Measurement That Matters

How to measure—and get the most out of—your email, intranet, internal social media and other platforms.

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Introduction

How do you measure communications success?

Internal communications makes an essential contribution to an organization’s success. But for years the dearth of metrics prevented executives from assessing communications’ value—and communicators from making informed decisions.

That’s all changing. With the advent of digital communications, numbers are easier to come by. But which numbers are important, and what is just noise? How do you turn raw numbers such as intranet page views and email opens into key performance metrics that executives will recognize as valuable?

This guide offers tips on measuring your efforts. From planning communications goals to measuring outcomes, this guide will help you implement strategies to prove your value to top leaders. This enables you to measure your efforts and make improvements, and it helps you get a seat at the table when top leaders meet.

Professional communicators are bringing a level of analytical rigor to their roles as never before. (See case studies below.) Why? In a business setting, analysis is respected. It gives you a stronger voice. It’s no longer “I think,” but “I know,” because that’s what the data shows.

The tips and ideas included in this guide come from professional practitioners and experts as well as case studies that draw lessons from three internal communications powerhouses: JLL Americas, Microsoft and Cleveland Clinic. Read on to tap into their collective experience and wisdom.

The feedback loop

Whether you’re using email, an intranet or internal social media, measurement is essential.

“Measurement is the feedback loop that informs all our decisions,” says Ryan Williams, partner at Tekara Organizational Effectiveness. “If we’re going to be effective, we have to measure. There’s no way around it.”

“A lot of times we find a lot of opportunities by measuring,” says Cindy Crescenzo, president of Crescenzo Communications. “By seeing what’s working, we can build on top of that. Of course, if we find out what’s not working, we should not be afraid of that.”
Internal Communications
Measurement That Matters

Identify Business Goals and Objectives

Pinpoint your objectives

Regardless of which organization you work for, you should align your measurement with the organization’s goals in addition to industry standards, says Kevin Kolus, communications manager at Cleveland Clinic. (See case study below.)

“That’s the way to make sure that you stay relevant within your organization and make sure that you’re meeting the needs of the business,” he says, “as well as staying on top of the best practices that you’re learning from your peers.”

What areas should you measure? Crescenzo suggests the following:

- **Knowledge**: Do they know the facts?
- **Perceptions**: They might know something, but they don’t believe it.
- **Behavior**: Do their actions reflect what they know and believe?
- **Effectiveness**: How many people did you make aware of a communication piece? How many people followed your call to action?

Executive interviews

To identify your goals and objectives, start with executive interviews, Crescenzo says. Ask your leaders what keeps them up at night. What do they think employees should know in order to help your organization succeed? What’s going on in the industry that people must be aware of?

This sets the direction for your communications. There’s a side benefit, she says: It gives you a seat at the table as a communicator, because executives can see by the way you conduct the interview that communications has a huge impact on whether employees are brought along.

“It’s a great one-two punch,” she says.

Use focus groups

Employee and stakeholder focus groups also help communicators benchmark, says Shel Holtz of Holtz Communications + Technology, “because you want to find out how all this is working for them.” Stakeholders could include the HR team or whoever is behind the communication.
**Map your plan**

When Valley First, a division of First West Credit Union in British Columbia, began planning for its new banking system, communicators decided the project was so crucial that they needed a fresh, creative approach. Rather than simply draw up an editorial calendar, Valley First commissioned a map marking the journey for employees, with checkpoints and dangers to overcome, such as the Forest of Indifference and the Desert of Doubt, says David Kropp, communications business partner.

Fictional guides, such as Gandalf from “The Lord of the Rings” and Luke Skywalker from “Star Wars,” led them through each phase, laying out messages and challenges that were essential to its success.

This required Kropp and his team to talk to the players at every phase of the project, including the project manager, the learning development team, and reps from human resources, marketing and member experience.

The result was a creative process that let everyone see where they were on the path and what they ought to do next. Employees began to ask, “When’s the next phase launching? Who’s our next quest guide?” Kropp says.
Making the Best Use of Email Analytics

A Ragan/PoliteMail survey of internal communicators showed that email is the most used, valuable and desired form of employee communication within an organization. Still, email can be overwhelming, so it is essential to understand how best to structure both the content and timing of your email communications program.

Measurement helps you gauge the effectiveness of your initiatives, activities, vehicles and messages. It might also lead to changes. These could be as small as altering page formats and using images and links, or as great as increasing message volume to amplify a campaign that’s proving successful. You might even abandon an unsuccessful program.

