CASE STUDY
FLEISHMANHILLARD

Powerhouse agency solves workflow challenges and boosts revenue growth with Central Desktop

Highlights

THE PROBLEM

With communication and collaboration largely happening across email chains, Excel spreadsheets and Word documents, too many opportunities for inefficiencies arose in FleishmanHillard's everyday workflow: lack of version control, lack of accountability and a knowledge management process that was too work-intensive to be sustainable.

THE SOLUTION

Implementing Central Desktop allowed FleishmanHillard to create a secure and centralized location for files, feedback and conversation – solving the headaches surrounding creative intake and project management.

THE RESULTS

By reducing time spent with cumbersome and inefficient workflow processes, FleishmanHillard increased its volume of client projects and improved internal communications. The global communications firm links the rise in billable hours - and its ability to justify an increased headcount - to the use of Central Desktop.

Today's agency has no time for yesterday's problems

A time-tested giant in the field of communications, FleishmanHillard bases its philosophy on the "power of true." Founded in 1946 in St. Louis, the firm has blossomed into a global powerhouse, adapting with new technology and expanding campaign offerings to encompass public relations, public affairs, marketing, paid media, and transmedia and social content. Its client list includes Procter & Gamble, Energizer, AT&T and General Motors.

"Central Desktop is a huge factor in the revenue growth of this department."

- Brandi Friel, senior vice president, creative integration

Part of any forward-thinking agency's mission is to constantly improve not only the client work itself, but the ways in which

that work is done. When Meredith Bradshaw (senior vice president, digital) and Brandi Friel (senior vice president, digital & creative integration) surveyed their office's work processes, they found ways to reinvent how their team worked together.

On the traffic management side, collaboration was typically limited to forms and Word documents shuttling back and forth.

"People would send creative requests via email and we would have to respond with, 'Can you please fill out this Word document and send it back?'" says Friel. "And maybe they did and maybe they didn't – and maybe the information requested was there and maybe it wasn't."

On the web side, meanwhile, the team struggled with document version control and a complex CMS process.

"Half the files were in somebody's email, the other half were on the shared drive, and it was unclear which files were the most recent – we had a lot of that," says Bradshaw. "There was one Excel spreadsheet that had usernames and passwords in it and you hoped it was updated, but it was always a little unclear."

Everyone agreed that they needed a better way to do things – there wasn't much need to campaign against the old processes – but in a marketplace crowded with collaboration solutions, which offering best suited their specific demands?

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- Meredith Bradshaw, senior vice president, digital

Central Desktop: tailor-made for agency needs

Central Desktop for Agencies is the first collaboration platform built specifically for marketing agencies, drawing heavily on ongoing feedback straight from seasoned agency pros.

FleishmanHillard experimented with several options prior to committing to Central Desktop, but struggled to find an all-in-one solution.

"We would have had to augment [the other solutions] with other things," Bradshaw says. "They would have one thing that we needed, but we needed five things."

Central Desktop's enterprise-grade security proved to be another key differentiator. Instead of going rogue with software implementation – and risk a future shutdown – Friel and Bradshaw involved IT early in the process. Friel even hand-delivered a security-specific PDF to her colleagues to allay their concerns. It worked.

With IT on board, Bradshaw and Friel spent a couple months working closely with the Central Desktop implementation team to develop a solution – which they quickly nicknamed "The Hub" – designed not just for agencies, but customized to fit FleishmanHillard. They initially rolled out The Hub in beta to the 15-20 people working most intensively with the creative team.

"The creative side is really where we had most of our pain points," says Bradshaw. "How do we best set up our creative intake for success?"

"We were able to work really easily with Central Desktop to build it, which I appreciate because I built a similar tool with another company and it was the most excruciatingly painful, miserable process. It took forever and there was extreme frustration on both sides," Friel says, laughing only in hindsight. "They didn't have the capabilities with

customer service or tech support to do what we wanted to do."

Two additional keys to successful implementation and long-term user adoption were securing executive sponsorship and empowering a champion (or multiple champions) to oversee the project.

"I think our leadership was very clear in saying 'We are not working unless this works,'" Bradshaw says. "Everyone had to buy in."

Fleishman Hillard's customized collaboration platform – branded "The Hub" – transformed the agency's creative intake.

All creative requests are submitted directly through Central Desktop. No more loose ends!

Central Desktop as part of day-to-day business

The Hub isn't an optional tool. To emphatically drive adoption, Friel and Bradshaw made it mandatory – right out of the gates.

