14 steps to great internal communications
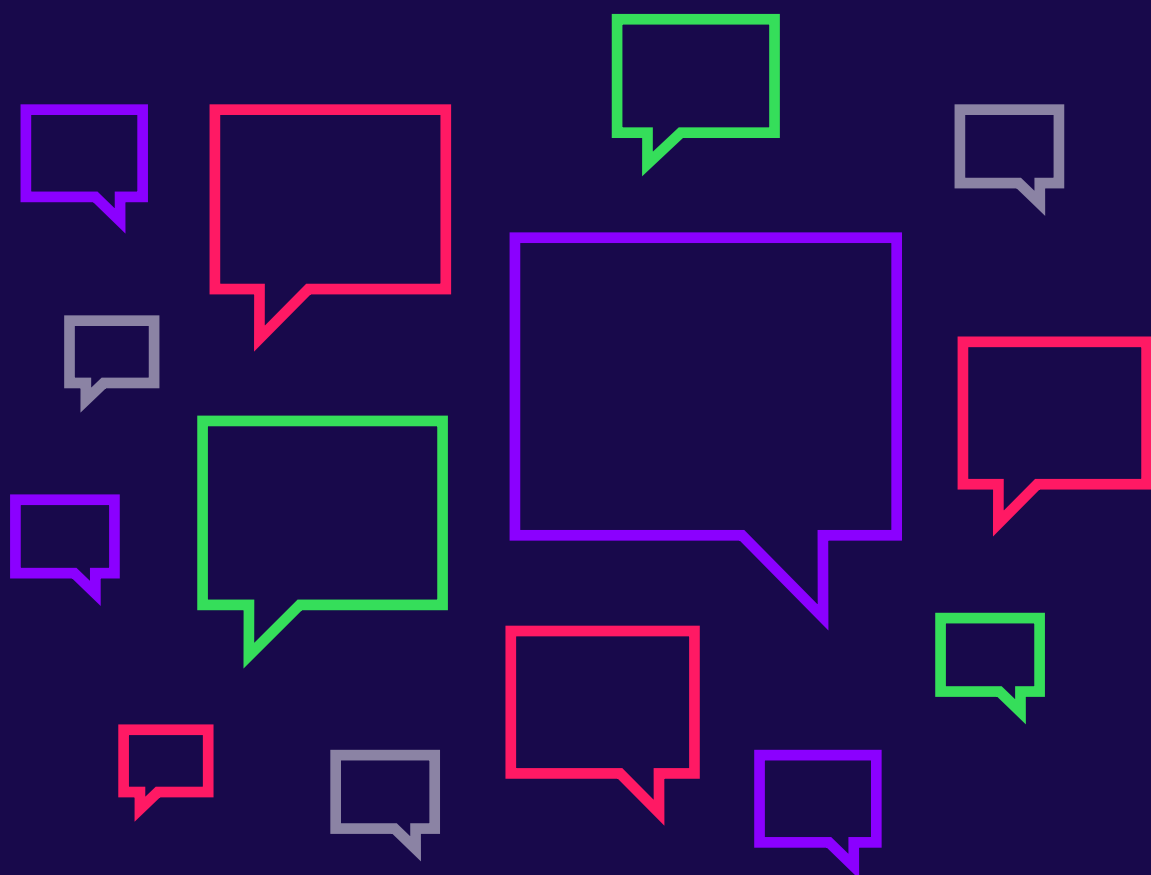
Contents

How can internal communication make a difference?

Good communication in the workplace isn't just about giving and receiving clear instructions. It's also about building a strong company culture where everyone is valued and empowered to achieve their potential.

Perhaps not surprisingly, 83% of respondents to a recent ATD poll said

communication is the most critical success factor for managers. And another study by Gallup shows that employees are usually up to three-times more engaged when managers hold regular meetings with their teams.

The evidence in support of communication, then, is strong.

