



STEERING SIG-MARCOMMS THROUGH 15 YEARS OF SUCCESS!

If longevity, satisfied participants, a proactive steering committee, and emulation by your peers are indicators of a successful community working group, then SIG-Marcomms can rightfully claim success.

September marked the 15th anniversary of the Special Interest Group on Marketing Communications, as well as its 45th face-to-face meeting, making it the second oldest activity in the GÉANT Community Programme of SIGs, Task Forces, workshops and small projects.

In June 2018 group members met with other marketing communications staff from NRENs around the world. They discussed the progress in other world

regions of similar groups and celebrated 5 years of the 'Global PR Network', which had been inspired by the SIG-Marcomms approach.

Although the name has changed over the years – originally TF-PR, then TF-CPR – the main objective of SIG-Marcomms has remained constant; to provide a forum for the exchange of ideas, experiences and best practices in order to develop skills among the group's

participants and raise the game in NREN marketing communications activities. Although marketing communications is not NRENs' core business, it is a core support to their business goals and sustainability.

"The NREN community and its stakeholders and users are special, compared to what you learn in business school," explains Gitte Kudsk of the Danish NREN DeiC, who is a founder



Photos
Top left:
SIG-Marcomms
and Global
PR Network
members at
TNC18

Top right: The
SIG-Marcomms
Steering
Committee: Gitte
Kudsk (DeiC),
Maria Ristkok
(EENet of HITSA)
and Lonneke
Walk (SURFnet).

Middle right:
Happy birthday
SIG-Marcomms
(15) and Global
PR Network (5)!



and current member of the SIG. “You have to communicate through the universities and their IT departments. There are the technical aspects and the special advantages of NRENs. Mutual inspiration about practical communications is for me the biggest advantage of participating in the group. What we do now in DeiC and NORDUnet is very much inspired by what I have learned during the years at the meetings.”

Maria Ristkok of the Estonian NREN, EENet of HITSA is another founder and current participant. Unlike Gitte, she had no professional marcomms background when she joined the group. “Users need to understand that the services and structures we offer will make their work life easier. SIG-Marcomms helps NRENs with planning and managing such communications. If you are a small organisation you can’t spend your time and resources on everything you would like to. The experiences of others are a big help because you can skip the trial and error. My interest in different ways of marketing and communications has just grown as a result of my participation, and through the years I completed an MA in communications management.”

Participants have typically come from diverse backgrounds; some with relevant professional training, others being assigned marcomms work as an aside to their main NREN technical or admin role. But the benefits of the group’s information exchange don’t just flow in one direction.

“SIG-Marcomms meetings give me inspiration to think outside my own daily job,” says Lonneke Walk of SURFnet, who has a solid professional marcomms background. “One part of being a marcomms professional is being creative and thinking outside the theory and daily routine. It’s inspiring to hear



how international colleagues are handling the challenges we face. It gives me new insights and it keeps me sharp. The work I do for our users in the Netherlands doesn’t stop at the border; if our target group is working internationally then we should too.”

Lonneke, Maria, and Gitte had all chaired the group when it was a Task Force. When it became a Special Interest Group two years ago they joined together as the steering committee. They have proved a great team in generating topics and sharing the work to secure presenters, finalise agendas and agree on key points to be reported in blogs to the wider community. They have made meetings as interactive and hands-on as possible, with training and workshops, and ensured a friendly welcome to new participants so they feel comfortable at the events and following up via the mailing list.

With a satisfaction survey about each meeting and each year, the steering committee gets plenty of feedback.

“The best thing is to think about how we can make each meeting even better than the last one. How can we make it useful for everybody? When

you get the positive feedback from the participants, I always know why I do this,” says Lonneke.

“I believe in change to make things better and I’d rather be active than passive. Although it takes some time and dedication, it’s definitely worth it,” agrees Maria.

“The more engaged you are in an activity the more you gain from it,” adds Gitte. “Being in the SIG and its steering committee has given me the valuable possibility to be an active member of the international NREN community, even as a non-technical person. Being able to influence the directions the SIG is taking and the overall themes of the meetings ensures for me that participating in the SIG keeps adding value to my own job.”

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