

Willis Innovation Challenge: *Unleash your thinking*

Project title:

Willis Innovation Challenge:
Unleash your thinking

Category:

11 Internal Communications

Client company:

Willis Group Holdings PLC

Design consultancy:

Radley Yeldar

Current date:

June 2014



1. Executive Summary

With ambitious plans to become ‘The world’s best risk advisor, insurance, and reinsurance broker’, Willis’ new CEO Dominic Casserley identified that innovation needed to become a key pillar for the business, ultimately contributing to its growth.

But how to make innovation ‘the way we do things around here’ amongst 18,000 employees in over 400 offices?

Enter the Willis Innovation Challenge – an annual internal event that seeks grass roots engagement with innovation. Radley Yeldar devised an internal communications campaign that incorporates digital, ambient and print – one that engages with Willis’ people in all markets and that drives participation, either by submitting ideas on innovation or voting for those ideas.

The five-month campaign is an undeniable success – all objectives were surpassed by a wide margin.

- Ideas submitted outstrip objective by an unbelievable 367%
- Long list of ideas increases 230%
- Short list of ideas increases 66%
- Five ideas to be implemented across the business instead of just one
- Votes on ideas exceed target by 27%
- Unique views per day of Innovation Community page exceeds objective by 36%
- 577,746 Innovation Community page views throughout campaign – 28% above objective
- 80% average email open rate exceeds target by 15%
- 10.77% increase in belief amongst associates that Willis is more innovative
- 13.27% of associates feel more empowered to raise new ideas
- 72.71% of associates feel the IC was run well or very well

What makes this even more impressive? There was no formal local champion network. Creative and messaging needed to work across all languages and cultures around the world. Plus a new and unknown system was used for idea submissions and voting – potentially becoming a huge barrier to participation.

Willis is well and truly embracing innovation as part of its DNA.



2. Project Overview

Outline of project brief

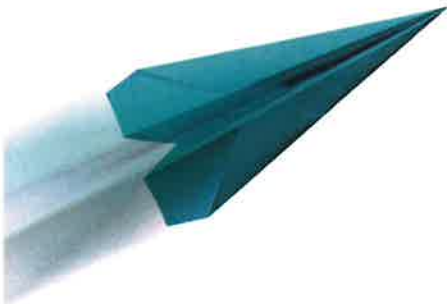
With ambitious plans to become ‘The world’s best risk advisor, insurance, and reinsurance broker’, Willis’ new CEO Dominic Casserley identified that innovation needed to become a key pillar for the business, ultimately contributing to its growth.

The first step on this path was to make innovation ‘the way we do things around here’ amongst all associates, and capture all the great ideas floating around the business. Enter the Willis Innovation Challenge (IC) – an annual internal event that seeks grass roots engagement with innovation.

Radley Yeldar’s (RY) role was to craft a largely self-supporting internal communications campaign for the first IC – one that engages with Willis’ people in all markets and that drives participation, either by submitting ideas or voting via Willis’ Innovation Community portal.

Objectives for the campaign included:

- 200 ideas to be submitted
- Long list of ten ideas, short list of three ideas, and one overall winner to be implemented by the business
- 10,000 associate votes
- 850 unique views per day of the Innovation Community portal on average throughout the campaign
- 450,000 Innovation Community portal total page views throughout the campaign
- 65% open rate average for all campaign emails (where 52% is considered the benchmark)
- Increase belief amongst associates that Willis is more innovative by 10%
- Increase empowerment of associates to raise new ideas by 10%



