



Corp Comms: 5 keys to overcoming the disconnect

Corporate communications professionals feel like they're fighting a losing battle. They struggle against an adversary that creates an environment where employees are disengaged, executives are disconnected and key initiatives have insufficient employee support.

This adversary is fragmentation.

Fragmentation can be seen in every part of the enterprise, but is felt most keenly within corporate communications. This is because corp comms has the massive task of keeping the workforce informed, engaged and aligned with company goals and objectives. Yet this same workforce is becoming increasingly dispersed geographically and siloed departmentally and divided by generational differences and workstyles.

Care employees are spread out more than ever before

With the proliferation of remote technologies, large organizations are strongly embracing alternative work arrangements. Employees can now work from a corporate office that is thousands of miles from their teammates or from a coffee shop on the other side of the planet. Also, working remotely isn't just for field employees any more; it's becoming an option for nearly every role within the organization. And while this flexibility does help with employee acquisition and retention, it can also lead to serious fragmentation.

Generation gaps contribute to the problem of fragmentation

Organizations are struggling to engage employees within three very different generations. Baby boomers, Gen-Xers and millennials have different workstyles and must be engaged in different ways. The really concerning factor, however, is that the generation that is pouring into the workforce right now (millennials) are the least engaged of them all. According to a recent report from Gallup, only 23% of millennials are engaged which means that the majority of them are emotionally checked out and have little passion for their jobs.¹

The tools aren't cutting it

Not only does corporate communications have the dynamics of a heterogeneous workforce to contend with, but it's doing so in an environment of tools and processes that are insufficient to the task. Most organizations rely on antiquated tools such as email and static intranets to get content out to employees—and both are huge contributors to fragmentation.

The problem with email

1 Email as a mass communication vehicle is inherently flawed

Email is top-down. It's unidirectional. It leaves employees with no ability to chime in with questions, thoughts or ideas and thus doesn't encourage a dialog. The larger issue perhaps is that employees' inboxes are already filled to bursting. According to a recent report from the Radicati Group, the average employee already receives more than 80 emails per day.² With this constant barrage of emails that employees are receiving, is it any wonder that corporate communications emails go largely unread?

2 Email can't be measured

Organizations report insufficient visibility into the effectiveness of corporate emails. If they're lucky enough to leverage an automation tool to send emails rather than just Outlook, they may have basic open or click-through data, but measuring employee sentiment is a pipe dream for most.

The problem with static intranets

Similar to email, static intranets are a relic of the 90s that are causing fragmentation for organizations.

1 Static intranets offer one-way broadcasting of content

Like email, they're unidirectional, with no way for employees to respond or contribute. If employees have questions or comments on published content, they are forced to use slow, traditional channels that yield poor results and lead to employee discontent.

2 Static intranets are difficult for corporate comms employees to build, maintain and keep updated

They require IT infrastructure resources just to host them and for most of these portals, making even the smallest change to the user interface can require significant web development resources. Being at the mercy of IT to make changes becomes tedious very quickly. More importantly, it takes a serious toll on productivity.

3 The majority of the content found in static intranets isn't relevant to employees

And after reading #2 above, it's easy to see why. Content is rarely updated (for the reasons stated above) and becomes stale very quickly. What's more, the content isn't targeted or personalized for the employee in any way, which makes it difficult for employees to find content that's meaningful to them and their jobs. When employees can't find relevant content, they become quickly disengaged.

4 The static intranet is just one more information silo

It's disconnected from the other tools employees use, spend their time in and use to get work done. Most static intranets lack any kind of useful integration into these tools; therefore employees must leave their center of work to find and download content from them.

The limited impact of the all-hands

Another method corporate communications teams go with to help achieve alignment is the "all-hands" or town hall meetings. These forums can be effective; however, companies can rarely bring all of their employees together in one location. And when organizations hold these company-wide meetings via remote technologies,

there tends to be a fairly low level of engagement because employees can multitask while the meeting is in session and thus don't provide the meeting with their complete attention.

The limited impact of the all-hands

Another method corporate communications teams go with to help achieve alignment is the “all-hands” or town hall meetings. These forums can be effective; however, companies can rarely bring all of their employees together in one location. And when organizations hold these company-wide meetings via remote technologies,

So, just how big is this fragmentation problem?

According to a recent study by Gallup, 70% of employees are not engaged at work.³ In that same study, Gallup found that the resulting loss of productivity from this lack of engagement costs the United States an estimated \$450 - \$550 billion annually.

