

Effective internal communications in 2018

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The internal communications sector has to gear up to deal with a whole new world of communication.



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Take the not-so-futuristic example of an employee travelling to work in their driverless car. They're able to access multiple channels of communication via a phone, a tablet or the vehicle itself. They may be working, studying, catching up on news or chatting to their friends in a time that we historically use for...well, driving.

This scenario is the exaggerated version of how people are accessing information today and the noise that internal communications will have to cut through to be relevant.

Digital publishers already cater for this with aggregated apps that use artificial intelligence to understand your interests and feed you news.

Similarly, the internal communications sector needs to understand that social media and technology on the whole is fundamentally changing the way in which society consumes information. Every single person has the ability to make themselves heard, to embark on a dialogue with a global brand or individuals, and to lobby and advocate for change via the small computer in their hand.

Why is internal communications still so important?

Research by Willis Tower Watson showed that companies with good internal communication outperform their competitors by 3.5 times. The reason for this is complex, but a solid rationale is that employees have evolved in the last 10 years. There is a new zeitgeist where people choose to work for companies due to an alignment in vision and the organisation's purpose. Staff are looking for a more meaningful reason to get up and go to work than to simply help their company drive the bottom line.

Unless the company communicates what their vision and purpose is, and solidifies it regularly, they're missing a beat in their staff retention and attraction policies.



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So, what works?

The answer is – many things. It's all about the content and the format in which it is delivered. It's about understanding what you want to say, who you want to say it to, and then unpacking how you want to deliver it.

For internal communications to succeed in the next decade, we believe that there are seven key trends to pay attention to.

1. **Social @ work**

By far the biggest trend in internal comms is providing staff with social media platforms to engage and interact with.

Social media formats for internal communications can convey announcements, news and personalise content delivery. A mobile friendly platform that allows for sharing, features video to convey news, delivers content in short stories with highlighted features and allows for user generated content. Sound familiar? We've seen a 70% use adoption in the Africa zone for just such a platform. Users are even willing to use their own data to access it – if it's interesting and informative.

2. **The resurgence of email**

Email is back in a big way. The reasons for this include that email is an open platform that is pretty much available to everyone, as well as the very obvious fact that email is a work-related tool and accessible during the working day. We've had powerful results with email *but* the email must not be a word-heavy, unattractive missive in the inbox. The content needs to be engaging, relevant and compelling and be used tactically. We've seen a 68.5% interaction on emails on a video-driven email series.

3. **In-powerment**

Serving people content that is segmented, and therefore valuable to them, keeps content relevant. Print is a great one for this. Readers can choose to read what they wish to, when they wish to, and a wide audience is catered for. Personalised emails are another – Experian Marketing Services data shows that emails with personalised subject lines are 26% more likely to be opened and showed six times higher transaction rates.

Segmented relevance works. You would communicate an eco-message differently to procurement than to management. Procurement would want to know about "green suppliers", management would want to know about paper saving initiatives and why.

By using social listening and pulse surveys on digital platforms to gather data on an individual level – in-powerment not only makes sure that the right messages reach the right audiences, you're actually able to respond to individual concerns and feedback. In-powerment equals engagement.

4. Value-ation

The value of the content that is delivered must always bear in mind:

- How can we help you to do your job well?
- What can we give you to communicate our values and purpose so that you can align yours with ours?

Facebook understands this trend well. People are motivated by the power of pride in an organisation that they perceive to be doing social good, with a mission that they understand and an optimism that they can buy into.

Communicating your company's mission, purpose and values drives culture. "The C in CEO stands for Culture," says Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella in his book *Hit Refresh*. We agree.



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5. Ambassador buy-in

The power lies in visible leadership. Video emailers with a message from the CEO (using his first name only) resulted in 97% of recipients saying they wanted more and 80% saying that they preferred the video emailer format. The message was humanised through relaxed visual communication.

6. It's about People First

We have seen the same success with difficult messages, for example an interview with the HR Director responsible for wide-spread retrenchments or a report on a Ghanaian branch's progress via a video message on the trip accompanied by visual graphs. Unpacking big issues by framing the content in a people-centric manner lets the most relevant person or people in the company tell the story from their viewpoint. Social pictures and staff content are consistently the most engaged with on internal communication digital platforms - ultimately, we are all human beings.

7. Content as craft

Design is a science. You can do everything right, and have a brilliant strategy and the platforms in place to do the job, but if the content isn't world class and of a standard that compares to the best consumer brands, it's going to fail

badly. Your staff is consuming the world's media daily, yours has to be as good if not better to remain relevant in their media landscape.

This means you need to focus on user experience, design, storytelling and must provide rich media content.

Organisations globally have understood that internal communications are not a nice to have, but are mission critical to the future growth and prosperity of the company, and to their staff's wellbeing and job satisfaction. However, a recent Gallup Survey showed that 82% of HR managers felt that their internal communication strategy needed an overhaul. Companies that do not have a good understanding of the trends in this dynamic and fast-changing space run the risk of staff disengaging with their messaging, which will have a huge negative impact on the company.

Engaged employees thrive and organisations reap the benefits.

ABOUT BRENDAN COOPER

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