Just as good communication is vital to success, lack of it can cause significant issues for organizations. A Project Management Institute report found that for every $1 billion spent on projects, $75 million is put at risk by poor communication. And disconnects between managers and colleagues in operational teams regularly dent profits on all kinds of projects, across all business sectors.

While the need for excellent internal communications is clear, it can be difficult to achieve in practice. Gallup data shows that around 37% of US employees now work from home or telecommute at least part of the time, which makes face-to-face meetings more difficult to arrange. Many teams also include colleagues in different countries and time-zones, which complicates the communications picture still further.

To overcome the communications challenges of the modern workplace, organizations need strategies and technologies for bringing people together, wherever and however they work. That means engaging global teams, sharing knowledge to improve business performance, and building a strong company culture based on strong brand values.

In this eBook, we run through 14 steps that can help you to build a successful internal communications strategy. Find out how the latest internal communications tools and techniques can help you improve your engagement and, critically, build a smarter, better-performing business.

For every $1 billion spent on projects, $75 million is put at risk by poor communication.

Step 1:
Automate mundane tasks

Improve team productivity by making it easier to do the day-to-day stuff

The latest internal communications tools and techniques don't just impact how people communicate. They also affect how people work – most of the time, in a good way.

For example, many of the routine tasks that increase administration can now be automated using collaboration technology, such as reserving rooms and equipment, or filling out HR forms. Time savings for staff enable them to focus on strategic, revenue-generating activities that positively impact customer service or the bottom line.

> " In a few simple clicks, you can carry out routine tasks, from reserving a cart for a visitor, to ordering new business cards, requesting uniforms, or logging a support ticket with the IT team. Completing routine tasks is much faster and easier with Interact, so we can spend more of our time doing what we love: caring for animals and visitors."

Kara Masharani, Web Developer, The Houston Zoo

HOUSTON ZOO

Step 2:
Share knowledge

Improve customer service and performance with a centralized knowledge depository

According to a recent study, Fortune 500 companies lose around $31.5 billion per year by failing to share knowledge effectively. However, without the right processes and tools in place, it can be challenging to find employees with key skills and knowledge in an organization, and to get their input where it's needed. It may also be difficult to search corporate knowledge locked in systems or even filing cabinets around the business – negatively impacting productivity, customer service, and performance.

Organizations can overcome their knowledge-sharing challenges using features built into the best collaboration platforms, such as team or project areas, or advanced search functionality. Most modern intranets will also include social networking tools, which allow employees to create communities of interest, and to share knowledge related to their specific roles.

Fortune 500 companies lose $31.5 billion per year by failing to share knowledge effectively.

Interact customer, Dex Media, is exploring the social capabilities of its intranet to improve not just information sharing, but to connect individuals to one another to share knowledge.

" *Now, employees across the business have a voice and a place where they can share their ideas and opinions. They can post, comment and ask questions on The Buzz (Dex Media's intranet) without asking anyone's permission, which sets the agenda for greater openness and trust between managers and their teams... People are setting up team and project sites, commenting on posts and asking questions, and we are developing a more contemporary, entrepreneurial, forward-looking business culture as a result."*

Maureen Locus, VP of Corporate Communications, Dex Media

dex **media**

Step 3:
Use an intranet persona

Communicate with and support your teams by speaking their language

As an internal communications leader, you are in a unique position to understand what employees want and need across multiple functions. The question is, how can you best use technology to respond to their requests and concerns?

Increasingly, we are seeing our customers use 'personas' to post information and content that is relevant to employees from specific departments or groups. The idea isn't to fool anyone or to make them think a persona is a real person. It's more about engaging employees, gauging their opinions about key issues, and empowering them with the information they need.

Having said this, personas need to feel human, so your people can relate to them. Language should be informal and mirror how we talk to one another. That way, conversations get started, and teams are much more likely to engage with you.

Kent Community Health NHS Foundation Trust developed a persona around its new intranet, Flo – named after the iconic nursing figure Florence Nightingale.

