



# A GUIDE TO **ENGAGING REMOTE EMPLOYEES**

Communications Advice for the **Digital Workforce**

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## THE NEW NORMAL

Before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, organizations of all types were already making efforts to engage remote employees and move at least some tasks off-site, at least some of the time. Working from home either full- or part-time had been on the rise: the percentage of workers doing things remotely at least once a week had grown 400% since 2010.

Exact numbers vary according to the source, but somewhere around 5-7 million people, or around 3.5% of the workforce, were telecommuting at least half-time by March of 2020, and around 43% worked remotely at least once in a while. All you had to do was look around the office where desks were empty 50-60% of the time.

### Give the People What They Want

More than half of workers said that they could work from home sometimes (a [Citrix](#) poll in 2019 has that number as high as 62%, with that skyrocketing to 95% for knowledge workers). [Owl Labs](#) found that 80% of employees wanted their organizations to figure out a way for them to work from home; 27% even said they'd take a 10-20% pay cut in exchange for the possibility. Offering this became an important part of attracting and retaining talent, improving work-life balance and providing flexibility.

These trends accelerated dramatically after March 2020. According to [Nicholas Bloom](#), an economist at Stanford, an astonishing 42% of the American workforce was currently working from home full-time in June. When you consider that a third of workers lost their jobs, that left just 26% still working on site. Essentially, the U.S. had become a work from home economy in less than a year.

Telecommuting has been key in keeping the economy afloat. Without remote work, lockdowns would have failed to slow the spread of the virus, and the entire economy would have collapsed. People in white collar jobs obviously have an easier time completing their tasks out of the office – no one has yet figured out how to enable a convenience store or fast-food worker to assist people while sitting in a home office.

Having said that, some of those industries that would seem to be remote-work-proof are transforming. Like food, either from restaurants or stores. [More people are using delivery or pick up options](#), and they're ordering more than when they could only dine in. By the end of the year, at least a third of Americans were using a food delivery option at least once a week, 40% more restaurants started offering a home delivery option and specialized companies like Grubhub saw an average 20% rise in order size. The U.S. is now the second largest food delivery market in the world (China has the number one slot), and many restaurants say they will continue to offer delivery once the pandemic has ended.

If that's what's happening with perishables, you can imagine what's going on in office environments. In almost all sectors, the workplace experience is changing. Even prior to the pandemic in 2019, Owl Labs found that over half of all in-office employees wanted to telecommute at least part-time. [Buffer](#) finds that 97.6% of the people surveyed said that they want to work remotely, at least some of the time, for the rest of their working lives. Quite a few people already wanted it, and now that more have tried it, they don't want to go back to the ways things were before.

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## Employees Surveyed Said...

**97.6%** Want to work remotely at least some of the time

**80%** Want their organization to figure out a way for them to work at home

**27%** Would take a 10-20% pay cut in exchange for the ability to work remotely

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As mentioned before, some people say they'd take a pay cut in order to work from home. That's partly because, when looking at things from a wider perspective, it's actually in their best interest. Almost a third of people working remotely personally save \$5000 a year in costs (commute, lunches, daycare, etc.) and companies save an average of \$10,000 per year for every employee that works at least half-time out of the office. But there's more to the bottom-line benefits than just dollars and cents.

## Happier Employees = Higher Productivity

Over three-quarters of people working remotely say they are more productive than when they were in the office. Contrary to the now-old-fashioned belief that the office is the best place to get work done, [Global Workplace Analytics](#) finds that in-office workers are 35-40% less productive than their colleagues working remotely, and workplace distractions cost the business world an astonishing \$600 billion a year. 27% of companies say their overall productivity has risen since pandemic-enforced telecommuting started, while 67% say it's about the same as before.

There's more job satisfaction among remote employees than those stuck in the office and study after study has shown that happy workers are far more productive. A lot of that is the much-touted work-life balance. People can take breaks when they need to instead of rest periods predetermined by the job clock. Also, different people are at their peak productivity at different times of the day, and remote workers can adjust their schedules to take advantage of their own individual rhythms. We're not all morning people, after all. Counter-intuitively, remote employees report fewer distractions, probably because they have total control over their schedules and routines.

And don't underestimate the boon of not having to commute. Not only is rush hour wearisome, it's also time consuming. Commute times in America have been increasing steadily since 1980. In 2018, the average person spent 225 hours a year going to and from work. That's over nine full 24-hour days! Plus, time for gas and car maintenance. That's a week and a half less time for family or friends or hobbies or even just resting. And this is the average – by 2018, 10% of commuters were traveling 60 minutes or more one-way, and one million more people had a 90-minute one-way commute than in 2010.

All this is going to continue in the future. It's estimated that 25-30% of the entire workforce will be remote at least twice a week by the end of 2021. Even back at the start of it all, [Gartner](#) found that 74% of companies were planning to make at least 5% of their workforce remote once the pandemic was over, with a quarter saying it'll be at least 10%. And 4% of companies are planning to shift half their workforce to regular or permanent remote work conditions.

This marks one of the greatest shifts in work habits in over a century. The repercussions of this one change, moving to a more remote workforce, will ripple out in new and perhaps unexpected ways.

*"In-office workers are 35-40% less productive than their colleagues working remotely."*

Economist Nicholas Bloom predicts people will start moving to more suburban or even rural areas. People who don't especially like living in cities but do so because it makes their commutes easier will be able to migrate to more open spaces and larger homes. People who want to stay in an urban center will find it a little less crowded. When people do commute (since many organizations will most likely end up adopting some sort of hybrid remote/in-office model) they'll find fewer vehicles on the roads, which means rush hour could end up becoming a thing of the past.

Everything that is happening, and is about to happen, is made possible by technological innovations that continue to hit the market at an increasing pace. The new office is what makes it all possible.

## THE NEW OFFICE

Most businesses will adjust to the post-pandemic world by going virtual to some extent. It might be that the majority of employees work remotely at least some of the time, or maybe only something like 10% will have that option. Even organizations that try to return to a pre-pandemic set up will almost certainly adopt some sort of hybrid workplace set up. Some employers might be reticent, wishing to "get back to normal" as quickly as possible, but many employees have expressed a desire to have a remote option as part of their regular workflow. Competition for talent will eventually drive organizations to adopt more modern processes and technology tools in the years and decades to come.

A lot of these changes will be employee-led, but companies will soon see the benefits of having a hybrid office environment. One example is the actual physical space. Fewer people in the office on a given day means you don't need as large a venue. And a smaller footprint means lower rent and utilities costs. Even before the pandemic, there was a push toward non-traditional office arrangements like hot desking and office hoteling.

Hot desking grew out a desire to reduce or eliminate cubicle farms, which studies showed lowered morale and engagement. In short, it means no one had an assigned desk or area – you take whatever space is free that day. The drawback was that sometimes an employee could spend 10-20 minutes at the start of the workday looking for a place to sit, which is not terribly efficient. People also prefer having a place that's "theirs", so often the same people would sit at the same place every time and feel very uncomfortable if that space they'd mentally taken ownership of wasn't available. Office hoteling is a variant of this, but instead of a free-for-all, people reserve a particular workspace in advance.

Again, there is certainly some financial sense to this. A 2020 report by global commercial real estate firm [Jones Lang LaSalle](#) shows that organizations average 40-60% space utilization on any given day. That's a lot of wasted real estate being paid for. In expensive cities like London and New York, the cost of one desk is \$18,000 a year, whether it's being used or not. So, an office with 200 desks that's only being used 60% of the time means that 80 desks are not being used on average, which costs that organization up to \$1.4 million annually.



