

New Communications Tool Can Build Bridges *Inside* the Agency

The INDOT Communications and Talent Management divisions will soon unveil a new internal collaboration tool for the agency.

Yammer is part of the Microsoft Office 365 suite of programs, and has been described as “Facebook for business.” In reality, the tool goes far beyond providing a method to stay connected to your coworkers. Because INDOT is such a complex organization, with more than 100 locations across the state, Yammer can be a valuable asset for departments looking to communicate and collaborate better.

INDOT has experimented with Yammer before, but the Indiana Office of Technology’s (IOT’s) move to Office 365 brings a new INDOT Yammer network with better features, security, and administrative controls. INDOT employees will simply use their work email and password to access the new Yammer network once it launches in October.

Vincennes District Deputy Commissioner Rusty Fowler has been an active user of the tool and said Yammer can help the agency break down some of the communication barriers.

“I think the sharing of best practices could easily be improved statewide,” Fowler said. “We’ve worked hard at eliminating silos in the agency, and Yammer gives us another opportunity to hit an audience across districts and other borders.”

Fowler also said Yammer will help promote a better sense of community within the agency, and Crawfordsville District Safety Director Terri Griffin agreed.



“Email may someday be outdated. As INDOT’s workforce continues to get younger, the agency will relate to social media more and more,” said Griffin, who has been active on Yammer and appreciates the ability to “follow” a Yammer user like a user would on Facebook or Twitter.

INDOT’s Yammer network will be managed by members of the Communications and Talent Management divisions. Employee Communications Program Manager Kevin Cole said the potential benefits of Yammer go beyond just social connections.

“Any department that has experienced less-than-adequate communications at INDOT should think about how a tool like Yammer can help,” said Cole. “Districts, departments, project teams, or individuals will be able to create Yammer groups that can be used to share ideas, best practices, project updates, policy changes, or anything else important to others in that group. Instead of information going out to just the people on an email list, a post to a Yammer group quickly reaches anyone who’s a member.”

Yammer will have a comforting familiarity for anyone who has used Facebook. New posts — complete with “likes” — appear on Yammer’s main screen, which is known as the news feed. Icons indicating private messages and other notifications appear in the upper-left corner. Access to various INDOT groups is also available from this same area. There’s even a mobile Yammer smartphone app so employees may stay connected away from the office. Unlike ERIN, INDOT’s Yammer network may be accessed away from the office through the Yammer mobile app.

Too many hashtags may be seen as tiresome on Twitter, but they can be very useful in Yammer. Yammer has a robust search function that finds hash-tagged posts quickly. INDOT employees may also bring someone into a conversation easily by mentioning them in a post or comment. Those mentioned will receive a notification and can easily join in.

Yammer can have tangible benefits for the agency, if enough employees are actively engaged. Research shows that organizations can increase productivity by as much as 20 to 25 percent by using a social collaboration tool like Yammer, but only if around one-third or more of its employees are using the tool on a consistent basis.

Microsoft has studied these benefits, and talked to 10,000 Yammer users across various companies and organizations. Microsoft’s survey revealed benefits in six areas:

- Team communication
- Productivity
- Knowledge sharing
- Employee onboarding
- Company culture
- Employee engagement

Cole said the bottom line is improving how we share information at INDOT.

“Yammer can function as an organic repository of all knowledge at the agency,” said Cole. “When questions and conversations are managed in a more open and collaborative space, answers can be easier to find.”

The INDOT Yammer network is set to launch the second week of October. Look for more information, including a direct link to the network, that week on ERIN.

The Yammer news feed is similar to that of Facebook and features access to various INDOT groups.