Designed to be a personable and approachable character with whom users could identify, Flo was used as the author for most core content and as a figurehead to answer queries and respond to ideas submitted by staff.

A brand, tone and voice were carefully constructed around the persona to maximise engagement.
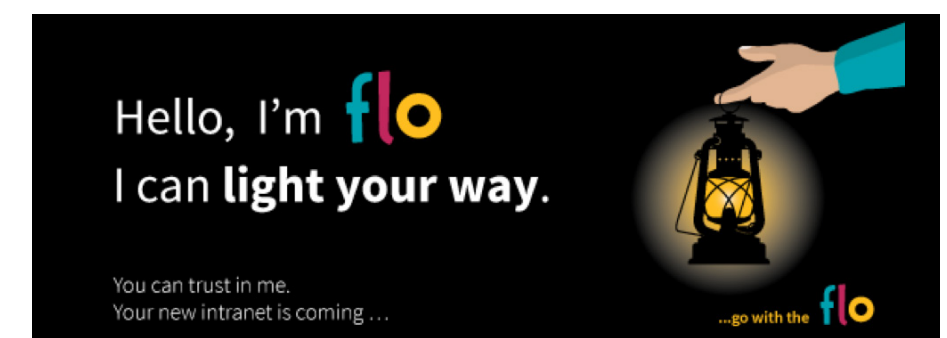
Step 4:
Avoid communication disconnects

Keep everyone informed and engaged, even as your business grows

A common challenge, especially in large and fast-growing organizations, is how to foster communications between senior managers and teams on the ground. For the management team, this kind of communication helps them stay in touch with the realities on the shop floor and adapt their strategies accordingly. At the same time, workers feel connected to the overall business strategy and clear on the targets they need to achieve.

Forward-thinking organizations are using social intranet features such as forums to combat any potential communication disconnects.

> " *Interact Forums in particular has helped to foster collaboration between teams and managers. People are happy to comment and share their views, and senior managers frequently answer points raised there. If a post gets 20 votes, it's also forwarded to the senior management team for review, which means employees at all levels of the organization can contribute to our success."*
>
> **Oraine Godfrey, Director of Digital Marketing and Operations, Cable & Wireless**
>
> Cable&Wireless
> Communications

Step 5:
Identify internal champions

Use your employees to help get your messages across

Who are the main stakeholders in internal communications at your company? And who does most to promote your brand and values internally? These are your internal champions – the people who can help you get your messages across.

So how can you find out who your internal champions are? And how can you make the best use of them to support your internal communications objectives?

A good starting point is to monitor communications activity and to see who the most active employees are on your platforms. You could also talk to managers to find out who their most engaged team members are, or you could even put out a message asking for potential champions to get in touch.

Once you have your internal champions on your radar, you'll need to supply them with the tools they need to talk up your brand. If someone wants to start a company newsletter, give them the tools and resources they need. If someone else is blogging about industry issues, ask them to publish their work on the intranet. You can support champions with features like blogging to showcase their work or publish their posts, articles, and links on internal forums or in team sites on your intranet.

Step 6:
Bring remote workers together

___

Use collaborative team sites to connect dispersed workforces

Remote working is now a feature of most modern companies, with team members frequently spread across multiple sites, continents and time zones. To work effectively, distributed teams need tools to collaborate and share knowledge, irrespective of where they are located.

To support collaboration between employees in different locations, Maxxam Analytics makes extensive use of Interact Team Sites. This provides virtual "spaces" where colleagues can meet and collaborate with members of their team.