In the office



WFH



Frontline Workers



Meeting Rooms



Collab Spaces



On the road

### Going Hybrid

The hybrid office is the fastest growing way to approach these issues. If some of the workforce is operating remotely each day, then the company can downsize its infrastructure, keep all its employees happy and save money. We will still have offices, but they will be smaller and more flexible, configured for a shifting workforce. Instead of fully equipping each desk area with everything it might need, enable employees to be more self-sufficient.

Each person has a laptop and can access remote colleagues (or even people in different parts of a building or campus) using apps and business communication platforms like Microsoft Teams, Slack and SharePoint (see the New tech section below for more ideas). Everyone essentially becomes a mobile office unto themselves. If any printing needs to be done, a couple of WiFi printers per floor should be sufficient. The only thing they can't carry around with them is the coffee maker. (But that's why we invented cafés with WiFi.)

People will still sometimes need to gather in groups for meetings and training sessions, but almost certainly a few of those participants will be remote. Open plan collaboration spaces for training or brainstorming can be modular and reconfigurable. You'll probably still need one or two large conference rooms, but most other meeting spaces can be redesigned as small huddle spaces for quick meetings of a few in-person participants (though you can have as many people coming in online as you like – there's no additional space needed for them). If you ever do need a really large room for something (like the CEO is retiring and everyone wants to be there in person), it'll actually be cheaper to rent a space somewhere for that one-time event, instead paying for it every month.

And, as funny as this may sound, more flexible work environments are cleaner. Meaning there's less clutter because people don't hoard things at their permanent desk areas because they don't have permanent desks. They also generate less trash and use fewer resources, like printer toner, coffee pods and office supplies. Letting people book space in advance can also help with hygiene. Using a reservation system of some kind for office hoteling means that you can make sure a space is cleaned and sanitized before the next occupant arrives.

These technology-led changes will affect nearly every aspect of organizations, from the public-facing to the very top. Lobby or reception areas might be able to transition to self-help kiosks or touchscreens that include answers to common questions and detailed wayfinding. This can then free up that worker who was simply manning a desk – surely that person can be better used elsewhere?

Virtual C-suites and managers can interact with employees remotely, and even be available more often. Instead of scheduling a meeting and a meeting room to ask three questions of a manager, an employee can just zip off a chat message and get a response in less time. The concern that technology may drive people apart is unfounded – it can actually give more people access and allow managers to keep in more regular touch with their workers.

Although employees prefer personal interaction for some tasks, a lot of the day-to-day can be digital. A report by [PricewaterhouseCoopers](#) shows while a plurality of people prefer face-to-face communications for things like problem-solving, performance reviews and giving feedback, when it comes to things like dealing with HR and benefits, or getting IT assistance, more people would rather do those tasks digitally. It's also worth considering that as the world around us becomes more digital, people want to improve and increase their digital skills. An organization that makes it easy for workers to get those skills will benefit in greater employee satisfaction and loyalty.

# 11 INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS TRENDS FOR THE HYBRID WORKPLACE



Realign business mission & strategies with the new environment. Make sure you IC and HR teams are involved in strategic planning. Employee engagement and EX has to be embedded in all facets of the business.



Equip your remote workforce with tools & training they need to work from home. Don't just buy hardware and set up VPNs. People need training, policies and guidance to be effective in the hybrid environment.



Deploy enterprise communication & collaboration apps like Microsoft Teams. Choose a platform that best meets your needs. Combine calendars, chat, projects and more into a single app.



Increase the use of intranets, chat apps & videoconferencing. Whether or not you use an enterprise app, you need to exploit all channels and publish a steady stream of information to keep people engaged.



Host virtual teambuilding & social programs to build community. People want comradery. Create opportunities for everyone to get together, no matter where they are.



Let employees choose how they want to receive communications. If people can use their preferred platform, they'll engage more often and more deeply. Be consistent across channels.



Publish goals, KPIs & data-driven messaging to keep people on track. Provide benchmarks. Let people know progress to goals, and provide meaningful, actionable feedback on a regular basis.



Mix content to support both business objectives & employee wellbeing. Hybrid workers can experience burnout. Focus on wellbeing to show empathy and provide solutions.



Offer more videos, podcasts & interactive media experiences. Stop push communications and start a dialog. The more participative a message, the more engaging it will be.



Increase & improve success measures for internal communications. Don't just measure reach. Check for understanding, and measure goals and outcomes. Use calls to action.



Encourage more feedback & participation in the communications process. Encourage lateral communication versus just top-down. Do surveys, and reward employee participation and feedback.



### Inspiring Interaction

Back in 2014, [Harvard Business Review](#) found that workers who can control their environment and how they use it are more satisfied with their workplace and their jobs, are more innovative and creative, and perform better. This trend has just increased in the ensuing years. It's thought that the hybrid workplace approach also helps eliminate silo mentality, since people are interacting with one another more than in a cubicle farm. Today, when people come into the office (instead of working remotely), they want that connection and sense of belonging. If they're just going to sit in a cubicle isolated from everyone else, then why even bother coming in at all? (Unless that's how they prefer to work, of course.)

Just as the space itself becomes more flexible, a hybrid workplace approach can actually engage more employees by allowing them to work in the way they like best. Scott likes to sit off by himself at a desk, but Fatima prefers sitting on a couch by a window. Variety is the spice of life, and that's just as true at work as it is anywhere else. Just like you probably have a number of options in the break room to accommodate a wide variety of diets and preferences, modifying your environment to different workstyles is only going to benefit the organization.

Just a few years ago, [Accenture](#) found that the trends companies are seeing in CX (customer experience) are being mirrored in the realm of EX (employee experience). Companies with good EX outperformed the S&P 500 by 122% and were 21% more profitable. They said the time of hyper-personalization was upon us, and it's all being led by technology.

Out in the wider world beyond the workplace, technology will continue to drive change in the ways people interact with one another and their surroundings. In their social lives, people will continue to communicate and connect using apps and social media from just about anywhere they care to be, and we can expect AI, AR and VR to become more commonplace fairly soon. These CX trends will continue to inform and shape EX as well. After all, it seems kind of silly to make people use methods and technologies at work that are less up to date and efficient than they ones they use to browse recipes and talk to their grandmother while at home or sitting in a café.

### 6 Tips for Work from Home Policies

Having a detailed remote work policy is one way to make sure that everyone is on the same page, regardless of where they're working. [ProjectManager.com](#) has a handy list of various examples and templates for work from home policies. [Employers.org](#) has a fill-in-the-blank template that can be adapted to many specific situations and environments.

A good work from home (WFH) policy should:

- 1. Be clear as to purpose.** Why allow people to work remotely? Generally, it's to raise your employee value proposition (EVP), which is what the organization offers in exchange for the workers' skills, experience and capabilities. Put plainly, working from home is an option because some people want it, and it enhances their experience with the company. The policy should be clear on why WFH is valuable to both employees and the organization, and how the policy will be used.

- 2. Define eligibility.** Obviously, some positions are better suited to remote work than others. An on-call nurse has to be physically present to assist patients, for example. Make it clear which positions are eligible and which ones aren't (but also explain why those that aren't, aren't). You might even individualize it a bit – employees who can demonstrate reliability and discipline, and can work independently, would be candidates for remote work if their tasks allow for that. Being aware of trial periods, trade secrets and cybersecurity could be another factor to consider. WFH might only be available to people who've been with the organization for six months or a year.



