

The Future of Communications Means Leaving the Past Behind



Robyn Hannah, Senior Director of Global Communications, Dynamic Signal

There are many things about HR communication that we've accepted as "the way it is" for far too long. As practitioners of HR-oriented communications, and as employees ourselves, we should expect more. But giving up on how we've done things for decades isn't always so easy. We get stuck in habits and patterns and analog methods of communication that should have been retired with acid-wash jeans and hammer pants.

Signs of the Past

Exhibit A- our continuing use of **print** as a means of disseminating important messages to employees. *Print!*

In 2017, breakrooms around the world are covered with the byproduct of technology invented in 1440 by Johannes Gutenberg to inform employees about everything from company policies to company picnics. The printing press is great for art work and inspiration, but not for ensuring employees know about open enrollment or the new COO. When it comes to time-sensitive information... we can do better.

I've toured some of the world's most advanced factories and coolest agency offices and I've seen how various companies pin up posters or set out those table tents in hopes that their messages will be seen and absorbed. But we only read table

tents for Happy Hour specials, and most employees aren't even hanging out in the break room to survey what's new on the bulletin board. When employees are in the lunch room, they're glued to their smartphones snacking on content of the digital variety.

Exhibit B- SUBJECT LINES IN ALL CAPS WITH LOTS OF EXCLAMATION POINTS AND THE WORDS "PLEASE READ"!!!!!!!!!!

Despite good manners and the extra exclamation points, open rates on those bad boys are dismal. And many organizations still aren't tracking internal open rates and click-throughs to understand for sure the extent of message penetration.

Beyond that, our inboxes are crowded and noisy. We prioritize internal content last, focused instead on project and customers and deadlines that impact revenue and job security.

Internal Communicators and HR professionals aren't marketers, of course. Theirs is a completely unique discipline and we celebrate the differences in goals and objectives. But it doesn't hurt to borrow some of their tactics- with our own touch of communication magic, of course.

Take the Path a Marketer Might

CMO's are predicted to outspend their CIO counterparts this year because the innovation applied to today's MarTech has proven to have major impact on our top and bottom lines.

So let's take a page from their playbook and get a little dirty digging into the data. That means looking at email open rates and interactions on social media. It means considering which media employees spend most of their time consuming. It means assessing the frequency of our messaging and determining when the law of diminishing returns sets in. If we are to make the case that what we do does matter, we need to come to the table with the data to prove it.

Run surveys and an employee NPS. Take the pulse of your company's most important asset and figure out how to drive satisfaction, engagement, and loyalty. And most importantly-do it in a way that is mobile-first.

Drive with Data

HR professionals are no stranger to metrics. Standard measurements include hiring ratios, retention and resignation rates. While those are, of course, crucial to assessing the relative health of an organization, communication often gets the short end of the stick.

That's a shame because the current state of HR-based communication is woeful. Some 75% of employees only use the company intranet exclusively for payroll information or to see their vacation time. Such narrow use of communication channels is a missed opportunity. Ideally, HR departments can use intranets and email to humanize the company, share the vision and company ethos, and remind employees that they're a critical component of the company's lifeblood.

The truth, however, is that most HR executives and internal communication teams don't really know how effective their communication is because they don't use software to gauge their success. If they did, they could start tinkering with the forms of media they use, like marketers do. Track, measure, and optimize. A little A/B testing applied to internal communications could go a long way in better understanding what makes your workforce tick.

Smartphone or Bust

According to research firm Dscout, the typical cellphone user touches his or her phone 2,617 time every single day. (And the average consumer now spends about three hours a day with her mobile device, which is an hour more than she spends on desktop.)

Ask a group of your millennial employees how many of them use their phone as an alarm. Hands will fly up. Most of today's workforce will look at their phones before their feet hit the bedroom floor. If you're not using mobile to communicate your message—you don't exist.

But proceed with caution. SMS is a fantastic option for urgent or important messages but like any other messaging platform it will become less effective if overused. If you're using SMS to offer tips about how to start a 401(k) and to advertise open positions, then people will begin to disregard those messages as well. Creating balance and platform hierarchy is key to successful communications.

The Future is Flexible

The best way to disseminate messages that people will actually read is to consider your customer- In this case, your employees. Learning how employees want to hear from you, and which channels are best for different types of content, is as important as a marketer's understanding of a consumer's path to purchase.

A single, mobile-first platform that will integrate with the channels and systems your workforce already uses daily is usually the best bet. Say that Sales loves Chatter, but maybe younger, retail employees prefer Facebook Messenger, and your global product teams live and die by Slack or Yammer. It's important to meet those teams where they want to hear from you. Time sensitive messages like a power outage at your factory may require an SMS and your exciting media coverage begs for a mobile push notification. Delivering the right message, to the right person, at the right time, on the right platform is as important for HR and Internal Communications as it is for marketing.

Let's leave the idea of a single medium of communication in the rearview mirror and take a modern approach to connecting

with our workforce of today.

Moving Forward

Marketers make a clear case for why their outreach matters – it impacts the bottom line. The same is true for HR communication. If an organization can't make employees feel informed, important, and connected, they're going to lose time, talent, and money since it takes as much as six- to nine months' salary to replace an existing employee.

With the right tools and testing, measurement and messaging, our HR communication can be as sophisticated as our customer marketing. And we're more than up for the task.