Description

Background

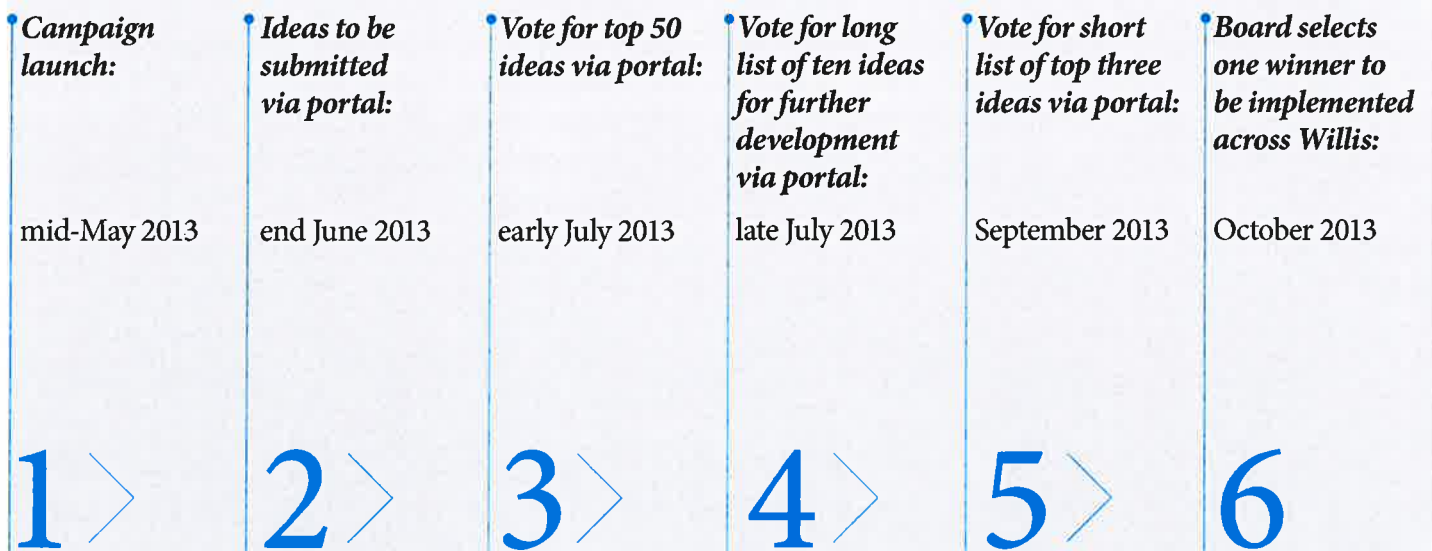
With roots dating back to 1828, Willis operates today on every continent with more than 18,000 employees in over 400 offices.

Innovation, embodied in every associate, will help shape Willis into an organisation with reduced risks, agile products, programmes and services, expansion in the right areas, and new ways of working, including greater connectivity at regional level and across its Business Units.

Willis believed that its people were already doing innovative things, but they just weren't voicing them. The IC is an event that gives associates from across the business a platform to share, capture, and then vote on their innovation ideas based around five themes, believed by CEO Dominic Casserley to be those most important to Willis' future business success.

The IC will catalyse associates' thinking, to ultimately make innovation the driving force behind their every day thinking. This is key to Willis' ongoing success in meeting and exceeding its clients' needs – and for this to translate into commercially viable ideas generated by the business.

IC process and timeline



Overview of market

General market overview

Willis is number three in its market. It's generally perceived as the challenger to Aon and Marsh. In a mature market that's dominated by a few major players, it's essential to stand out from the crowd. Through its emphasis on innovation, Willis will reinvent what brokerage and risk advice means to its clients, thereby gaining competitive advantage.

Challenges/obstacles faced

- No formal local champion network: Communications needed to reach all associates globally, but there was no existing infrastructure or network of local champions in place that could be used to achieve this. Because of the aggressive timings of the programme, Willis would be reliant on a network of local champions that volunteered to help in their own time.
- Global relevance: Creative and messaging needed to be simple but impactful, to work across all languages and cultures around the world.
- New and unknown system: Idea submissions, voting, and commenting happened on the new Innovation Community portal, so the campaign communications needed to work doubly hard to encourage maximum participation.

Project launch date

Mid-May 2013

Size of design budget

£100,000



Outline of design solution

There were four key phases to the campaign: raising awareness and submitting ideas, voting and commenting, showcasing the shortlist, and celebrating winning ideas. Overall, the design stands out dramatically from any other Willis material, which is typically very corporate in style. This makes the concept innovative in its own right and so inspiring that people can't help but react to it and get involved.