# WFH Policies

Be clear  
as to  
purpose

Define  
eligibility

Outline the  
approval  
process

Identify  
times

Define  
expectations

Consider  
tech

**3. Outline the approval process.** How does someone request to work from home? Do they have to initiate things with a request for each instance, or can they negotiate a flexible schedule? Who reviews requests and what criteria will those people use to make their determination? What are factors that will be considered? Do they have to give a reason?

Examples might be:

- Childcare issues
- Commute times
- Illness
- Weather
- Home emergencies
- Improving overall work/life balance

**4. Identify times.** Are there certain days or time periods when it's better that an employee be in the office? What are those and why? Do WFH employees have to be online for a continuous period of time or can they check in throughout the day? What scheduling system and processes should they use to show their availability?

**5. Define expectations.** How will the worker communicate with the main office, colleagues and managers? Are there expectations about responsiveness? How do time-sensitive matters get handled? Are there measurements in place to track productivity? If so, what are they?

**6. Consider technology and supplies.** Do they have all the equipment they need to succeed from home? Is their security sufficient or does it need an upgrade? If more items are needed, who is responsible for supplying them – the company or the employee? (Will the company reimburse the employee? Is there a maximum amount?) What about other office supplies (e.g., Post-it Notes, etc.)?

There has to be a certain amount of trust built into any WFH policy. Micromanaging virtual workers will certainly impact their efficiency and negatively impact the positive intangibles that WFH can provide. You have to assume they will do their best, and then evaluate if they do. If not, maybe things need to be adjusted. The process isn't really any different than evaluating the work of an in-office employee.

The way to do this is with various measurement tools, such as KPIs. Hopefully, your organization is already using and sharing them, so adding a couple more for remote work is an easy process. If not, now might be a good time to put some in place. Unless the virtual employee is simply evaluated on a task-by-task basis, being able to see what's happening becomes even more important when people aren't in the office every day. And that's a two-way street – your remote workers will also benefit from having transparency into how they're doing and what, if anything, needs improvement.

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## 11 Tips for Setting Up a Home Office

A lot of workers just aren't ready for a WFH situation – the internet is rife with stories of people trying to work at a dining room table in an uncomfortable chair while their dog barks at the mail carrier. Setting things up right can make working from home as easy as working in the office – maybe even easier. You first have to answer a few questions:

- How will the home office be used? Will all work be done on a computer or will there also be paper documents to deal with? Will most tasks be online or offline? Will you be storing digital files on your own hard drive or on a remote server (or in the cloud) somewhere? Do you need a faster internet connection or WiFi router?
- How much streaming and/or videoconferencing will there be? If you expect a lot, a good microphone and webcam will be essential.
- Will other people be around in the background, or is the workspace dedicated? Pets?

Once you've thought about what work you need to do, where you'll do your work and when, you can tackle the tools you'll need to be happy and productive.

- 1. A laptop will give you more options** than a desktop computer. Make sure you've got lots of memory but even more importantly, lots of RAM. As far as where you work, you're ultimately looking for is a space that's flexible yet doesn't compromise productivity. If most work will be online (and it probably will be), then a really fast internet connection is crucial. WiFi is best because you have mobility around the space, but the most important thing for connectivity is that you have as fast an internet connection as possible and a strong signal.
- 2. Use a desk instead of a table** or something else that's been commandeered for work purposes. Good work desks are usually around 29-30 inches off the floor – you should be able to get your legs under it with room to spare. A desk that can convert into a standing desk is a great idea since it gives your body the option to have several positions throughout the workday. If you're using a laptop, get a stand for it that can be angled. If you use pens and other office supplies, have a holder of some sort so you don't have them scattered all over your work surface.
- 3. Your chair is key to comfort.** It needs to be ergonomic, and able to have the height and even pitch angle adjusted. Some sort of lumbar support is also a good idea. If you don't have an adjustable desk, try varying the height of your chair throughout the day. Armrests are optional, but don't lean on them all day. The purpose of an arm rest is to let your arm sit in the correct position, not to take your body's weight.
- 4. Think about getting an external keyboard** for your laptop. Again, this increases the variety available to you. A wireless keyboard/mouse combo is a good idea if you like using a mouse – this connects to your laptop with a single dongle in just one USB slot. There are lots of ergonomic options for both keyboards and mice, and most people adjust to them within just a few days.
- 5. Choose the right monitor.** A monitor that's too small is doing you no favors, but don't just go out and get a huge one if that's not good for your specific set up. The common wisdom is that when you're sitting in your chair, the top of the monitor should be just below eye level. So, get a size where that can happen. Put it straight in front of you versus off to the side where you'll have to turn your head. And while it's important to make sure the screen's not too dim, don't have it up on the brightest setting either. You don't want eye strain after sitting there for hours every day.
- 6. Consider using two monitors** in extended display mode. This greatly increases the variety available to you during the day. It also gives you a lot more desktop space. If your organization is using a collaboration app like Teams that you need to keep open all the time, you can have it open in a small window in the corner of one screen all the time, easy to monitor and access when you need to.
- 7. Don't work in the dark,** with only your monitor for illumination. Try to use a space that has some natural light at least sometimes throughout the day. And avoid glare on your monitor, either from a window or a light source in the room. It might not seem like a big deal at first, but over time that will grow into a major annoyance.

8. **Get a surge protector** for all your electronics. Better to have it and never need it than to have everything blow out one day. Some people take the extra step of getting an Uninterruptible Power Supply (UPS), which is basically a big battery for the worst-case scenario of all of your power going out.
9. Whenever possible, **go wireless and handsfree**. Cables can become irritating and tie you to a specific location. Don't forget that many devices come Bluetooth-enabled these days. Whatever cables you do have should be neatly run and cable tied to avoid trips and mess.
10. **Optimize your desktop** with shortcuts to the most frequently used apps and folders. And be sure to master whatever enterprise apps your organization is using. Keeping a complete and accurate calendar is also going to help smooth things out and make everything much more efficient. If you're not sure how to use the tools they've given you, ask for training and best practices.
11. **Consider your internet security**. Get a good firewall and think about using encryption software or VPNs when applicable to further reduce the risk of crucial, even proprietary data, getting leaked or hacked.

### 6 WFH Tips

A good physical set up is important, but there are other things to keep in mind when optimizing your home office. Little things can become big problems over time if they aren't addressed right from the start.

- 1 **Set boundaries.** That means with yourself and others in your space. It's best if you have a dedicated work area that is just for work and nothing else. If it can be closed off with a separate door, even better. Keeping the lines clear between work and home life will become important to your mental wellbeing in the long run. This also means that, when you are working, that's what you should be doing. Don't check social media or personal emails during designated work times. Keep work and personal time and tasks separate.
- 2 **Minimize distractions.** If there are other people around, let them know when you're working so they understand not to disturb you. Setting a clear schedule that everyone can agree to can prevent headaches in the future. This becomes especially important if you have conference calls or other realtime interactions with colleagues or clients. The occasional cat walking in front of the camera is fine, but too often and it looks unprofessional. Even a seemingly minor interruption can cascade into delays. Studies show it takes 20 minutes for most people to get back in the flow of things after being interrupted, so just six small interruptions during a day translates to two hours of reduced productivity.
- 3 **Watch your hours.** One of the surprising things we've learned during the pandemic lockdown is that people report that they end up working more in a WFH situation than when they're in the office. This is likely because the lines between work and home have blurred throughout the day. Help prevent this by demarcating things and sticking to a schedule.
- 4 **Give it a rest.** It's also important to take breaks throughout the day. Even if it's just for five minutes. Get up and physically leave your work area. Do some stretches. Make a sandwich. Even while sitting or standing at your desk, every 20 minutes you should give your eyes a rest by looking at something that's 20 feet away for 20 seconds. This helps reduce the risk of eye strain. Some people resort to productivity tools like Time Out or Pomodoro that take over your screen, basically locking you out for 30 seconds or so to force you to rest.
- 5 **Grab some fuel.** Keep yourself hydrated and fed throughout the day. You're probably used to having constant access to coffee and snacks when in the office, so stock up your home in a similar way. And sometimes just drinking a cool glass of water can wake you up more than a cup of coffee or tea.
- 6 **End it.** Most importantly, when the workday is over, it's over. You aren't commuting, so you have extra time for tinkering around the house or spending time with family and friends. Part of the reason you're in a WFH program is to improve your work-life balance. Don't undo that by extending the workday into your personal time.