"We invited users into beta, we created some documents that were how-to guides... and we basically told them, 'If you want to create a project, the only way you can do it now is through this electronic form,'" says Bradshaw. Even now, she and Friel continue to stress that if a request is made outside of The Hub, it's simply not going to get accomplished.

Project managers and designers easily isolate the tasks and deadlines that directly pertain to them.

"It's almost at the point where if it's in an email but it's not in The Hub, it doesn't exist," Friel says.

All of the team's design projects are now housed within databases on The Hub and the majority of its digital projects are managed in custom workspaces. By running simple filters, designers are able to see the projects that pertain just to them and digital project members are able to track tasks, deadlines and deliverables at-a-glance.

"I run an active project report every morning," Friel says. "Our daily production meeting is dependent on The Hub being up to date."

Collaboration for on-the-go creatives

A crucial product feature for FleishmanHillard is the ability to email directly into the system, especially for team members who aren't always confined to the office. When a creative product is delivered electronically for review, the reviewer can respond as though replying to an ordinary email, but still have the feedback and conversation saved within The Hub.

"If I'm not able to manage traffic for a day or two when I'm on the road, it's a very easy handoff," Friel says. "When I come back, I have the luxury of deleting massive conversations in my email and going straight to The Hub for a status update. For a person who's coming into the project [for the first time], it's all there. For a person who's returning to it, it's easy to catch up. I think those features offer the main benefits for us: the real-time record-keeping, tracking and accountability."

Gone, then, are the days of missing a deadline or key detail because it was forgotten or out of sight, out of mind. Gone are the days of losing access to a file or project because its owner is out sick. Gone are the days of one person scrambling to archive all of the information related to a given client project.
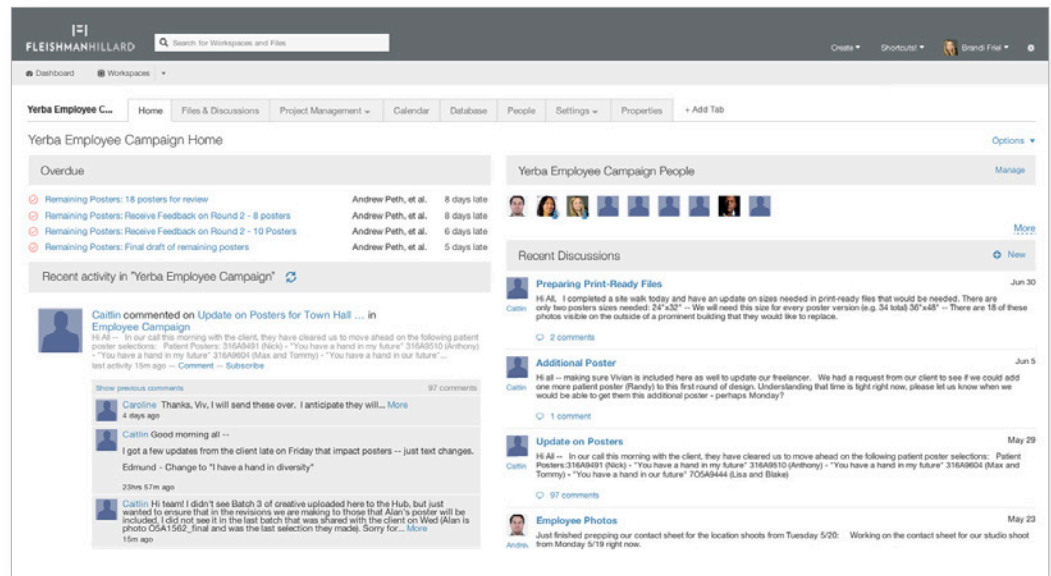
Central Desktop as business booster

A year after implementing Central Desktop, Bradshaw and Friel presented financial results. The news was very good news: they'd doubled revenue while only increasing team size 20 or 30 percent. The executives, of course, had a quick follow-up question: how is that possible?

"We attributed a good bit of our success to Central Desktop," says Friel, noting that the team was in a period of growth, but logistically wouldn't have been able to handle the increased volume of work without a better collaboration solution. "I think it's a huge factor in the revenue growth of this department, absolutely."

Reports from Central Desktop also help the team identify additional opportunities with clients and to justify the headcount required to handle the projected volume of work.