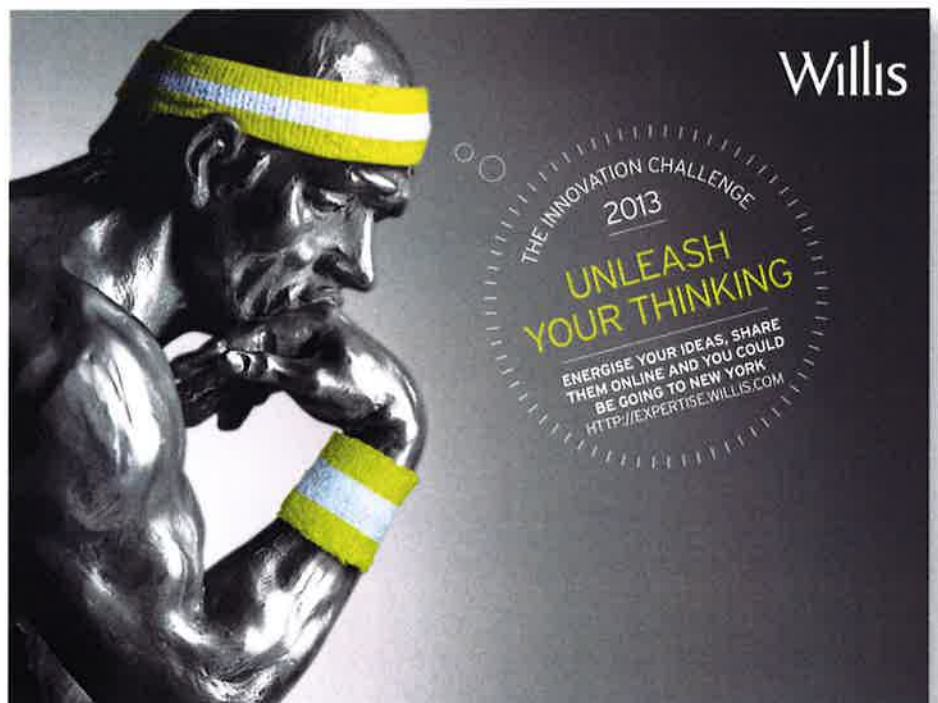
The campaign concept: Unleash your thinking

The campaign is all about unleashing your thinking. Rodin's iconic sculpture The Thinker is the foundation of the core visual idea, immediately recognisable around the world. However, The Thinker is just about thinking, while innovation is all about turning thinking into action.

To make him more active, witty key visual props are added to the sculpture. Each prop represents a different way to unleash ideas and supports the messaging at each stage of the campaign. For example, a megaphone for shouting out ideas, and Newton's Apple to promote inspiration.

Thought bubbles are used to further encourage action and participation. The supporting messages within the bubbles drive each phase of the campaign.

Combining these cerebral and fun sides completely reflects Willis' culture – a long history and legacy married to a dynamic and engaged workforce. The look and feel is bold, distinctive, memorable, and flexible enough to work throughout the campaign journey.



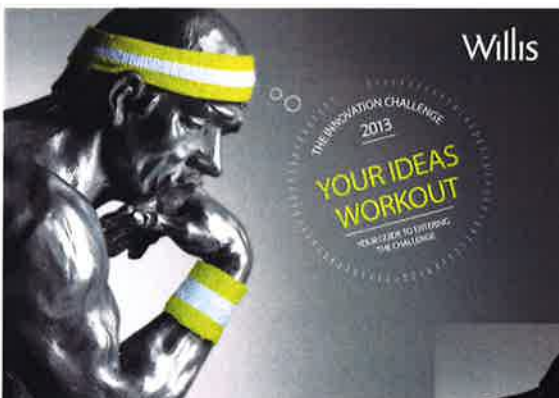
The campaign materials

RY audited and reviewed Willis' internal communications channels to establish which ones would resonate most with associates. From that, a campaign was devised that incorporates digital, ambient and print. Each application's design changed as the campaign progressed:

Emails



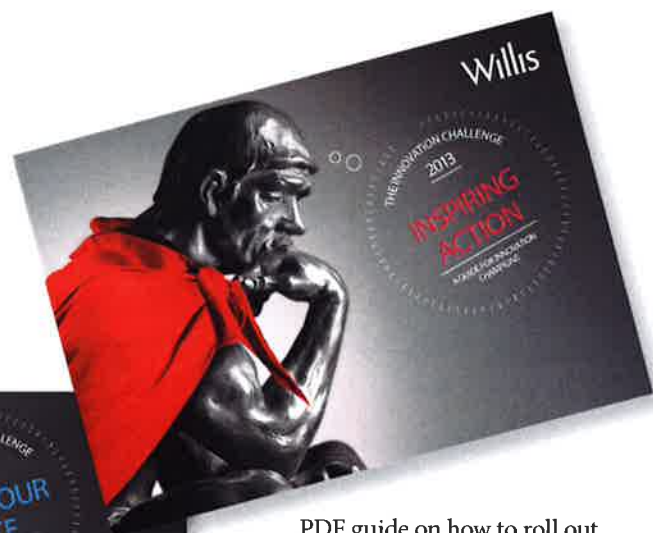
Guides



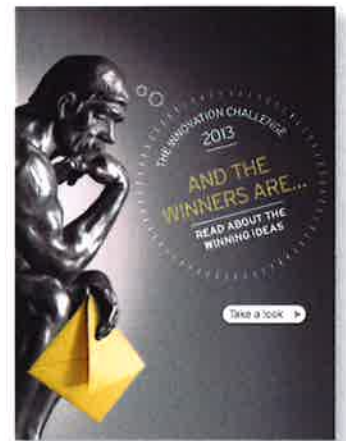
PDF guides on how to submit ideas and how to vote and comment (to help people understand how to use the new Innovation Community portal)



PDF guide on how to roll out the campaign locally, for a volunteer champions network



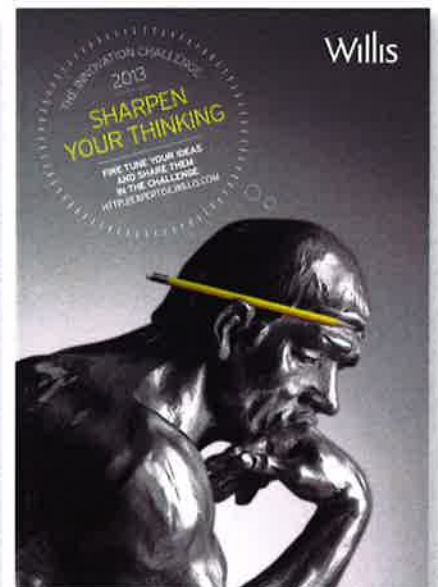
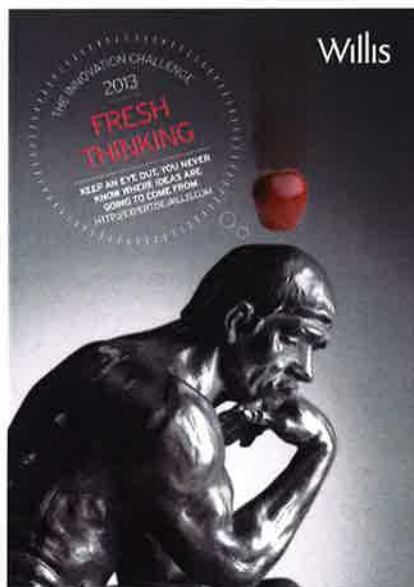
Intranet web banners