# 16 TIPS FOR REMOTE WORKERS

SET YOURSELF UP FOR SUCCESS

## WFH OFFICE

1. Get a laptop instead of a desktop for more flexibility.
2. Use a desk instead of a table (roughly 30 inches off the floor).
3. Have an ergonomic chair with adjustable height.
4. Get an external keyboard for your laptop.
5. Put the top of your monitor at eye level. Consider two monitors.
6. Have some natural light in your workspace.
7. Get a surge protector for all your equipment.
8. Try to go wireless and hands-free when you can. (Keep cables neat.)
9. Reduce clutter in your work area and on your desktop.
10. Find the fastest internet connection possible, and make sure it's secure.

## WFH HABITS

1. Set boundaries in your space and with your time.
2. Maintain a work-home schedule for your household.
3. Beware of burnout. Answering emails on your phone is work.
4. Take regular breaks, at least 20 seconds every 20 minutes.
5. Stay hydrated and don't forget to eat.
6. When the workday is done, it's done.



## THE NEW PROCESS

So, many companies are going to implement some sort of hybrid workplace structure soon, and more will follow later. This will change processes and workflows somewhat, most notably in that set work hours will decline for employees that don't interact with clients or work in spaces where a physical presence is necessary, like a factory or retail shop. But as the number of virtual employees on a given day increases, it'll mainly be a matter of doing more of the things that organizations are already doing.

Obviously, there'll be more interactions of a digital nature. People will have more virtual calls and chats more often, rather than scheduling a long meeting to cover many topics. They'll also check in more frequently with their managers and teams. One effect of the increase in the number of interactions is that they'll most likely become more informal to some extent. This is actually a good thing – virtual employees still want to feel a sense of connectedness and camaraderie. Communicating with people in many short bursts throughout the day actually mimics what it's like to interact with colleagues in a face-to-face environment.

### Personalized Platforms

While companies may want to try and dictate which technologies everyone will use, that will end up changing to a multi-platform approach before too long. Can you imagine if, in your personal life, you were a Facebook user, but someone required you to use TikTok instead? You might give it a try, but you would never be truly comfortable with that platform.

Instead, we're going to see more omni-channel communications – the same message replicated on multiple platforms, at least for messaging that needs to be more widespread or is more formal in nature. So, an email for those who still prefer email, an intranet post, a group chat in Teams, all with the same content. Improving workflows and using centralized content management tools will make this a seamless and fairly easy process.

Each organization is going to be different, and each department or team might also be different. The one-size-fits-all approach to management and communications is going away. Yes, there can be a unified corporate culture, but the place is still made up of individuals. And to attract, engage and satisfy employees, you'll need to cater to the tools and techniques they prefer.

*“The one-size-fits-all approach to management and communications is going away.”*

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## Rethinking IC

With the digital workplace becoming the norm, it will be more important than ever to have a unified communications strategy. Employees and managers have had to adopt new methods of connecting and communicating, and new ideas and processes have come out of that. Here are some of the major ways that the hybrid workplace is predicted to affect internal communications (IC) in the near future:

### 1. Internal Communications Elevated

It's been a longtime struggle to convince the C-suite that the internal communications role is as crucial to success as any other business operation. Investment and inclusion have often been elusive, but 2020 changed that. The rapid move to a remote and hybrid workforce put internal comms in the spotlight.

Suddenly, IC professionals have a seat at the table, being included in business strategy, and receiving long-requested budgets for staff, technology and training. But it's not all celebration – with this more visible role workloads have skyrocketed, and accountability is at the forefront (more on that later). Internal comms is increasingly strategizing not only with executives, but also with IT, HR and front-line managers.

Everyone has recognized that they are all targeting the same audiences, and that their messages can blend, overlap and reinforce each other. These teams are now working together to coordinate, prioritize and plan messaging campaigns and calendars to the great benefit of employees who used to get separate, sometimes conflicting, communications.

### 2. Focus on Employee Experience

Employee experience is the journey an employee has with the organization from onboarding through retirement, and it encompasses the workplace, relationships and wellbeing. HR has been focusing on the employee experience for a few years now, but recently internal communications teams are taking up the reins.

The hybrid workplace offers a new employee experience. It's increasingly remote and increasingly digital, which presents both challenges and opportunities. A positive employee experience demands constant care. It's as much about culture as it is day-to-day tasks. It should be organic, holistic and carry over into every interaction and communication.

Effective internal communication and a good employee experience lets everyone – whether in the office or out – to fully participate, develop and succeed.

### 3. Mobile-first Communications

Millennials and Gen Z account for a little over a third of today's workforce. These workers are extremely tech-savvy and mobile-dependent. Communicators who want to reach and engage them will need to adopt mobile tech solutions that match their habits and preferences.

Many organizations have either launched or expanded their digital communications in 2020, deploying enterprise messaging apps like Teams, as well as collaboration apps, chat bots and other mobile-friendly tools. Intranets were redesigned to be responsive, everyone got a crash course in videoconferencing etiquette, and internal comms expanded the number of channels it had to manage.

Moving forward, those channels need to be streamlined, optimized and fully adopted by the hybrid workforce. It's no longer enough to post the same message you'd put in an email on your intranet, digital signage or messaging app. For one thing, information has to be organized and searchable.

It's estimated that employees spend on average 2.5 hours a day searching for the information they need. That wasted time doesn't just stifle productivity, it frustrates employees and decreases their trust, interest and engagement with communications.

### **4. Technology Adoption**

With the rapid deployment of mobile-first and work-from-home technologies, a lot of organizations and employees have been operating in crisis mode. Now that the hybrid workplace is a certainty, it's time to invest in fully adopting those tools.

The first step will be streamlining and consolidating. Organizations will land on a single platform or the fewest number of apps to serve their goals. In many cases, people have had up to a dozen different digital communication tools they're trying to learn, use and maintain. Companies need to find what works and downsize to that. It's guaranteed that apps will expand their features in the future, so successful adoption of the current version is essential so that rolling out updates goes smoothly.

Technology budgets will start to include services to train employees on new tech and tools – not just the buttons and features, but best practices, policies and how they can ask questions and provide feedback. Communicators will need to lead in adopting new technologies to effectively support rolling it out to the organization at large.

An essential component of effective communications for a remote workforce is delivering content how, where and when they want it. Messaging will need to be tailored to the audience and the channel. A one-size-fits-all approach won't work.

### **5. More Visual Communication**

Visual communication goes hand-in-hand with digital. As communicators adopt more mobile and online channels, visuals will grow in importance.

People notice and engage with visuals more than they do with text. Intranets, messaging apps, digital signs and other digital channels are designed with visual communications in mind. Internal comms will be focusing more on delivering attention-getting photos, infographics, videos and other visual content. Audio will also gain popularity with more internal podcasts and video streams.

