

Best Practices for Effective Internal Communications

This article originally appeared on [Forbes.com](https://www.forbes.com)

POST WRITTEN BY
Rebekah Iliff

While measuring PR and communications from an external perspective is generally the priority of PR executives, it's just as important for them to measure the success of internal communications. The reasoning for this isn't because you need a headcount for this summer's BBQ, but rather because your employees are your most dedicated brand champions.

They're tweeting about companies they're impressed by, writing articles on Medium, and discussing what you could be doing better via [Slack](#) messages. That's a whole lot of buzz that can influence the public's perception of your brand. Yet the term "measurement" is more often associated with customer-facing campaigning than it is with internal communications. This is now changing as internal communications strategies become increasingly sophisticated.

The [Coca-Cola](#) Company, for instance, has an employee brand advocate program called [Coca-Cola Ambassador](#), which prepares employees to better communicate with external and internal stakeholders about pressing issues affecting the business.

[Bayer](#) Corporation's internal communications team has a similarly sophisticated program in which they engage with nearly 200 employees to gather ongoing feedback about how messages can be better communicated to the company. Bayer Corporation Vice President and Head of U.S. Communications Mary Lou Panzano described the latter to me as an "internal [Nielsen](#) NLSN +0% group" for testing strategies and tactics.

We all don't work for companies of this size, nor do we all have a need for such thorough practices. Nonetheless, we all struggle in some way with how to best present information to our employees so that it's actually consumed.

So, how can companies of all sizes better message and measure internal communications?

Remember That Less Is Usually More

Sending too many emails means employees will ignore some of your messages. If you're continually emailing FYIs, most messages turn into a steady stream of static.

Panzano and her team at Bayer Corporation use an interesting metric for gauging success: the number of emails they *don't* send to employees. She cuts out the messages that don't align with strategic priorities to ensure employees hear what matters most. At the end of a quarter when she views the emails that weren't sent, she sees it as a win that's helped with message penetration.

Target Groups Strategically

"Strategic targeting" isn't a concept that's often paired with internal communications. But when you think about it, "internal communications" is just marketing to employees. And just like in traditional marketing, the more you cater your message to a niche audience, the more effective it will be.

Consider who needs to know what to help clear out unnecessary static. You can still be transparent with information (sharing all-company news on social channels or intranets), but flagging everyone on these notes is often unnecessary.

As my company's chief strategy officer, I share relevant PR industry news with my team of PR engineers before anyone else as a litmus test. If it's of interest to them and garners a larger conversation, I loop in other senior leaders and teams, but only after the information has been pre-vetted by a smaller group.

Make Your Intentions Clear

When sending out its annual employee engagement survey, The Coca-Cola Company pays close attention to metrics associated with whether employees understand the company's vision and strategies, including how their individual work is connected to those strategies.

Steve Soltis, group director of employee and leadership communications for The Coca-Cola Company says, "A business cannot generate sustainable value and growth without employees understanding where it's headed, why, what it's going to take to get there, and why each employee matters."

The Coca-Cola Company also uses spot surveys throughout the year to gauge the temperature of company culture.

“We’re in the process of developing a plan to use Salesforce Chatter to gather anecdotal feedback on our various programs and to see if the messaging is resonating,” Soltis told me in our interview.

[Forbes Agency Council](#) is an invitation-only community for executives in successful public relations, media strategy, creative and advertising agencies. *Do I qualify?*

Avoid Falling Into The Role Of A 'Corporate Publicist'

If you’re looking to solve an organizational problem, make sure you’re actually taking steps to solve it first. Maybe this scenario sounds familiar: Data from an internal survey indicates that a number of employees would have increased job satisfaction if greater advancement opportunities were available to them.

As part of the solution, you focus on developing a few employees who exhibit leadership skills until they’re able to fulfill management roles. To share the news, you blast their accomplishments on your intranet and share them on your Slack channel. This effort illustrates that if you stick with the company, you *too* could have a similar victory.

All in all, you will have acted as a great internal publicist, but you’re not solving the problem. A true fix requires a much deeper dive into the data that can inspire comprehensive, long-term solutions, as opposed to temporary bandaging.

When Aflac’s employee engagement survey revealed a similar scenario (a yearning for advancement opportunities), its communications team visually weighed which indexes were most relevant to employees. As a result, Aflac created a [Career Success Center](#).

“It’s staffed by a team of human resources professionals whose mission is to help individual employees understand the promotion process, which jobs within the company they’ve qualified for, how to refine their resumes, and interviewing techniques,” said Catherine Blades, senior vice president of corporate communications at Aflac, in my interview with her.

Since launching in May of 2014, nearly 600 Aflac employees have been surveyed in over 1,000 development sessions. Thirty-five percent of those employees have been promoted or moved on to jobs that better suit their skill sets.

Give Employees A Voice

Rolling out an intranet? Take an iPhone video of an employee walking you through how to access pertinent information and add it to your next company-wide newsletter. This corporate-journalism approach allows employees to be the mouthpieces of your brand.

When internal communications work well, your employees end up being so in tune with the business they'll begin to tell the company story for you – and they'll take pride in doing it.