

A photograph of a business meeting. In the foreground, an older man with white hair and a woman in business attire are looking at a laptop. In the background, other people are blurred, suggesting a busy office environment.

DECISION MAKERS

Solving Internal Communication Struggles

Let's get **Started**



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Communicating successfully with your entire organization can seem like an impossible task. However, the efficacy of your company's internal communications is one of the most crucial elements to maintaining a thriving organizational culture, sustainable growth and healthy cash flows.

This can be forgotten or overlooked by higher-ups in the company, because they're busy juggling so many aspects of the organization.

It's crucial for managers to merge and balance all of the factors of the business, and foster an environment that helps employees work with optimal efficiency and satisfaction.

This is where strong internal communications can help.

Sales, marketing, operations and accounting all have clearly defined metrics which measure the success or failure of their initiatives, so why not communications as well?

Your company can be thriving in any number of traditional channels – you have a well-made product or service; your value proposition is clear to clients; your short-term cash flows are positive – but even so, mishandling internal communications can have drastic consequences for your long-term success.

Read on to discover the very real pitfalls of inefficient internal communications and ways you can avoid them.

PART ONE

How and Why Internal Communications Fail

To develop a robust internal communications roadmap, it's important to first understand why communications sometimes don't work.

One of the most common causes is that, while executives are quick to see the value of investing in capital and employees, they fail to recognize the potential benefits of a successful internal communications program.

Because measuring the ROI of your internal communications platform isn't as straightforward as other metrics, some executives allow the entire endeavor to fall by the wayside.

We care about what we measure, and once you believe that a particular area isn't providing value for your business, it's unlikely that the approach will receive the attention it needs to thrive.

A Task Too Big to Tame

When executives or HR managers do seek an internal communications policy, they can become overwhelmed by a strategy that is too broad or seems unattainable.

It's more than just analyzing the big picture – an effective internal communications strategy must begin at the individual level. Misjudging your audience, or neglecting to tailor your message specifically for them, results in communications that fail to engage employees in the best of circumstances, and can even cause discord and misunderstandings.

Not everyone responds optimally to one particular style of messaging, and not every communicator reaches out to their audience in the same way. That's why organizations who've mastered internal communications develop several different strategies, appropriately tailored to individuals. Because of this, it's nearly impossible to maintain a successful communications plan that isn't formally written down as policy.

Your managers may have developed effective methods for conveying information to employees, students or visitors, but what happens when someone comes in that has a different communication style?

Your plan needs to be codified and teachable, so that anyone new to your organization can learn the proven methods you've worked so hard to foster.

Of course, you want to allow for some flexibility should things need to be updated, but failing to create a formal policy with clear objectives and goals is a sure path to sending mixed messages to your team.

According to a Gallup survey administered to more than 25 million employees, 70 percent of respondents say they are not engaged at work.



70% of U.S. employees say they are not engaged at work

Clearly, companies are missing out on clear opportunities to keep their employees engaged and productive. Your organization's internal communications policy is a crucial factor in this issue.

While widespread employee satisfaction is a worthwhile goal for any business, the same study demonstrates that employees see satisfaction differently from engagement.

Job satisfaction alone isn't enough to cultivate the culture of a company or retain desirable employees, so managers need to communicate with staff in an engaging and positive way - enhancing their work life, rather than just maintaining it.

PART TWO

Why It's Crucial to End This Struggle

It's a well-known fact that it's more expensive to hire new employees than it is to retain existing ones. Not only are you spending money on new training resources and losing out on productivity due to the learning curve, you may be missing out on all of the potential benefits the departing employee would have contributed to the company.

This is especially detrimental when your top performers are fleeing for greener pastures because they feel disengaged. Focusing on using internal communications to increase employee engagement helps you retain high-performing employees and reap the windfall of their creativity for years to come.

According to the Gallup poll, an engaged workforce results in 10 percent higher customer ratings, 22 percent higher profitability, 21 percent higher productivity and 41 percent fewer quality defects.



These results indicate a direct link between engagement and bottom-line numbers, not to mention customer satisfaction and retention.

Effective internal communication policies drive employee engagement, and have a tangible effect on your success.

Don't Get Left Behind

In the competitive employment marketplace of the 21st century, it's not enough to hide out in the crowd. In order to attract and keep the top talent, your communications efforts need to stand out from your competition.

Modern audiences expect more than a monthly email newsletter with a cute quote at the bottom. Companies stuck in these old ways may think their communications strategy is fostering employee engagement, but the truth is that they are relying on outdated strategies.

You want to be seen as an industry leader with your innovative product or service, so why wouldn't you expect the same from your internal communications?

Rather than go with what was popular 20 years ago, try something fresh and unique that your employees will actually want to talk about with their friends.

Another thing to remember is that a single message isn't enough. If you want your message not only to stand out, but to be absorbed by the audience, you need to incorporate repetition into your delivery system.

Depending on the medium you choose, this can mean a costly and time-consuming undertaking, which is why it's paramount to devise an efficient solution that can be employed multiple times in many different ways.