With YouTube the second most popular search engine in the world, video will be more relevant than ever. Everyone has a camera in their pocket and audiences are familiar with, and receptive to, lower production values. In fact, many employees consider informal videos to be more personal and trustworthy.

Every message should be examined to see if it can be presented visually versus text. If something requires lengthy copy, design a visual hook or summary and let people link out to the text. Better yet, tell a story with a staggered campaign.

### **6. Focus on Employee Recognition**

With fewer people coming together physically, it's crucial to prioritize employee recognition.

Communicators will need to build processes and plans for recognition into their digital channels. If they don't already have them, organizations will need to put peer-to-peer recognition funnels in place, and create a calendar for simple things like anniversaries and birthdays.

Recognition should be on both the macro and micro level. Employees need meaningful feedback and recognition from managers, but they also crave public recognition in front of their peers. All of this helps employees feel more connected to their workmates and the organization. Be sure to call out employee achievements across channels, with a priority on the channels that the person being recognized prefers.



### 7. Democratized Communications

The days of top-down communications are waning. People want the employee experience to mirror their personal styles of communicating. Things like messaging apps and social media offer everyone a place to start and participate in conversations. Internal comms teams will need to build in commenting, emojis, message boards and chat to keep employees engaged and satisfied.

Although there will always be some centralized communications coming from HQ, more content will be sourced from employees. Lateral communications between peers will also take on elevated importance in the hybrid workplace, providing connection and empowerment for remote workers.

Organizations should encourage employees to contribute to different channels directly or submit media for distribution. Be sure to publish policies and have feedback levers in place to measure employee satisfaction with the content contribution process.

### 8. Wellbeing Takes Center Stage

Wellbeing, both physical and mental, has been in the spotlight since the outbreak of COVID-19. However, the resulting workplace changes have had their own health effects.

[A employee culture survey by Gartner](#) found that “employees who are moderately stressed underperform those who aren’t by 5% — reducing a \$1 billion top line by \$32.5 million at an average company. Highly stressed employees impact revenue even more.” [Their later study](#) found that 29% of people who worked full-time from home reported burnout very often or always.

Information gives people a sense of security, safety and control. Effective messaging that keeps employees informed, educated, updated and engaged is key to their wellbeing. In addition, communicators can promote wellbeing values, tips and resources to support the corporate message. Tell your employees you care about their health, wellness and work/life balance.

### 9. Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

According to [dei.extension.org](http://dei.extension.org): *Diversity is the presence of differences that may include race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity, nationality, socioeconomic status, language, (dis)ability, age, religious commitment, or political perspective. Populations that have been-and remain-underrepresented among practitioners in the field and marginalized in the broader society.*

*Equity is promoting justice, impartiality and fairness within the procedures, processes, and distribution of resources by institutions or systems. Tackling equity issues requires an understanding of the root causes of outcome disparities within our society.*

*Inclusion is an outcome to ensure those that are diverse actually feel and/or are welcomed. Inclusion outcomes are met when you, your institution, and your program are truly inviting to all. To the degree to which diverse individuals are able to participate fully in the decision-making processes and development opportunities within an organization or group.*

Social issues cannot be ignored. Modern employees expect transparency and activism from their employer. At a minimum, they expect a workplace culture of respect and inclusion. IC professionals will have to start exploring how internal communication strategies can address these issues if they don't already, and at a minimum, need to advertise the organization's values and expectations for employees' behavior toward others.

Younger generations are deeply invested in these topics. Organizations that have built a diverse, equal and inclusive place will promote those topics in the communications calendar. Those that haven't started building DEI into the employee experience will want to start now.

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## 10. Emphasizing Sustainability

Another topic that's important to the modern workforce is sustainability. Modern employees don't just want to know how they fit into their team, they want to know how their team fits into the company, and how the company fits into the local community and the world at large.

The [Cone Communications Millennial Employee Study](#) found that 64% of Millennials won't take a job if their employer doesn't have a strong corporate social responsibility (CSR) policy, and 83% would be more loyal to a company that helps them contribute to social and environmental issues (vs. 70% U.S. average).

A [study by WeSpire](#) found that Gen-Z is "The first generation to prioritize purpose over salary. They read Mission Statements and Values documents to select where they work and want their employer's values to match their values. They expect consistency and authenticity and will call you out, often publicly, if they don't see it. They will leave companies they believe are hiding or putting too much spin on bad news, ignoring their negative environmental or social impacts, or that have toxic workplace cultures."

Many organizations already have sustainability initiatives in place, and those that don't likely will within the next few years. Whether it's donating to carbon-neutral initiatives, volunteering and activism or a simply recycling program, internal communicators will need to include those programs in their messaging.

Internal comms can use campaigns to educate employees about what the organization is doing, but also how they can help. It's always better to provide specific action that motivates employees rather than vague jargon. The goal for companies who are serious about CSR is buy-in and participation, not just greenwashing.

## 11. Data-Driven Communications

Methods to deliver realtime data will continue to gain traction. In the hybrid workplace, it's crucial to keep everyone on the same page since they aren't working alongside one another. Publishing metrics and KPIs ensures that each employee knows the goal and how much progress they've made at any given time. It also gives more weight to your communications and provides transparency.

We're used to having information at our fingertips, so internal communications have to be just as timely. Integrating existing data sources like dashboards and data visualizations into communication channels can offer up information at a glance without staff having to create messages from scratch.

# Modern IC Priorities

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IC Leadership

Focus on EX

Mobile-first Comms

Tech Adoption

More Visuals

Employee Recognition

Democratized Comms

Focus on Wellbeing

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

Emphasizing Sustainability

Data-Driven Comms

# 25 SURPRISING INTERNAL COMMS STATS

A recent study asked IC professionals about the challenges and opportunities that will influence their plans for the next few years. Here are some surprising stats from that survey:

## INFLUENCE & EX

- 66%** of IC pros say influence on senior leadership increased due to the pandemic
- Just 40%** have an overarching IC strategy to cover more than one year
- 68%** say employee experience (EX) is discussed at C-suite level
- 20%** say EX isn't discussed at the executive level
- 37%** have change plans in place for new information and collaboration tools
- 27%** do not have a clear strategy for handling digital experience as part of EX

## FOCUS & RESOURCES

- 49%** will focus on engaging teams around purpose, strategy, values
- 41%** plan to develop / refresh their IC strategy, framework and tone of voice
- 40%** will dedicate resources to improving digital / social channels

## EMERGING TRENDS (2-3 YRS)

- 54%** Featuring diverse voices / inclusivity
- 46%** Authenticity in messages
- 43%** Employee advocacy / user-generated content strategies
- 42%** Subscription models for IC (choosing how you're communicated with)
- 33%** Drive for integrated, omni-channel frameworks
- 32%** Data-driven cultures
- 21%** Experiential communications (integrating all 5 senses)

## OMNI-CHANNEL

- 46%** plan on greater investment in digital channels
- Only 51%** have channel-specific editorial calendars or frameworks in place
- 31%** want stronger emphasis on employee voice and feedback
- 52%** have no plans to let employees choose how they receive communications

## CONTENT PRIORITIES

- 70%** will increase focus on mental health and employee wellbeing
- 55%** will focus on diversity and inclusion
- 52%** will focus on new ways of working
- 47%** see a need for increased leadership visibility
- 17%** will focus on presenting a more authentic tone of voice

Timely collection and analysis of IC performance data will be vital to successful employee engagement. It's not enough to just measure how many messages were sent, or even how many were received. That's just measuring reach. Teams need to measure employee understanding and satisfaction, as well as behavior change and business outcomes. As organizations employ more apps and digital channels, each one will need to be measured and monitored regularly for quick adjustments to strategy.

