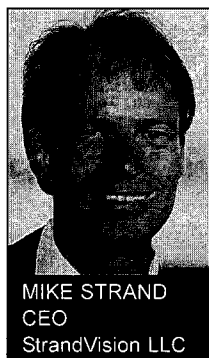


Improving communications

Happy and motivated employees are critical components of every company's overall business success.

One of the most important, yet challenging issues is employee communications. There are regulatory notices, such as unemployment and anti-discrimination postings, that have to be distributed in prescribed ways; there are business notices, such as health insurance enrollments and payroll notices; and there are general



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and social notices, such as club schedules and holiday events, that build team spirit. Internal communications (good and bad) affect the morale of the staff, which impacts corporate culture, customer satisfaction and the future success of the company.

Whatever the message or the medium, communications must be timely, clear and pervasive. If not handled properly, communications have the potential

to become part of a sea of information that clogs bulletin boards and in-boxes. The congestion is at least partly due to the fact that distributing and posting notices are only the first steps; communications also have to be removed or updated when the information is outdated or the event has passed.

Outside the box

Let's face it; most employee communications are boring. Ignoring the regulatory postings (which are boring by definition), communications do not have to look like they were drafted by some bureaucrat. It makes sense to invest in both writing and design to make them more interesting.

Think about the audience you are trying to reach. Today, everyone is more sophisticated in the way that they interact, and their expectations are higher. Virtually everyone was raised on television. Many have been familiar with computers for years. Throw in the Web, email, instant messaging and, now, text messaging, and you have a broad array of communications options. Not every one of the new communications types is appropriate for business communications, although you should be thinking about all of your options as new media become more pervasive and people become even more comfortable with them. What worked yesterday is not necessarily the best way to go today – or tomorrow.

Time to take a look

It is time to reexamine your internal communications. Is it hitting the mark? Is it cost effective? Is it in keeping with the increasing sophistication of your audience? Start by examining if each communication is necessary. Eliminate what you can. Then, take a look at these new communications media:

Postings: Bulletin board postings don't have to be boring. Most standard word processing packages allow you to

create attractive formatted documents or Adobe PDF files that are easy for your employees to read. You can even print them on a color printer, or email them for local printing in remote offices. Keep designs simple. Remember, just creating a color document doesn't make you an artist. Also remember to print an expiration date on your announcements and have someone at each location in charge of discarding them.

Email: Do you really have to print out or post every employee notice? Email is an effective, cost-efficient way to reach many employees at their desks. This has the advantage of reaching remote workers and even telecommuters. Keep in mind, however, that there will always be some employees (many, in some companies) who are not on company email. Also, remember any email can be printed or forwarded outside the company, so confidential communications should be handled accordingly.

Web sites: Many companies are setting up private Web sites for employee services. You can create a central repository for employee news where you can post work and club schedules, employee handbooks, even corporate videos, ads and other items of interest. These sites can also be used to provide many employee services, such as benefits administration. However, be aware that Web sites are expensive to create and maintain. Transaction-based systems generally require larger investments in systems and consulting services.

Digital signs: Another medium that's catching on is digital signage. This takes advantage of people's acceptance (and fascination) with television. You can set up television displays in employee break rooms, dining areas, lobbies and conference rooms. Digital signs are completely passive – employees don't have to do anything to see them. The signs can display rolling text messages and graphics or even videos with or without audio. This approach is great for late-breaking news or to remind employees about deadlines for health insurance sign ups, for instance. It's also a great way to recognize employees, announce new customers, provide weather updates, or even run the company stock ticker.

These new technologies won't replace all traditional methods but they expedite the communications process, reduce complexity and can act as supplements. They are now pervasive and have come down in price to the point where they are practical even for smaller companies. When employee communications tools are combined properly, employee morale and profits will most likely go up over time. I encourage you to step back and take a look at how you reach out to your employees. There may be a better way.

StrandVision LLC is an online digital signage company located in Eau Claire that uses the Internet to deliver timely information inexpensively through televisions or computer displays in business showrooms, lobbies and employee break rooms. Mike can be reached at 715.833.9501 Ext. 100, mjs-trand@strandvision.com or www.strandvision.com.