Free standing banners



Posters



Wall projections in reception and communal areas like office canteens



Plasma screen projections for lifts

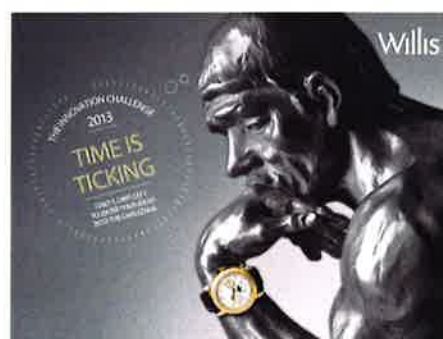
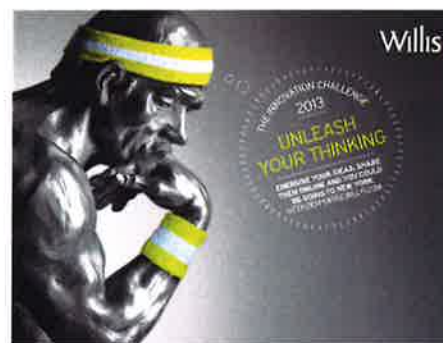


Table talkers and coffee cup sleeves



3. Summary of Results

The five-month campaign is an undeniable success for Willis. All objectives were outdone by a wide margin. And they're all the more impressive since the Innovation Community portal was relatively new and quite unknown, potentially becoming a huge barrier to participation. Willis is well and truly embracing innovation as part of its DNA.

Ideas submitted outstrip objective by an unbelievable:

↑ 367%

934 innovation ideas were submitted across the business, soundly besting the objective of 200 by 367% – that's more than 4.5x expectations.

Long list of ideas increases by:

↑ 230%

The quality of ideas was so strong that Willis ended up long listing 33 ideas instead of ten.

Short list of ideas increases by:

↑ 66%

As another testament to the strength of the ideas, what should have been a shortlist of three became five. **Not only this, but the Willis board decided to invest in implementing all five ideas, rather than the original plan for just one.**

Associate votes exceed target by:

↑ 27%

With 12,745 associate votes, the 10,000 target was outdone by 27%.

Unique views of Innovation Community page per day exceed objective by:

↑ 36%

The Innovation Community page got 1,154 unique views per day on average throughout the campaign, bettering the 850 goal by 36%.

Views of Innovation Community page throughout campaign exceed goal by:

↑ 28%

577,746 Innovation Community page views throughout campaign exceeds the objective by 28%. Yet more evidence of engagement with the whole idea of innovation.

80% average email open rate exceeds objective by:

↑ 15%

What better endorsement of associates' engagement can there be than an astonishingly high 80% average email open rate over the course of the campaign, which outstrips both Willis' own high 65% target as well as the 52% industry benchmark for internal emails.

Willis also conducted a survey amongst associates before and after the IC – the results of these are a clear sign that this initiative is well on the road to embedding innovation into the business:

↑ 10.77%

increase in belief amongst associates that Willis is more innovative – meets objective.