At times internal communicators use email and other messaging “like a crutch,” Crescenzo says. They feel that once they fire off an email, they have done their job. Only through measurement can you establish the impact of that message, cut out wasted effort and focus on communication that drives business outcomes.

Measurement also offers a snapshot in time, helping answer the question, “How are specific communications working now?” Crescenzo says.

People often focus simply on measuring opens and the click-throughs for their own sake, she adds. “You have to couple that with the outcome,” she says. “The click-throughs and opens are great, but if [the recipients] didn’t learn anything, if they didn’t absorb the message, if they didn’t change behavior, it cannot be considered a complete success.”

A focus on open rates can be misleading. Executives should understand how their organization’s metrics are calculated and the accuracy of their measurement data, says Michael DesRochers, founder and managing partner of PoliteMail. For example, one company recorded an average open rate near 20 percent, and the communications team shut down those email programs and diverted content to the intranet.

Within two months, traffic to the intranet fell by nearly half, and people were directly emailing their managers asking for news and information. Why the inaccuracy? Some measurement tools don’t record an email as “opened” until the recipient clicks on the line that reads, “Click here to download emails,” DesRochers says. People can also read email without downloading images.

Although opens are the most common email measurement, they are also the least valuable metric. What to measure? DesRochers says you should track the following:

- **Open rate.** This is the most obvious but weakest metric. Opens tell you only whether recipients have clicked on the subject line. They may have just previewed and deleted the content, or they could have read all it without actually “opening” the email because they didn’t download the pictures.
- Mobile and desktop access. Are people finding your content through their smartphones? Is mobile increasing, and are you designing for mobile? If not, could you increase open and click rates by making your email more mobile responsive?

- Click-through rates. Do they follow through to your content? If you want click through, are you designing and writing emails in a way that encourages this? For example, offering a list of linked bulleted points near the top of the message will help readers quickly access the stories and content most relevant to them.

- Read time. The amount of time the recipient spends with the email open is the best indication of whether they are reading it. Obviously, if readers are opening and immediately deleting your email, you are not getting through.

- Long versus short messages. Monitor how people consume your email. Measure read times and message lengths, as well as which page formats work best. Microsoft isn’t alone in discovering that “popcorn email”—pithy, well-designed messages—can be more effective than smorgasbord-style information overloads. (See case study below.)

- Attention rate. If people are not even getting past the subject line into the body of your message, reconsider the address you’re sending it from—and write catchier subject lines or change the From address.

- Effectiveness rate. Calculating the ratio of recipients to opens/clicks will tell you how successfully your content and design get people to take the actions you want.

- Time of day a message is sent, and when it is read. When are your staffers most likely to check their email? That’s good information to have, because you’ll get better results if you structure your messages and send times to fit into their day.

- Outcomes. When possible, measure how your messaging affects the desired outcomes. For open enrollment, safety and compliance, leadership strategy or employee training, gather data on form completions and conduct before/after surveys.

- Behavioral and attitude changes. When you make changes, are you gaining positive results? Is the time they spend reading the content increasing relative to its length? Are you getting more click-throughs, greater participation and better outcomes?
Making Sense of Your Intranet

The important areas to measure on the intranet are easy to list: page views, time on page, time on the site, and engagement by employees, such as shares and “likes” of articles.

The challenge, however, lies in defining your purpose, Williams says. Is the intranet a place for staffers to connect and be rewarded? Is it a place where they do work, using a platform such as SharePoint to swap and edit documents and advance their work projects? Is it a document archive?

“What do you hope employees are doing there, and why would they find it valuable?” Williams says. “Are they using it? We do have to track usage. What are they using, and how does that relate back to business strategy.”

Have a plan

“Measurement is always based on how well I’ve defined my endpoints,” Williams says. “You need to spend a lot of time up front making sure you know what you’re trying to do.”

Make sure you know the people in your organization, their education levels and the overall culture—as well as the action you are seeking from your employees.

Your messaging—and measurement—should all be framed around how you add value to the business.

Monitor what you post

Track the nature of the content that you and others are publishing on the intranet, Williams says. What’s happening on your pages? How many people are blogging or posting, and how often? Are employees commenting? What people are talking about, and how does it relate to business?

It’s important to know that people are talking about, say, new sales 20 percent of the time and the brand 30 percent of the time. Or is it extraneous stuff that won’t matter to the business bottom line?