With a staggering figure like that, it can be difficult to relate it down to an individual corporate communications organization level and get a feel for how fragmentation is affecting your business.

Let's take a deeper dive into some specific examples.

One common theme found in large organizations is the problem of employees working within their own silos. They have limited visibility into what other employees, even their own team members, are working on and thus can end up duplicating efforts—or even working in opposing directions. It's not just employees being out of sync with each other that's contributing to the huge cost of disengagement. The larger issue is that, without corporate alignment, employees are often working on projects and initiatives that are counterproductive to the overall corporate goals and objectives. In his book entitled, “Performance Management: Putting Research into Action,” Author James Smither explains that only 14% of employees truly understand their company's strategy and direction.

What's more, due to the challenges and limitations of tools and processes already mentioned, many executives are working in silos of their own and are likely unaware that they're doing so. In a recent survey, 90% of employees reported that their executive leaders were out of touch and not even aware of the problem.⁴

A new direction

By looking at the statistics we've already covered, we can see that the problem of fragmentation within corporate comms is extensive and pervasive.

However, not all organizations are struggling. What's so unique about these organizations that seem to have solved the corporate comms puzzle? Do they have better leaders? Perhaps they have better hiring practices and thus have more skilled workers? Maybe their business model creates an easier landscape for corporate comms to navigate. Perhaps... it's just luck?

In truth, it's none of these things—and that's a good thing. Replicating success based on any of these factors would be next to impossible. Luckily, the secret ingredients to a successful corporate communications strategy are far more attainable and repeatable and can be found within a strategic application of the right tools and processes.

5 keys to a successful corporate communications strategy

1 Personalized, targeted and relevant communications

Best-practice organizations use a channel that allows for targeted communications. These reach groups or individuals with content that is relevant to them, without burying them with useless information. Not only does this allow corporate comms professionals to schedule and publish targeted content, but lets employees customize the breadth and depth of the content they're shown.

2 Positive employee experience

One of the first steps successful organizations take to ensure employees adoption of new communication tools is to ensure that the user (employee) experience is as positive and painless as possible. They change the paradigm by providing content and communications where employees spend their time and do their work, in an environment that is intuitive, enjoyable and easy to use.

3 Omnidirectional communications

One of the most critical keys to a successful strategy is ensuring communications are omnidirectional. Instead of using the megaphone approach of broadcasting communications, best-practice organizations facilitate real conversation around their content. They do this by choosing a channel that allows employees to respond with feedback, questions, comments and ideas, while at the same time being able to bring others into the conversation to ensure that all stakeholders are part of the dialog.

4 Employee empowerment

Employees at all levels must be empowered to create and share content, ask questions and provide feedback— and to do so without complex publishing tools, processes or training. This starts at the top by providing executives with the ability to schedule and publish blogs and rich media such as video messages and share relevant content, all without the need for involvement from IT, developers or creative staff. In bestpractice organizations, this empowerment extends throughout the company to entrylevel employees, making them feel like they can contribute and are part of the strategic direction of the company.

5 Real-time analytics

The final key to success is found in the ability to measure just how effective communications are. Best-practice orgs must use a channel that allows them to see not only how many employees are reading content, but which actual employees have read it and which ones have not. Additionally, they need to be able to judge sentiment of communications, thus keeping a finger on the pulse of the organization and providing executives the ability to react quickly. For corporate comms, this all needs to be realtime, rather than waiting days or weeks to get reports from traditional analytics platforms.

Demonstrated success

When these principles are applied, what kinds of results are best-practice organizations seeing? How about 25-59% reduction in employee turnover? Or 49% reduction in safety incidents? Or 37% decrease in absences? Or a 60% reduction in quality defects?⁵

These results are quite real and attainable for organizations that employ these best practices. By shifting the corporate communications paradigm, organizations can connect and align with employees in ways only imagined before.

Now, what technology platform are these bestpractice organizations leveraging to accomplish this impressive transformation? We call it the corporate community platform.

1. Gallup - How Millenials Want to Work and Live - 2016
2. Email Statistics Report, 2011-2015 - <http://www.radicati.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/Email-Statistics-Report-2011-2015-Executive-Summary.pdf>
3. Gallup - State of the American Workplace Report 2013
4. American Management Association – 2014 - Poor Internal Communications: Why Many Leaders Lose Touch
5. Gallup – 2009 - The Relationship Between Engagement at Work and Organizational Outcomes