> " *If an employee in Montreal discovers a new, more efficient way of doing something, they can now talk about it on Catalyst (Maxxam's intranet). Colleagues in Mississauga or Burnaby can find out what's working best and consider changing their processes accordingly – it all feeds into improved efficiency and better services for customers."*

Corinna Bork, Communications Director, Maxxam

Maxxam
A Bureau Veritas Group Company

Step 7:
Build a strong company culture

___

Keep employees engaged and informed

To build a strong company culture, you have to effectively communicate the company's values and keep employees informed of all the latest news. Sharing fun news and promoting social events can also improve employee engagement, satisfaction and retention. This kind of communication can even be used to promote healthy living campaigns or get employees more engaged with company benefits.

Returning to Houston Zoo, we can see an inspiring example of this. Not all employees can regularly attend staff meetings when important news is disclosed. They use their intranet to combat this, posting bi-weekly news updates there. This includes topics such as a new species arriving at the zoo, or an animal birth.

These are great ways to engage staff and boost morale, leading to better all-around performance.

Step 8:
Promote transparency

Be clear and ensure consistency across all internal communications

The game Chinese Whispers shows how messages can get diluted the more people are involved. To make sure everyone is receiving a single, united message, many organizations are communicating news from senior management or the CEO via blogs on their intranets. This is the case at Maxxam, where CEO blogs are a regular feature.

> " Our CEO uses Interact Blogs to share strategic information and to promote efficiency and client-service initiatives across the business."
>
> **Corinna Bork, Communications Director, Maxxam**
>
> Maxxam
> A Bureau Veritas Group Company

This direct communication approach provides total transparency, helping teams to understand exactly where the business is going, and their role in supporting that process.

Step 9:
Use images and videos

Get people's attention by bringing your communications to life

According to a study done by Hubspot, 55% of people finish videos they've started. By contrast, only 29% of respondents said they'd read a blog right to the end.

Marketing teams have understood the value of visual components for some time, building images and videos into all kinds of campaign materials. Increasingly, these techniques are also being used by internal communications teams to engage with workers more effectively.

Consider how you can use visual elements to improve engagement, whether they are CEO video blogs, infographics or simply photos and images. Such elements can dramatically enhance the visual appeal of your intranet homepage, for example, and help you attract even more users.

Step 10:
Tap into the altruism of your people

―

Use internal comms to go beyond the day job

Half of Millennial employees say they would accept a pay cut for a job that aligns more closely with their values, and they're not the only ones. Employees of all ages demonstrate a preference for working for companies that are a force for good in the world.

By understanding and fostering employees' desire to effect positive change, internal communications teams can build a stronger company culture and coordinate activities and

events with real social value. There are countless examples of organizations using their intranets, for example, to fundraise for specific causes, to organize volunteering, or to give back to the local community.

Internal communicators who actively promote these kinds of activities immediately build bridges with employees that are essential for engagement and likely to promote better overall performance.

Step 11:
Empower employees

―

Provide accurate, up-to-date information to help your employees work effectively

Passing documents around on paper or by email can cause version control issues. Using a document that is inaccurate or out of date can pose significant risks, from poor customer service to legal issues such as non-compliance with industry regulations.

To mitigate these risks, and to empower all employees with accurate, up-to-date information, TaxAudit.com uses Interact technology. Director of Strategy, Matthew Estes, says:

> " *Our success depends on staying current, so we needed a centralized way to store and update critical documents for our teams... When you send out information by email, there are always some people who don't get it – like new employees for example. Now, with Interact, everyone has the information they need to work effectively."*

Matthew Estes, Director of Strategy, TaxAudit.com

TaxAudit

Using their intranet as a centralized Document Management System, TaxAudit.com is able to ensure that all employees see the same thing when they look for a document – a single version of the truth.

Step 12:
Make your people feel valued

Recognize the contributions of staff to improve morale

Stress at work can cause low morale across the workforce, and that's bad for business. As well as negatively impacting productivity, low morale can also increase the risk of high employee turnover.

One way to mitigate these risks is to show employees that their contribution to the organization's success is valued.

Giving them this recognition makes all the difference to morale and engagement, and the latest internal communications tools can help you do it.

TaxAudit.com, for example, is using the Rewards feature on their intranet to recognize the contributions of employees to the success of the business.