“Most of your measurement should be framed on: How do I engage staff more effectively so they can do their jobs more effectively—and sometimes save a lot of money?” Williams says.

Measure time on page—and identify who’s clicking

Sure, they’re clicking through, but you have to know how long they spend on the page to know whether they have even read your message.
“Simply entertaining them isn’t enough,” Williams says. “If you aren’t actually getting their attention and they aren’t spending time with you, then you don’t have the opportunity to have a meaningful interaction.”

Once you get your data on page views (for example), break the data down further into the region people are in, and what level of job they hold, Williams says. That way you are able to find out what interests people in various parts of your organization and what they spend time with. Then track that back to a business result.

**Strike a balance**

Measure communications read times across your intranet and email relative to the content being produced. Employees have only so much time to complete their jobs and stay up to date with important internal communications.

How much time do you require of them? What is a reasonable expectation? Depending upon your metrics, high engagement could mean employees are wasting too much time or that the message isn’t clear or easy enough to find.

**Differentiate messages**

Valley First offers general updates for large groups, but it can target information based on employee location, position and job title. “So through our intranet messaging,” Kropp says, “we are now sending messages that are applicable to various employee groups that land on their home pages.”

Measurement can then reveal what form of messages and content work best with each group.

**Use quick polls and focus groups**

Valley First uses quick four-question polls to determine such things as which area of a given project they want to learn more about in the next month. Employees vote on options such as employee training or strategic vision, Kropp says.

Short polls don’t take much time out of the workday, so staffers are more inclined to complete them. You get quick data on an area of interest.

Similarly, just as focus groups can help you benchmark where you are as you start out, they help you see how well your communications are received. (See the Microsoft case study.)
Drawing Conclusions from Internal Social Media

**Turn social media platforms into sounding boards**

Internal social media platforms, such as Yammer, can be hard to track. Still, there are ways to get value from the platform beyond its well-known strengths, such as collaboration.

How about using it to measure sentiment internally?

If you just held a town hall meeting and heard from leaders, throw out a question on social media for people to answer when they get back to their desks, Crescenzo says. Ask, “What did you guys get out of that?” or, “What can you do to help us obtain the goals the president is talking about?”

How did you do? How did those executives do in communicating to employees? Did the message get through, and did it resonate with them? Are they excited about that big acquisition, or afraid of the reorganization?

“That will help you read where the temperature is,” she says.

**Measure engagement**

It’s not enough to know that 99 percent of employees logged in to your internal social community if no one is collaborating or deriving value from the network, Guy Alvarez writes for Good2bSocial.com, a legal digital marketing firm. Luckily, engagement is fairly easy to measure.

Measure matters such as the average number of comments or “likes,” average amount of time spent on the network by individual user, user activity, contributions per user, percentage of contributors, number of downloads or uploads, and number of questions, Alvarez writes.

Reading and clicking are the two primary forms of engagement with most corporate content, so monitor them through email and intranet communications.

Measuring engagement has three purposes. First, understand how much content you produce and how much time you expect your employees to spend consume it. Second, monitor the level of interaction with that content. Third, measure whether the engagement achieves your objective.

It’s splendid if employees are highly engaged with that information on the company picnic—as long as that leads to high attendance. More important, however, is to compare the level and value of that not-so-essential event to their engagement with the company strategy.
4 steps to measuring internal social media

In an article for Ragan.com and her blog, The Social Workplace, communications expert Elizabeth Lupfer lists a series of steps for measurement. They include the following:

**Set your business objectives.** Determine what you are trying to achieve. Retain employees? Boost collaboration? Speed up innovation? Or maybe turn your employees into powerful brand ambassadors? Then map out your current information flow, and determine how employees engage with your intranet or social media tools, Lupfer writes. Also, decide what your ideal social media scenario would look like. What cultural differentiators do you hope to foster?

**Align for design.** Balance potential risks against projected gains in productivity, collaboration or innovation. Develop guidelines for social media use, and employ metrics to determine how well your engagement tools work. Make sure you get senior management on board—and train them, too.

**Implement.** “Identify the most effective tools for your needs—from wikis and microblogs to robust knowledge-sharing and innovation platforms,” Lupfer writes.

**Measure and adjust.** “Judging social media ROI is difficult,” Lupfer writes, “but by establishing a benchmark and then conducting employee engagement focus groups and surveys, linkage analyses, social media diagnostics and business analytics, it is possible to gauge how well you did.”