When a colleague recently asked what they'd like to add to their platform, Bradshaw and Friel shared a laugh. "I don't think we need to add anything," Bradshaw says. "I don't want to mess with a good thing!"
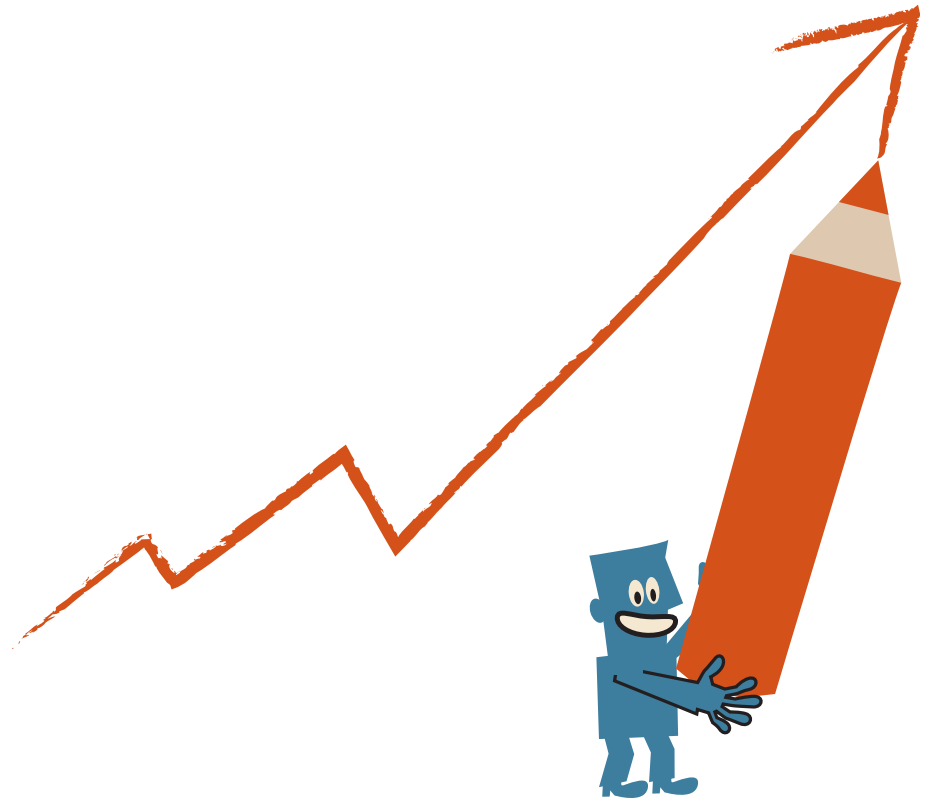
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- Brandi Friel, senior vice president, creative integration

1. Our wiki has all the information you'd need about clients and vendors. Making sure all that data is in one place – so no matter who is looking, you can find it – is really helpful.

2. It works with Outlook. You can respond to a Hub email in Outlook and it pulls it into the stream. That was a huge challenge that the previous product I worked with didn't offer.

3. Database customizations. All of our design projects are housed in there and I can run reports and create filters so that each designer doesn't have to look at a mess.

...about central Desktop.

Here are three of our favorite things...

Meredith Bradshaw
senior vice president, digital
FleishmanHillard

Brandi Friel
senior vice president, creative integration
FleishmanHillard

About Central Desktop

Central Desktop helps people work together in ways never before possible.

The Central Desktop collaboration platform connects people and information in the cloud, making it possible to share files, combine knowledge, inspire ideas, manage projects and more. Central Desktop serves half a million users worldwide.

Key Central Desktop customers include CBS, MLB.com, PGA Tour, the Humane Society of the United States, CareerBuilder, Javelin Marketing Group, Moxie, WD-40, Workday and more. Founded in 2005, Central Desktop is a PGi company located in Pasadena, California.
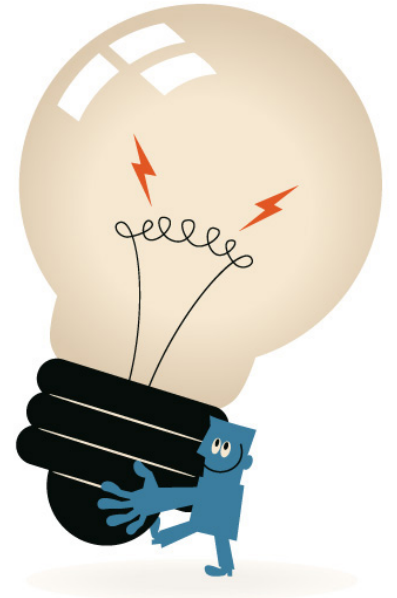
Click here to learn more about Central Desktop (c'mon just click it!)

Contact us
We don't bite

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