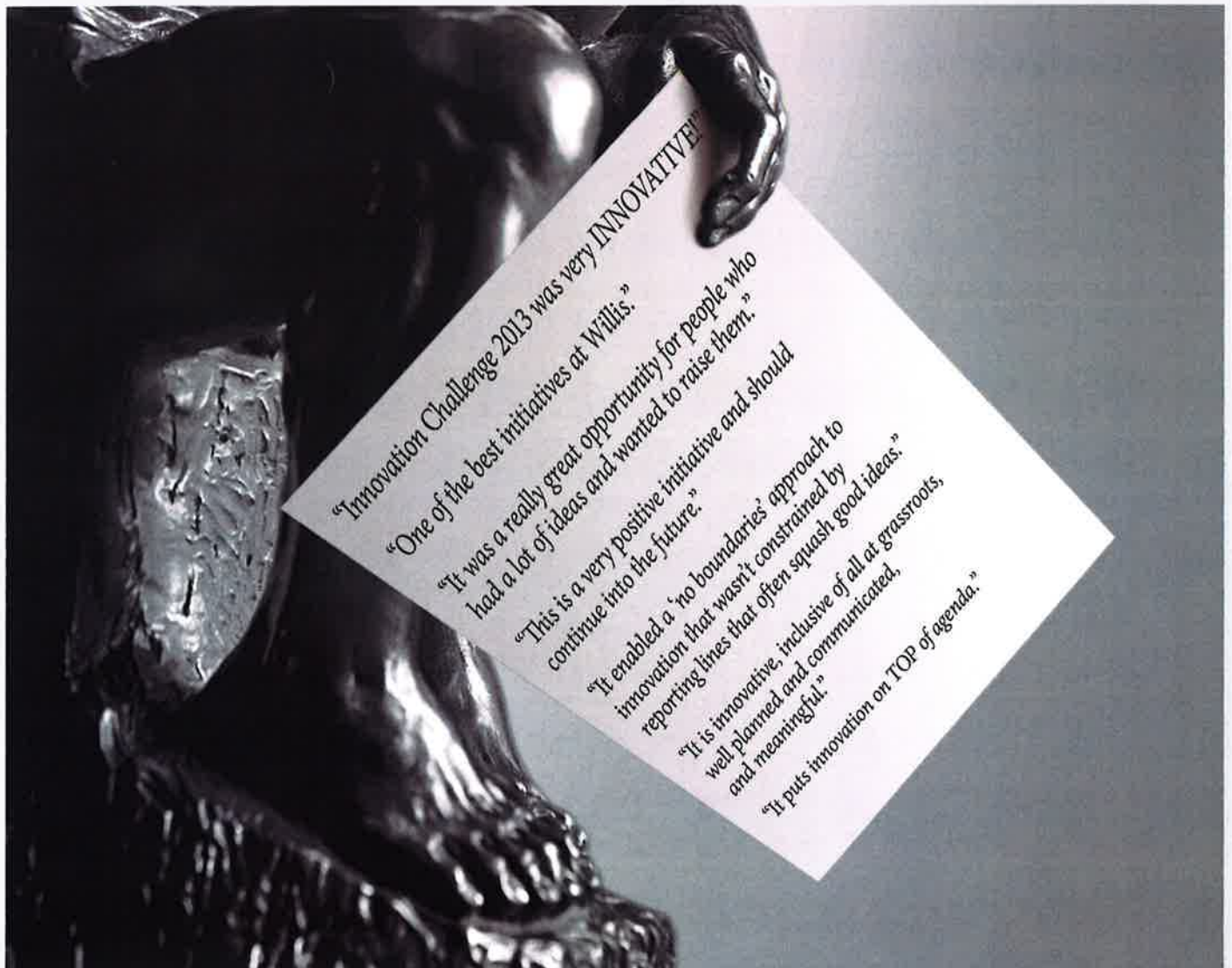
↑ 13.27%

of associates feel more empowered to raise new ideas – surpassing 10% objective.

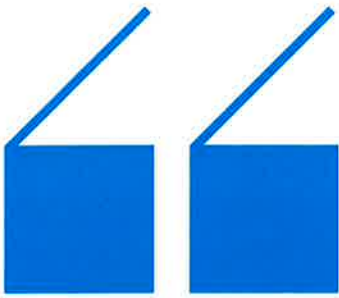
↑ 72.71%

of associates feel the IC was run well or very well – and just 4.94% feel it was poorly run.

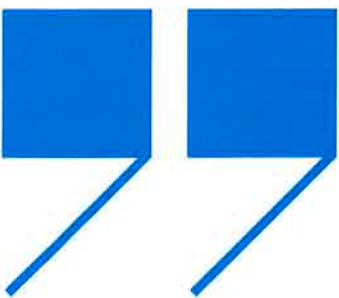
**Sampling of survey comments:
what associates liked most about the IC**



Testimonial



The success of the campaign was well beyond our highest expectations. There's no doubt that the creative execution of all the elements was the key driver to what can only be expressed as 100% success in creating engagement around innovation.



Thierry Saada,
Group Chief Marketing Officer,
Willis

4. *Other Influencing Factors*

There were no other influencing factors. In fact, Willis didn't even have an established communications network globally – people who could drive the campaign from a local office perspective. The business had to depend on people volunteering to help, above and beyond their normal day-to-day jobs. And let's not forget that lack of associates' knowledge and understanding of the new Innovation Community portal could have been a huge barrier. Given this, campaign's success is all the more incredible.

5. *Research Resources*

Willis internal data

Willis internal IC surveys, May 2013 and November 2013

Newsweaver internal communications open rate benchmark study (52%), 2013