In short, keep what works, and tweak what doesn’t.
Getting Insight from Feedback

Survey and poll for success

Just as surveys can help you benchmark in advance, they can tell you how to adjust in the midst of an initiative. Once Williams was consulting with a global plasma company that was going through a merger, and there was fear in the ranks. The company was at risk of losing top talent.

Williams conducted weekly polling to understand what employees wanted to know and what they were taking away from the information that was being offered.

“What we identified in Berlin was that there was a huge drop in support and confidence,” he says. “Immediately we were able to send the president there and do some town halls and connect with staff and dialogue. In support of that post we created some specific communications and channels and delivery in that area as well.”

Use simple survey and polling tools

Valley First’s new banking system was the foundational platform used for, well, just about everything: loans, financial information, online and mobile banking, business intelligence—you name it.

Such a launch takes years of planning, and it was essential that employees were on board, says Kropp. That made internal measurement an essential vehicle in ensuring a successful rollout.

“While we know that the technology implementation is what really pushes out the project for us,” Kropp says, “the success hinges on how well prepared and confident our employees are once we go live with the banking system.”

To establish its metrics, Valley First undertook a series of internal “change readiness surveys” that helped it to benchmark progress that followed. It created an internal microsite—a hub offering information on everything related to the big switchover, such as training, project updates and member impact. Valley First drove its 1,700 employees there through intranet teasers, tracking the visits to the site.

You don’t have to break the bank to get a survey done. Use your intranet metrics or email to reap quick numbers if you ask just a few questions, says Angela Sinickas of Sinickas Communications.

Pose a question on your intranet home page about a topic you plan to communicate. “Then repeat the same knowledge question after your campaign is underway to check for improvements,” she says. “Just realize that you’re hearing only from the people in your audience who regularly use electronic channels.”
Surveys aren’t solely for gauging the success of broader campaigns. Often people will comment, offering you “success stories and anecdotes that are far more valuable than your traditional reach and engagement data,” Alvarez writes.

How about the story of how somebody located an in-house expert thanks to your internal social network? Successes abound out there.

**Using survey data wisely**

Surveys are not just a key form of measurement; they are essential to building employee engagement, says Larry Emond, managing partner at the pollster Gallup. Seventy percent of U.S. workers are not reaching their full potential, and these disengaged workers cost the U.S. economy an estimated $450 billion to $550 billion a year, he says.

For people to take employee engagement seriously, it has to be an important performance metric for all managers, Emond says. Gallup—which does internal surveys as well as its more famous political work—doesn’t accept projects with clients who won’t let the pollster report its findings to every manager who supervises five or more people.

“The entire story is local,” he says.

It is common for companies to find one work group that ranks, say, in the 87th percentile of engagement, yet another work group in the same building and business group is in the 25th. Some companies that conduct employee surveys think it’s enough to have managers view a webinar on how to interpret the results, Emond says. But you shouldn’t be training them solely on how to read the scorecard.

At the best companies, the manager development program includes significant training about how better to engage people. After all, engagement scores relate to how much employees like their manager.

“If I hate my boss, those [scores] are less,” Emond says. “If I love my boss, those are high. About 70 percent of my world is colored by my boss. It’s the filter by which all employees do almost everything.”

**Outcomes and results**

Use measurement to demonstrate that your interaction with your employees is meaningful. If you work in an industry with high risks of injury—mining, forestry, factories, paper mills—did your safety initiative show results? Were there fewer on-the-job injuries following your communication? Are you saving lives? That’s a pretty powerful result—something you can tell the kids about at the dinner table or friends at a party—unlike effusing about how many clicks your story got on the intranet.
"Is it actually helping you reduce costs, reduce risk, keep people safer?" Williams says.

All these matters can also be turned into value that the green visor types will appreciate. Does the improved safety reduce insurance costs? Is your retention initiative keeping top employees on the job longer? Was there an uptick in applications from people who were recommended by friends on staff?

“That’s why it’s essential for communicators to [measure],” Williams says. “It’s not enough to create entertaining magazines and send them around internally and improve readership. The readership has to identify a business solution.”
Case Study

JLL’s Key to Better Staff Communication: Reliable Metrics

Here are four ways JLL Americas has used email metrics to measure employee engagement with its internal messaging.

Do you make decisions on communications projects based on how everyone feels about them—or do you use hard data?