> *We've found that Interact Rewards is a hugely successful way to increase employee engagement. We've seen a ton of spontaneous altruism, with employees giving colleagues 'WOW Points' for volunteering for projects or going beyond the call of duty. We also did our bit, investing around $40,000 dollars in prizes to make the initiative work. We now have more than 80% daily engagement on the intranet and counting."*

Matt J. Estes, Director of Strategy, TaxAudit.com

TaxAudit
Audits happen. Be prepared.

Step 13:
Make sure everyone reads the important stuff

Use mandatory reads and push notifications to highlight critical updates

News, policies and procedures are constantly changing, from major organizational restructuring, health and safety updates, policy and process changes, through to HR and benefits changes. Some company news is absolutely critical and needs to be read by everyone. Getting the word out is one challenge, but ensuring it's been read and understood can be extremely difficult.

Interact addresses this issue with a feature called Mandatory Reads. This pushes important messages to employees' homepages until they click to say they've read them. Push notifications can also be sent to employee mobiles using the intranet app, or a text message via the Broadcasts feature. Administrators can then see the results and follow up with anyone who hasn't responded.

> *Mandatory Reads is a really great feature for us, which no other solution offered. Previously we had to rely on emails, which were then printed out, signed and returned back to head office. The Mandatory Read is perfect, as it means we can be rapidly notified when staff have read the documents, saving us time and effort and also saving on printing and environmental costs."*

Kimberley Nicholl, Internal Branding and Communications Specialist, Kantar Health

KANTAR HEALTH

Step 14:
Bring it all together to maximize your success

Internal communications challenges in modern organizations are many and varied – hence our 14 steps rather than just one or two. However, bringing all of these capabilities together can empower internal comms leaders and teams in ways that were previously impossible, feeding directly into higher morale and improved business performance.

The latest internal communications tools, for example, can enable real-time collaboration and knowledge sharing, helping teams to boost productivity and improve customer service. At the same time, social tools such as forums and blogs give employees a voice, as well as fostering direct, transparent communications between managers and teams. Additionally, features such as employee rewards make it easier to engage with employees and to ensure that their contributions are valued by everyone across the organization.

By taking advantage of the innovative tools and techniques featured in this eBook, internal communications leaders can help to build smarter, more productive organizations. Even more importantly, perhaps, your workers will thank you for it.

About Interact

Interact is a global enterprise software company that serves intranet software to over one million users across more than 850 organizations. We specialize in solving internal communication and collaboration challenges by combining our sophisticated intranet software with outstanding professional services, focusing on developing long-term strategic partnerships with our customers.

Interact has offices in Manchester and New York, and operates across the whole of the US and Canada, EMEA and Australia.

Enjoyed this eBook? Why not explore the role and potential of social collaboration technology with our free eBook series? In the series, we explore:

01   **WHY do I need social in the workplace?**

Making the case for social and collaborative technology

02   **HOW to get the boss to say 'yes'**

Securing stakeholder buy-in for your project

03   **WHICH social collaboration tool is right for my business?**

Understanding social technology, and choosing a platform to meet your needs

04   **Intranets: are they still relevant?**

Exploring the role of the intranet in today's digital workplace

Contact us today:
New York: +1 (646) 564 5775
Manchester: +44 (0)161 927 322

www.interact-intranet.com

Station House,
Stamford New Road, Altrincham,
Cheshire WA14 1EP, UK

21 W. 46th St. 16th FL,
New York
NY 10036

+44 (0) 161 927 3222
info@interact-intranet.com

+1 (646) 564 5775
info@interact-intranet.com

Station House,
Stamford New Road, Altrincham,
Cheshire WA14 1EP, UK

21 W. 46th St. 16th FL,
New York
NY 10036

+44 (0) 161 927 3222
info@interact-intranet.com

+1 (646) 564 5775
info@interact-intranet.com