PART THREE

Internal Communications Best Practices

Creating an internal communications plan from scratch can be overwhelming, and executing that plan can be a full-time job for multiple employees.

To streamline your processes, follow some best practices to get on the right track.

The Six Ds

If your internal communications are faltering, many experts recommend adopting the six Ds. Using these as a guideline for each message you create gives you a process to focus your efforts.

The six Ds are:

1. **Distill your message to its simplest form**
2. **Define the audience**
3. **Detail the intent of the message**
4. **Decide how it can best be delivered**
5. **Deliver the message**
6. **Determine success by using measurable objectives**

These provide a workable roadmap for finding the best planning, creative and delivery systems for your campaigns. Once you've worked through these steps a few times, you can begin to formally draft an overall plan for internal communications, complete with actionable objectives and ways to measure success.

Don't Forget Metrics

Metrics are a crucial part of success in any area of business, and measuring the ROI of internal communications is no exception. You can't possibly be expected to know if you're succeeding, or how to promote that success to your executives, if you don't have measurable goals.

The types of metrics employed will largely be determined by your company's specific communications goals, but there are some high-concept methods that are often used.

Employee surveys are a great way to engage your staff on communications effectiveness, provided you're prepared to act on their feedback. You can also track responses to calls to action in your messages (webpage hits, benefits sign-ups, etc.), event participation and productivity to get a better sense of the effects your efforts are having.

Keep the Conversation Open

Understand that while the communicator conveys the message, they aren't the only person defining it.

The receiver puts your message in their own context every time.

You should care as much about what your audience needs to know, as well as how to best deliver that information to them, as you do about what you want to say. Look at it from their perspective.

Communication isn't a one-way street from the sender to the audience. It's participative and inclusive.

The days of pushing out memos are over, because you can't create a prosperous communications policy in a vacuum. It's more productive to think of the process as a constant loop: message sent, message received, feedback offered or action taken, results measured, message adjusted – then back to the beginning again.

Get more people involved in the message creation phase by soliciting advice from colleagues in brainstorming sessions. One of the most interesting things about the human brain is how differently we all react to certain stimuli. Each person will have unique responses to your idea that can help you predict possible audience reactions and better tailor your messages to their tastes.

PART FOUR

Methods to Improve Internal Communications

Once you work through the six Ds, outline your metrics and have brainstorming sessions, you'll have a good idea of your internal communications goals. Determining the tools you'll use to engage your employees on a regular basis is another important piece of the puzzle. Here are just a few ideas:

Solicit Feedback

We said it before, but it's worth repeating – internal communications is not a one-way street. In order to put an effective plan in place, you have to be willing to listen to feedback from people inside your organization and adjust practices based on that feedback. Employees want to feel they are making a contribution, and that their opinions are seriously considered.

Good internal communication should flow naturally from an open, sharing culture. At the heart of the process, you need to teach and encourage people to readily express their opinions and needs, and give them the means to do so.

We've mentioned surveys as a great way to solicit ideas and feedback, and they give managers the opportunity to ask specific questions and easily see trends. You can encourage honesty by crafting questions with open answer fields so people aren't roped into just a few multiple-choice answers that may not match their feelings.

Depending on the size of your business, you can conduct surveys weekly, monthly or quarterly.

Use Digital Signage

Digital signage is a modern solution for companies whose internal communications efforts are lagging behind. Message management software makes it incredibly easy to tailor your communications to specific audiences, keep your content fresh and engaging, and create a unique and exciting way for you to interact with your hard-working team.

Unlike resource-wasting print materials and email templates that look clumsy unless you hire a graphic designer, digital signage software is as cost-effective as it is intuitive. With digital signage, your message can reach more people at a lower cost per person than printed communications (you save money and waste from paper and toner), and you can deliver messages from your desk instead of having to physically replace old notices.

While email and posters are static, digital signage is dynamic with animation and video, and can be adjusted on the fly to incorporate a wide array of content.

Train Your Managers

If you want your teams to collaborate and communicate openly, they need to see their managers and executives do the same.

Good managers lead by example, so you'll need to train each manager in your organization to share, comment, give feedback and answer questions promptly. This encourages open and honest communication within departments and up the ladder, and it's natural for staff members to carry these practices out into other parts of the workplace.

If necessary, invest in management training to ensure effective communication practices. Conduct regular evaluations to check progress, and be ready to adjust your plans to meet individual needs.

Be Modern

The Gallup survey reported that Millennials are the least engaged generation. That may seem insignificant now, but with nearly 40 million Millennials in the workplace – their voice is becoming important.

In order to effectively communicate with Generation Y, communicate with them in the way they're accustomed to – through a screen. This group relies on the latest technology for community and communication, so they won't readily respond to outdated intranets and printed company flyers.

Invest in modern technology that lets you communicate with each and every employee in a way that works for them. You can send a text about an upcoming company event, create collaborative spaces that are accessible via tablets and make company videos to talk about performance.

- Don't overlook internal communications as a key to successful business!
- Use the information provided here to discover new ways to drive growth, increase productivity and retain your best employees with effective internal communications.
- Get creative and start thinking of innovative ways to engage your audience.