Think about all the subjective opinions you field when you’ve just conducted an employee town hall or you’ve planned out a revamped newsletter.

“In communications, your content is often judged based on opinions and anecdotal feedback,” says Chris Close, former director of internal and external communications at the commercial real estate service firm JLL Americas.

Those opinions and anecdotes may be very much at odds with actual outcomes and results—which are, of course, the metrics by which content and conduits should be assessed.

To find out how modifications to internal communications emails changed behavior among the company’s 19,000 employees in the Americas, Close used the PoliteMail email measurement tool and employee surveys. The metrics revealed an improved knowledge of company strategy.

By using solid data to cut through assumptions and opinions, Close has boosted readership of emails and newsletters and has streamlined workloads for his communications colleagues.

Here are four tips for your email measurement:

Map employee knowledge to newsletter readership

In recent years, through ongoing improvement of content, Close nearly doubled open rates of the JLL Americas weekly email newsletter, This Week at JLL, from 30 percent in 2011 to 57 percent today. That’s certainly good news, but the big question is whether the increase in newsletter readership has an impact on employees. “I wanted to connect the increase in the open rate with our objectives,” he says—one of them being raising awareness of JLL’s corporate strategy.
After one of JLL’s employee town hall meetings, Close sent out a survey to attendees, asking how often they read the weekly JLL Americas newsletter, how well they knew the company business strategy, and how confident they were in their ability to help JLL reach its goals. Close found a clear link between frequent newsletter readership and knowledge and confidence in the strategy.

Specifically, employees who read the newsletter every week were nearly four times as likely to understand company strategy compared with employees who don’t read it, and those regular readers were nearly four times as confident that the company was on track to meet its goals.

“This tells us there’s value in what we’re doing with the newsletter, and that we should keep investing in it,” Close says.

**Drive newsletter readership with mobile-friendly design**

A closer look at email metrics also helped Close garner support for better mobile access to the weekly employee newsletter. Analysis showed that newsletter readership via mobile devices was on the rise—from about 3 percent in 2011 to about 12 percent in early 2014.

However, “the newsletter wasn’t especially mobile-friendly,” which was slowing gains in readership from the growing number of JLL Americas employees accessing content on their phones and tablets. Regular Outlook email doesn’t translate well to mobile email platforms, Close says, nor were JLL’s intranet pages programmed using responsive design techniques. “It was painful to read the newsletter on your phone,” he says.

Despite the difficulties, analytics showed a steady upswing in mobile newsletter readers. It made sense to invest in a better mobile experience.

“We figured out ways to ‘trick’ Outlook into being mobile-friendly,” with mobile-responsive email templates, Close says, “and we built mobile-responsive pages for our intranet.”

The payoff on these investments of time and money was rapid, according to ongoing email analysis: Mobile click-throughs are up to 16 percent and are rising steadily.

**Use metrics to allocate resources**

Email analysis has helped Close and his colleagues figure out where to invest time and money in email communications—and where to stop wasting time and money.

JLL America’s HR department was producing a twice-monthly newsletter called “People Connection”—a mix of profiles and news about JLL employees, along with alerts about benefit enrollment deadlines, vacation signups and other time-sensitive news.
When the HR team decided to pull the news alerts out of the newsletter so that employees could receive customized emails instead, the newsletter’s open rates and click-throughs fell off the cliff.

“People weren’t that interested in the content that was left,” Close says.

When he suggested that the HR team discontinue the weakened newsletter, they were hesitant: “People like to hang on to the content they’ve built. The newsletter’s stakeholders insisted that it was still a good information source.”

Only hard data could overcome the entrenched opinions about the failing newsletter, Close says. He showed the HR team that after the time-sensitive alerts were removed from People Connection, open rates dropped by 4 percent—and worse yet, click-throughs dropped by a whopping 40 percent, at a time when click-throughs with This Week in JLL rose by 20 percent.

Faced with clear evidence that the newsletter was losing readers, the HR team agreed to shelve it. Close agreed to add the remaining “people” content into the weekly newsletter so it would still get viewers.

Use design to boost open rates

Analysis of email open rates also helped JLL communicators save the time they were spending on designing internal newsletters.

“Lots of our people create communications for their local offices, and my boss and I thought they were spending too much time on design,” Close says. “The emails often looked overdesigned, without benefits to show for it.”