And now that communication pros have the C-suite's ear, executives will be looking for solid analytics and employee feedback about campaigns. The higher the investment in internal communications, the more accountability IC has for measurable results for both employee engagement and employee experience.

### Keep it Friendly

Since the new company will be a virtual one with lots of satellites versus physical offices, it's more important than ever to have a culture of communication that connects all locations and people to let them feel like part of one united whole.

Despite all the effort that goes into making sure virtual employees feel connected and included in work processes, it's also important to create opportunities for socializing both inside and outside of work. The number one thing people miss when working the majority of time from home is that social interaction, as in catching up about people's kids, vacations, sports teams they love or love to hate, and so on. This sort of camaraderie building would happen naturally and spontaneously if everyone were in the same environment, but with a sizeable chunk of the workforce operating remotely, it becomes necessary to plan and schedule opportunities for social interaction.

When planning agendas for virtual meetings, be sure to build in some time for general conversation. Do it either at the beginning or the end so people can feel free to catch up without worrying about interrupting the flow. Joining meetings a few minutes early can also give you a little extra time to chat. And encourage people to use their cameras so everyone feels more personal and connected.

At least once a month, there should be some kind of non-work-focused "get together" that combines virtual employees and people on-site. This could be a short trivia match, bingo or any other fun activity. Each event should be fairly short (30 minutes or less) and should be very informal. Naturally, these would have to be voluntary – the point here is to provide this opportunity to those who want it.

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## THE NEW TECH

For people working remotely to do their very best, their home office has to be set up for success. The organization should evaluate each employee's technical needs and provide the necessary tools and equipment, as well as IT support. They can either purchase equipment outright or reimburse people for things they buy on their own.

In terms of ergonomics, employers will have to decide how much they want to be involved in decisions like desks, chairs and lighting. At the very least, WFH employees can get some tips and advice on how to optimize their home office environment. Organizations should compile a list of useful tips for virtual employees and make it available to them.

### Business Communication Platforms

With employees spread out across a city or across the globe, organizations are adopting enterprise platforms to help employees work better together. Collaboration and communication platforms like Microsoft Teams, Slack, Google G Suite, Workplace for Facebook and others had already taken root, but became critical systems in 2020.

The advantages of these platforms aren't restricted to remote employees. Instead, they allow everyone in the company to access a central system for chats, conversations, files, calendars, voice and video meetings, and integrated apps. All of the most popular platforms have both desktop and mobile versions so people can stay connected wherever they are.

If your organization hasn't already settled on an enterprise platform, now is the time. Many companies resorted to multiple apps to handle the unexpected increase in remote workers, and mastering so many different workflows has added stress to already stressed workers. Landing on a single, enterprise platform will let you devote more resources to training and developing best practices, rather than managing multiple apps.

Of course, when deciding on a platform, the business will have to consider what budget's right for them, as well as features and other considerations (IT support, update frequency, subscription terms). But it could be a mistake to make a final decision without soliciting employee input. People are much more likely to adopt and use technology that they prefer, so ask your workforce what features, apps or perks they'd like to have. Consider a trial period for employees to evaluate different options. Even if you have to choose a platform that didn't garner the most votes, explain why and invest in training.

*“Landing on a single, enterprise platform will let you devote more resources to training and developing best practices.”*

### Digital Signage Evolves

As remote engagement has become more important, digital signage has evolved to let organizations expand the reach of their visual communications.

We've known for years that digital signage is an incredibly effective way to communicate with people. Four out of five companies that use digital signage see an increase of up to one-third more sales, especially in the retail sector. More and more organizations are planning to implement a digital signage system in the next couple of years or increase one they've already been using, including 56% of internal communications professionals in North America.

Messages seen on digital signs get 400% more views than static displays and have an astonishing 83% recall rate. Companies that use digital signage as part of their internal communications strategy find their employees are 25% more productive and report a fourfold increase in employee engagement. And employees who are recognized on digital signs feel more appreciated, which results in their being 60% more productive than people who receive recognition through other means. Stats about the effectiveness and impact of digital signage have been trending up for years and aren't expected to lag any time soon.

But how does adding remote workers into the mix change things? Traditionally, digital signage required people to be physically in a space, looking at a physical screen. To a certain extent, that's still true. However, neither the person nor the screen has to be in your office for it to be digital signage. Anything with a screen can be a digital sign.

As content management systems have evolved, more and more endpoints have become available. It used to be just displays mounted on walls. Then touchscreens, video walls and room signs came along to extend the reach for visual communications. Now the technology has evolved again to let you send messages or playlists to responsive webpages, embed them in intranets, or even push them to enterprise apps like Teams. Some can even send your messages via email.

These new endpoints, paired with traditional screens, can all be part of a comprehensive visual communications network that lets you connect with more people in more workspaces – all managed from a single source. By messaging out to people where they are and the way they prefer, you ensure that everyone's on the same page and more connected to the organization as a whole.

The trick for communicators is that omni-channel thinking lets them truly unify how they communicate. Don't create an email, and then a message for digital signs and then a post for Teams and then another one for social media; create one that works on all those platforms and then schedule it to go out to all those different platforms at once. This gives your audience the option to use the method they like best, and it also provides reinforcement if they see your message in more than one place.

Think about how digital signage transforms the way in which people interact with your messaging. For many years now, visual communications have been shifting from push-only messages to dynamic, interactive content.

Instead of just informing people, digital signage has also been connecting them to your communications and one another. Everyone sees the messages, then some of them talk about it, which drives more people to look for them and so on. Wayfinding has gone to interactive touchscreens and directions can even be sent directly to a person's mobile device. QR codes let people use a web browser to get more information, fill out questionnaires and forms, and so on.

Remote engagement is all about continuing to encourage these trends and extend them out to WFH employees. It doesn't matter where they are, they should all be getting the same information and the same opportunity to interact with your communications.

## Space Management

Any facility that's using office hoteling will also need a good room reservation system that updates in real time and is accessible to everybody, regardless of where they're located. The ability to book meeting rooms and collab spaces for face-to-face interactions will become even more important, as a hybrid workforce will need to ensure the spaces they reserve have the videoconferencing and collaboration tools they need. Some organizations may opt not to kit out every room, so they might also have reservation systems for equipment, like monitors, webcams and videoconferencing setups.

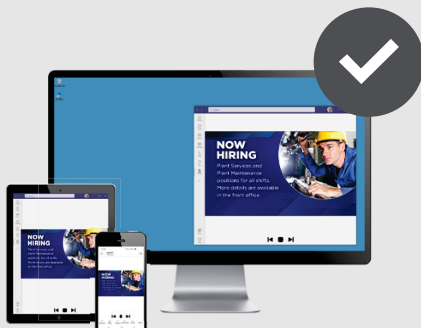
### Reach Employees Wherever They Are with Visix Digital Signage



**In the Building**  
(Displays, Touchscreens  
& Video Walls)



**In Collab & Meeting Areas**  
(Meeting Room Signs)



**Working/Studying at Home**  
(Webpages, Intranets  
& Microsoft Teams)



**On the Go**  
(Responsive HTML5  
Playback on any device)



## The New Content

The “internal” in internal communications refers to within the whole organization, not just a particular room or building. With at least some employees working remotely, it becomes even more important to reinforce culture and policies, motivate people and let them feel connected. The goal is to connect everyone inside and outside the office with the same mission and messaging. And although this guide is focused on virtual engagement, your strategy should be equally weighted for both on-site and off-site employees.

