actually, you're the person who loves to pass on knowledge. But how do you make sure your voice is heard and your knowledge is shared across the business without coming across like a pedant, I guess?

Craig Bentley – 09:51
I guess I do come across like a pedant quite a lot. But I think it all starts with the onboarding process. So as people join the business, being clear in the processes from the start, 'this is how we do things here', and getting off on the right foot from the start.

But it doesn't stop there as well. Like, as we know, things are constantly changing. Like with that example, I just gave, the way we store files is constantly changing. So you have to be able to communicate that constantly in different ways.

And thinking about it, how you can make people aware of it, take note of it. But importantly, like, implement that, and implement those actions into the way they work as well, because it's all well and good saying that we've got these processes, but people not actually doing them. And this is like, I think that's like any important announcement as well. It might need communicating in different ways. So digitally, through Teams and email announcements, but also, then reinforcing that message through meetings and managers.

We have internal excellence workshops that get recorded as well, so people know new ways of doing things. But people like to take onboard information in different ways. So not just sending out an email and hoping it lands with people. You need to constantly come up with different ways of and different very varying ways, of how you can tell those messages that you need to.

Elle Bradley-Cox – 11:31
I mean, you talked about excellence there. Our CEO, Jeremy, constantly uses this phrase. And I think it's a really good way of explaining what we're all about, like, 'excellence is the next five minutes'. It's not tomorrow. It's not unachievable. You do it right here in the next five minutes now. And it's become a mantra. It's become kind of a catchphrase almost of our working practices and our culture but is it something you stand by?

Craig Bentley – 11:58
Oh, yeah, it's probably, and I know Jez said that a lot but that is what I live by as well.

And that could be from taking the time to actually save a file on to the server in the right name, rather than just dumping it somewhere. Like, it doesn't have to be something so lofty. It's taking the time to make sure that you're sharing things in the right way for others. And it isn't, everything isn't

just in your head. Somebody might need to pick up a project and have nothing, no sort of context on what it is. So if you can name things and store things in the right way, it makes their life a lot easier.

Elle Bradley-Cox – 12:44
Speaking of which, we've just been launching a kind of SharePoint content hub for one of our clients, haven't we, and I love that we built in that governance on file names from day one, because it would be so easy for me to send them image one, image two, image three, image four for that story. But what did you do?

Craig Bentley – 13:06
So to just to make ... yeah, so we had a job where we were sharing files with the client. And those files are then going to be uploaded on SharePoint in different ways and different articles. And just so that it's really clear, it's coming up with that sort of process at the start to go, 'this is how we're going to name a file', so that you are clear on where you need to put it. You're clear on where it is in the job bag, and it doesn't slow down the process of going, 'here's story one, and we have story one for three different articles'. And you want that file name the same if you've got a story, and it's got multiple images in. If you name them all, so, image one, two, and three, that isn't the way that they're laid out in the article, that could get confusing.

So it's just being clear on where the story is set, but also having that consistent naming across multiple articles to make it as easy as possible.

Elle Bradley-Cox – 14:10
Yeah, and it's almost like if you set out the rules, internally first, like we're just an extension of that client theme. Right? So we've all agreed to these rules. And therefore if we break them, it's our fault, right? And no wonder it gets confusing. So it's a good way of setting up a job like that. I really enjoyed it. And I think, you know, we've had some great feedback from the client too.

Thinking about our listeners, what would you recommend to other internal communicators who were trying their best to be the sat nav of their business?

Craig Bentley – 14:41
Yeah, I'd say don't underestimate the importance of it as well. And take that pedantry if you need to, because there is an importance in that and the time you save and the value you can add those by creating those guidance and those processes will be so worth it in the long run. So don't be afraid to take excellence is in the next five minutes and be quite hard on that.
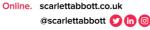
But having said all that as well like, we're in danger of kind of losing that knowledge that a conversation can have with a colleague, and it's a lot easier now to just go and search on Teams for a subject or a file, and then not get what you need out of it. Whereas having a conversation with somebody who might know about those things, could unearth some something that is nothing to do with that, but might be really valuable to you.

So I'd say as much as we put those procedures in place, and we create those rules, and we have that governance across it. We should never look to kind of fully get rid of the conversation because pinging somebody and saying, 'do you have any knowledge on this' can be a lot quicker than actually searching on Teams and a lot more valuable. So we shouldn't lose that.

Elle Bradley-Cox – 16:08
Yeah. And I think it's also about knowing the way that some people are working like if you know that you're working with a really feckless person and you both have competing priorities. Like my competing priority might be very different from yours on a job. I'm not you know, at all referencing myself as the feckless person here. Like, if you know you're working with someone like me, then actually, maybe you just taking that extra two minutes to explain why you've done something to me, will make me fall back in line.

Somebody needs to, like exactly like you said, rules organise the fun. Somebody needs to own that. And if you don't have that in your business, then maybe that person needs to be you.

Craig Bentley – 16:54
Yeah, yeah. And that's how I like to think of it.

Elle Bradley-Cox – 16:58
Well, I can't wait for many more years of your gorgeous pedantry. I love it. I think it makes such a difference. And if you weren't here, it'd be anarchy. So thanks for your tenure. Thanks for your rules, and thanks for the interview.

Craig Bentley – 17:14
Thank you!

Elle Bradley-Cox – 17:15
Cheers, Craig.

Craig Bentley – 17:16
Thanks.

Elle Bradley-Cox – 17:21
If you want to explore this topic a little more do join us later this month for our webinar, where you can put your questions to our expert panel. We'll share the details in the show notes and on our social channels.

Want to continue the conversation in the meantime? Do come and chat to us over on Twitter @scarlettabbott or drop us an email at hello@scarlettabbott.co.uk, and we'll see you next time for another dive into World Changers 2023.

World Changers is a podcast by employee engagement consultancy scarlettabbott, hosted by Elle Bradley-Cox. Find out more at www.scarlettabbott.co.uk.