

## Background

Canon UK & Ireland employs some 2000 people in its two main divisions, Canon Consumer Imaging and Canon Business Solutions. Its informal, open culture places a strong emphasis on two-way communication, however until 2004 there was no formal information or consultation framework in place. That was until it launched *EvoIve* in October 2004.

Using the slogan “Involving employees in Canon” *EvoIve* demonstrated Canon’s willingness to put best practice in place, to be an employer of choice, and to pro-actively respond to the forthcoming legislation on Information & Consultation. It also recognised benefits in terms of managing change in the business. Canon had run a European Works Council for several years, and the lack of a UK counterpart for its four UK members to report back to was another factor in deciding to set up *EvoIve*.

A project team was established drawn from people across the company, to help prepare an agreement, decide on the election process, design a communication plan, develop training for employee representatives and set up a dedicated Intranet site. The plans were put to the Board, and then views sought from all employees, generating a lot of interest and feedback which helped refine the proposals.

## Information & Consultation practices (“*EvoIve*”)

The structure put in place consists of a national committee for the UK and Ireland chaired by the company’s Managing Director, and five divisional committees chaired by divisional Directors. The divisional committees comprise between two and eight employee representatives, depending on the number of employees in the division, one of which is appointed as a co-chair. There is also a management representative and one from Human Resources. Meetings are held three times a year. The national committee meets twice a year and is made up of the five divisional committee chairs, five divisional co-chairs and five other divisional employee representatives. Once a year in January all the representatives are brought together to set the direction for the year and highlight challenges ahead and the issues that are likely to be talked about.

All representatives have clearly defined constituencies of about 75 employees on average, and are elected for a period of two years. Initial training covered such things as the scope of the role, rules of engagement

in meetings, effective communication, listening and questioning skills, and being constructive.

Subjects covered at meetings include business performance, finance and sales data, market conditions, competition and employment trends, marketing developments, corporate plans, company policies, issues affecting Canon's operations, redundancies, environmental and health & safety issues, and training and development. The Board and HR Director meet in advance to identify agenda items for both the national and divisional committees. Representatives can also raise their own agenda items and are encouraged to sound out their constituents on issues to raise. The chairs and co-chairs agree the agenda which is then posted on the Intranet site.

The *Evo/ve* Intranet site is the most important tool for keeping everyone aware of *Evo/ve* and its activities. Employees can see who their representatives are and e-mail them directly, keep up to date with meetings and agenda items, and contribute to a Q&A chatroom called *Your Voice* where questions can be directed to senior management and both the question and answer shared across the business. There are regular articles and updates in the company's monthly magazine, and its weekly e-mail news bulletin. There is a quarterly manager's team briefing to cascade business updates, and this always includes a short item on *Evo/ve*. Keeping in touch with the field-based sales and service teams is a particular challenge, so the *Evo/ve* team uses posters at Canon's 16 regional hub offices to help raise visibility.

### Business benefits

In the first 18 months of operation *Evo/ve* has grappled with a range of issues from improving customer relationships, introducing a new car policy, childcare vouchers and ideas for raising environmental awareness, to implementing a new IT system, working with patents, and developing a diversity & equality action plan. The stage at which *Evo/ve* is brought into the decision-making process, and the extent of consultation depends on the issue concerned, but the longer term objective is to consult and involve earlier.

Commitment from the company's senior management – both at the start of the process, and on an on-going basis by chairing meetings - has undoubtedly contributed to the success of *Evo/ve*. Without this buy-in from the senior management the initiative would not have been taken seriously by Canon's employees. The process of putting together a project team and consulting widely on the design of the arrangements helped raise awareness and set a good tone right from the start. The team also put

some effort into explaining *Evo/ve* to line managers at the beginning of the process, and again six months in, to deal with some concerns over time off for representatives and questions about what subjects are not covered. After just 18 months the company believes that *Evo/ve* is a valuable communication tool and already represents a very significant part of Canon UK & Ireland's culture.