## Omni-channel Opportunities

Omni-channel employee communications, sometimes called multi-channel communications, strive to give the same experience to an employee across all communication platforms. It’s about consistent messaging and branding on all platforms. For internal communications, it might encompass messaging for face-to-face meetings, town halls, videoconferences, email, business communication platforms, intranets, social media, printed posters and digital signs.

Start thinking outside the traditional push model and use any and all communication channels at your disposal to encourage virtual engagement and interaction. Since more people will be using mobiles on the job, interactive content that lets people click, comment and share will get more participation than in the past. And because people aren’t working side-by-side as much, easy feedback systems will be even more important.

The trick is to balance engagement with workload. The fear of every communicator is that with more channels available, they’ll have to work up separate campaigns and creative for all of them. That’s not necessarily so. You will have to discern what works best where, but then you can streamline workflows. This is where visual communications come in handy. For example, a visual that advertises an event (if created at the correct size) could be used for digital signs, social media, intranets, websites, chats and even emails and PowerPoint presentations. If you have the right CMS, you can actually schedule it across multiple channels from one place.

The key is to work out the campaign goals, create assets that you can repurpose across channels, and direct everyone on those channels with a single, measurable call to action. It could be a button click to a registration form, a QR code for a download or just a URL to a webpage with more information. Even if you have to tailor your message a bit for different channels, it’s all the same message inspiring the same desired behavior. And it gives the audience the choice to interact the way they want.

If you’re using virtual engagement correctly, you may find that your employees are interacting more than they did when they were all in the office every day. This is partly because remote employees may be a bit starved for that feeling of inclusion. And interactions that aren’t face-to-face give shier people a bit of cover. Not everyone is an extrovert, after all. Maybe some people have always wanted to interact more but felt they couldn’t.

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## Rethinking “Local”

Although we’re all using new buzzwords like “virtual engagement”, “remote workforce” and “work from home”, the fact is that we’re talking about digital communications. And digital communications have been a priority since websites and mobiles took over the world. So, this isn’t a completely new animal. It’s just that the audience for those digital communications has grown, and is predicted to keep growing.

Localization is also a known concept in communications. It’s ensuring that messaging is tailored to the localized audience through content, imagery, language, tone and more. With the growth of the virtual audience, localization will become even more important. Remote employees may be spread far and wide, so you’ll need to pick which content is most relevant and engaging for which audiences. And that might mean getting more granular with your channels.

The good news is that tools like digital signage and enterprise messaging apps let you segment your audiences as much as you want. You can send different messages, playlists or campaigns to selected screens, playlists, webpages or Teams groups to target only those people who care about that content. If your support team says that want weekly CSAT figures, but accounts receivable doesn’t care about that, then only send that data to the sales force. Of course, you’ll always have some broad messaging for the whole company, and that’s important too. Some crossover promotes unity.

A larger remote workforce may also require new types of content. In addition to regular workaday communications, like “Town hall meeting Friday at 11am”, toss in other things like wellness tips for WFH, and even messages that are just fun. Share a music playlist and get others to contribute. Ask people where their dream vacation is, or they prefer cats or dogs, or the perfect pumpkin pie recipe. (Get free digital signage messages to share at <https://www.visix.com/resources/free-digital-signage-messages/>.)

People might need a schedule of who’s working in-office and who’s working remotely on any given day. With more office hoteling, the current number of people in a facility may need to be tracked and there might even be check-in procedures that need to be advertised.

You may want to work more employee-created content into your strategy. Employee spotlights can help introduce remote employees to other workers who’ve never see them in the office. Videos or pictures of people’s home offices can give their coworkers an idea of where they spend their time, and photos of pets are always a hit.

Two critical content types for virtual engagement are employee recognition and transparency. Kudos can still happen one-on-one via videoconference with a manager, but for most employees, a shout-out across your internal channels will make them feel more appreciated and connected. And building and maintaining trust through transparency is even more important when workers are remote, since they may feel a bit out of the loop. You’ve got to honest and open, always, or people will simply go elsewhere.

The goal is to get people involved and interacting. Ask questions through surveys and polls, get and give feedback, share metrics on progress towards goals and find ways to spur participation. When people are all taking part in the same thing, they feel connected, even if they’re miles apart.

For other content ideas for visual communications,  
[download our Digital Signage Content Guide.](#)

### 10 Tips for Engaging Remote Employees

Engaging remote employees can be much easier than you think. It's not a completely new or foreign idea that you have to adopt. You're already working to engage your entire workforce, so you just need to keep some specifics in mind for people working from home.

**1. Get the right collaboration tools.** This means right for your organization and your people. This will be the main way everyone is interacting, so make sure you have all the bells and whistles you need but not much extraneous stuff. If people hate using the platform, that just makes remote work harder. Consider asking people what they need and want and then test drive one or two options before making a final choice.

**2. Give your IC strategy a rethink.** This goes to the omni-channel approach discussed earlier. Craft consistent messages across a range of platforms so people can engage in the way they prefer. It needs to be easy for people to access information, interact and share, and provide feedback. You'll also need to revisit your success measures to match up to your new strategy.

**3. Have a clear WFH policy.** Including the "why" as well as the "what" will go a long way toward preventing confusion and misunderstandings. Work from existing policies for in-office workers (dress code, online availability, etc.) and build on any additional conditions for WFH.

**4. Managers need to be educated.** If you have some old-fashioned mindsets, they may not be enthusiastic about WFH and could communicate the wrong attitude to employees. Make sure every one of your C-suite and team leaders understand the benefits for both your workforce and your organization.

**5. Make sure goals are clearly defined.** If a particular employee doesn't normally have regular targets, maybe it's time to make some for them. Giving people a list of goals lets them know exactly what's expected and what's coming next. And as they check items off the list, they feel a sense of accomplishment.

**6. Always give a context and reasoning.** Do this for workflows, instructions and goals, or at least be prepared to supply those if someone asks for them. Letting people see behind the curtain makes them feel more in control and more connected, and it also builds trust: because you trust them, they will trust you in turn.

**7. Communicate more succinctly but more often.** That doesn't mean it needs to be staid or boring. Shorter messaging means the overall feel and voice takes on a more informal tone, which mimics face-to-face interactions. One key element here is to make communications regular but not overwhelming.

**8. Simulate togetherness.** It's easy to start feeling isolated and cut off when working remotely, so do whatever you can to let people feel like they belong to something. Use video whenever you can, since actually seeing the people you're talking with is a part of the in-office experience and fosters a sense of connection.

**9. Encourage growth.** Most workers want to grow in their jobs, so offering some sort of training and skills acquisition package is a good way to keep them engaged. Recognizing achievements as they learn new skills and even micro-kudos can also motivate people.

**10. Be sociable.** While it's a good idea to help foster a feeling of belonging by having fun, social activities, these need to appeal to everyone. As always, asking your audience for suggestions is the best way to increase participation. They should be optional and online whenever possible so more people can participate, and everyone should be on camera.

# 12 **BASICS** OF GOOD, EFFECTIVE, ENGAGING... EMPLOYEE COMMUNICATIONS



## **Be honest, transparent & accessible.**

Always tell the truth. Share your mission and values, and be available to all employees.



## **Do what you say you're going to do.**

Build trust by walking your talk. Every broken promise undermines employee trust.



## **Know your audience.**

Understand the preferences and interests of your employees. If you don't know, ask.



## **Provide context.**

Give your audience the who, what, where, when, why and how behind communications.



## **Message to many channels.**

Reinforce your message across multiple mediums, and let employees choose how to interact.



## **Be consistent & systematic.**

Have a plan. Create a calendar. Communicate regularly to keep employees engaged.



## **Beware of burnout.**

Don't overload your audience with too much at a time. Don't overpublish and don't go silent.



## **Keep it short & sweet.**

Use good writing and design practices. Avoid jargon. Be clear and concise in your language.



## **Attract & engage.**

Use hooks, narratives and visuals. Get your message across in less than 10 seconds.



## **Get feedback.**

Check understanding and satisfaction with feedback systems like surveys. Reward feedback.



## **Measure success.**

Set goals. Measure reach and engagement with calls to action that provide actionable data.



## **Stay flexible.**

Be ready to adapt your plans and messaging to any disruptions or opportunities that arise.

## 12 Ways to Improve Communication with All Employees

No matter where your workforce is located, your communications goals should be the same: to help people integrate into the organization and the culture, feel connected, involved and valued, and become happy, productive employee advocates.

Here are some basic tips for effective communication with all your employees:

### 1. Build trust, credibility and accessibility.

- Tell the truth always. Be transparent.
- Communicate your mission, strategy and goals, and progress toward those things so people feel a part of the larger whole.
- Share your values to reinforce your culture.
- C-suite and managers need to set the tone, and they should be open and accessible.
- Everyone needs to understand and promote the correlation between communication, engagement and the organization's goals.

### 2. Back up words with actions.

- This goes back to building trust. Do what you say you're going to do.
- Every broken promise, mixed message or badly executed communication undermines your credibility.
  - If you have a public campaign all about sustainability, but don't offer recycling in your own offices, people will notice.
  - In the same way, if you tell employees that they have a voice in things, but don't provide any channels for feedback, they'll become disengaged.
- You only get so many chances before employees either stop believing your communications or tune out altogether. And every employee has a different threshold.

### 3. Understand your audience.

- If you don't know who you're communicating with, you cannot be successful.
- You'll need to communicate differently with different audiences, and over different mediums.
- Employees will have their own preferences for the information they want to receive, and how they want to receive and interact with it.
- Localizing communications is more important than ever with the WFH trend, and technology is making it easier to target messaging, so there's no real excuse.
- Surveys and conversations are the best way to get this information.
  - It doesn't stop with just asking what they want and where. You have to follow up to find out if you're delivering what they need, when and where they want it.

### 4. Give people context.

- People need context to fully understand, internalize and act on your communications.
- Remember the 5 Ws and H – who, what, where, when, why and how.
- What and why are the most important for employee communications.
- Remember to tailor your message to make it relevant to individual audiences – tell people how they fit in and how the information affects them.
- Just telling people that there are new online courses available is pushing out a fact. But if you advertise courses that are important to different groups in different messages, and highlight the benefits, it will make more of an impact.
  - For example, a time management course promises to save project managers 30 minutes a day.
  - An Excel course walks you through 10 common functions your accounting team could be using.

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## **5. Use multiple channels.**

- Even though you're localizing or personalizing, you still need to be consistent in your overall messaging.
- The classic yarn that repetition is the key to effective advertising also applies to communications, too.
- Make sure you reinforce your communications across multiple channels – intranets, digital signage, desktop apps like Teams, emails, posters (if you're still doing that), and one-on-one.
- But be sure that your message is consistent across all these channels.
- Also be sure you inform employees about their choices and get them training so they're comfortable on those various platforms.

## **6. Communicate regularly.**

- Be consistent but systematic. You must have a plan.
- We've all been bombarded by 10 intranet posts one day, then nothing for a couple of days.
- People need to know what you want them to focus on. You tell them that by feeding them a steady stream of information that helps and informs them, but doesn't overload them.
- Create a communications calendar with different campaigns and messages so you can see where the gluts and gaps are.
- Don't overload people and don't leave them starving.

## **7. Be clear and concise.**

- This is just a reminder to use good writing and design practices.
- Avoid getting too technical or using a lot of jargon.
- Just write like you're telling someone sitting beside you.
- If your messages are incomplete, unclear or confusing, it can lead to misinterpretations and misinformation spreading through your organization.

## **8. Make it interesting.**

- Your communications have to grab attention and spark interest for people care about them.
- Use a lot of visuals and attention-getting headlines.
  - Use more visuals than words – photos, videos, data visualizations.
- Be ready to attract attention at a glance and get your point across in less than 10 seconds.
- You have to hook people so they want to learn more.
- Use stories instead of one-off messages if you can. People like narratives.

## **9. Check for understanding.**

- First you need to measure reach (was it delivered, was it seen, was it interacted with).
- Then you need to make sure the message they walked away with was what you intended to communicate.
- If you don't make sure it was understood, you could either have more misinformation, or worse, mistrust and disengagement.
  - At a minimum, you won't have the behavior change or call to action you were hoping for.
  - Do surveys. Ask questions and adjust. Listen to feedback and reward it.

## **10. Beware of information overload.**

- Speaking of workload – everyone has one. By definition, you are interrupting that workload every time you send a message on any platform.
- With people working remotely, they're using more communication platforms than ever before for both life and work.
- People are handling lots of emails, looking at intranet posts, managing projects in collaboration apps, all while answering Teams, Facebook, and What's App messages, in addition to attention lots of meetings, both in person and virtual.
- Streamline interactions by communicating only on the platforms they prefer.
- Again, don't overload people and don't leave them starving for information.

## 11. Measure effectiveness.

- Every communication is meant to prompt some behavior change or business outcome.
- Tie every campaign or message to a measurable outcome.
- If it's about training, how many people signed up?
- If it's your mission statement, survey people to see if they understand how their work helps you achieve that mission.
- If it's employee recognition, see if that person remembers and values that in their performance appraisal.
- Set objectives and measure your success. Otherwise, you're just spitting into the wind.

## 12. Remain flexible.

- 2020 taught us all that things can change quickly. We've all had to adapt to a new hybrid workplace and a vastly different communications landscape.
- As much as you need a plan for your employee communications to succeed, that plan has to be flexible.
- You'll need to adapt and evolve based on the feedback you get when you measure ROI and get feedback from your audience.
- Hopefully, you won't have to adapt to another pandemic, but you will certainly have to adapt to new technologies and new generations in the workplace over time.

The relationship between communicators and employees is just like any other. It should be about mutual trust, respect, dialogue, interest and engagement. Just as any relationship takes effort and adaptation, so does employee communications. If you follow these tips with both in-house and at-home workers, you'll improve your messaging and have a pretty good framework to build from.

## Conclusion

Remote work is here, and here to stay. The fact is that if remote employees are happy, they'll spread the word. And if they aren't, they'll also spread that around as well. Or worse, they'll leave. Organizations that haven't embraced the digital workforce will need to adopt a new mindset and start thinking of remote work as the norm instead of an outlier. And IC is the best tool in your arsenal to address this new normal.

The future job market is likely to be labor-led. Just as things like daycare and flextime were "strange and new" ideas some years ago, they've now become a normal and expected part of the employee experience. For decades now, office jobs have been transitioning away from measuring performance against hours and focusing more on KPIs, productivity and job satisfaction. Nowadays, the conversation has simply shifted from "when" to "where".

Just as global firms have always had to knit their distributed workforce together, the same will become more and more common for companies of all sizes and types. To attract and retain talent, engage employees, and increase productivity and profits, organizations are going to have to be more flexible in their places, processes and communications.

## How to Get Started

We're here to answer any questions you have. Our team is happy to schedule a call to discuss your specific digital signage needs and pricing options.



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[SalesTeam@Visix.com](mailto:SalesTeam@Visix.com)



800.572.4935



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