Close’s team created two basic templates for email newsletters, including This Week at JLL. Naturally, there was resistance. “Someone told us we should go back to the old template instead of using what they said was a ‘bleak and lifeless design,’” Close recalls, “but we didn’t think design was all that important to readership.”

Sure enough, when he used email metrics to examine email read times before and after use of the new template, “we had the highest readership ever with the new design,” Close says. “It’s all about the headlines in the newsletter, not the design.”

Having seen time and again the power of metrics to support sound business decisions, Close is a believer.

“When you leave decisions up to anecdotes, you’re at the whim of just a few people,” he says. “Whether someone likes what you’re doing or doesn’t like it is immaterial. What matters is if it gets employees to do what you need them to do.”
Case Study

Metrics Deliver ROI—and Employee Buy-in—At Microsoft

How metrics persuaded the software giant to cancel an email newsletter—but keep sending ‘popcorn email.’ Outcome? How about that empty chair in practically every meeting room?

When communicators in Microsoft’s customer service and support unit decided to dig deep into internal email metrics, they compared and contrasted two of their publications.

The first was an extensive newsletter for managers, with seven or eight articles that showcased new faces, offered human resources information and linked to further information.

A second was what Tracey Grove, the 9,000-employee unit’s internal communications director, calls “email popcorn”: a postcard format with one paragraph of information. It turned out staffers were scarfing the popcorn and turning up their noses at the heavier fare.

“They were both launched at the same time,” Grove says, “and what was interesting was that the one crashed and burned, and the other took off.”

That's important information if you don't want to squander your time. Microsoft, which uses PoliteMail for email measurement, canceled the unpopular publication and put its efforts into the crunchy, salty stuff that employees devour by the fistful.

Metrics and focus groups

Microsoft uses its email metrics tool to better understand what the recipients (mostly field engineers) want from the missives, how they use them and whether they even read them.

When the analytics showed that few were reading the managers’ update, Microsoft communicators followed up with focus groups to determine why, Grove says. They learned there was too much information to process in the text-heavy managers’ update.

Some of it repeated what the managers were already getting directly from HR. There were stories about people who weren’t in their part of the organization and didn’t really interest these bosses.
They said, “I don’t know where to start,” Grove recalls. “There are five or six different things here. I don’t know where my call to action is.”

The newsletter—which took a couple of days of dedicated work by staffers each month—was canceled because it wasn’t providing the return on investment that Microsoft had hoped for. The real-time data helped Grove and her colleagues make decisions about allocating limited resources.

**Trends on the intranet**

Grove’s team also measures the intranet for matters such as clicks, downloads, page views and time of view, using analytics from Webtrends.

“There’s a lot of work that goes into putting the intranet together, and again the question is, ‘Does anybody care?’” Grove says.

Microsoft can make comparisons between the visits to pages that are heavily pushed and pages that draw clicks more randomly. Microsoft tracks top pages, trends of behavior, shares, and whether people are watching the video that the VP released.

If content is overlooked, communicators can determine whether the information is the sort you use only once (such as onboarding) or whether there is a content problem. Perhaps the page is hidden, or the information isn’t useful.

All this brings us to the second life of that manager newsletter. Grove’s unit at Microsoft did have a managers’ section on the intranet—a long page full of text and links. Nobody ever visited it, she says, and by “nobody” she means a meager 20 hits a year.

Seeing this, communicators got together with some managers and said, “What do you need?”

It so happened that a lot of the information from the managers’ newsletter could be useful. Microsoft redesigned the page to offer information that was short, crisp, visually oriented and easy to navigate. There were resources, information on new hires, copy about the rewards program, and tips and tricks for managers.

“Since then we’ve had a huge upsurge in views of the page,” Grove says, to the point that HR and other internal partners are emailing to ask that their information be included on the page.

**Not an internal social media culture**

Microsoft uses its internal platform, Yammer, as a backup to email, which serves as the primary vehicle for delivering information.
“Our audience is inundated with email,” Grove says. “They’re constantly complaining about too much email, [that] emails are too long, too detailed. Yet when you ask how they want to get information, they say, ‘Email.’”

Emails can be viewed offline, archiving is easy, and people don’t have to log on to Yammer and chase some forgotten thread to track down the information they need.

Outcomes can be difficult to determine internally, but Grove’s team is seeing results. Microsoft launched a campaign is to deliver a customer experience that is “perfect every time.” To their delight, the team is seeing the phrase pop up all over the place in emails and conversation.

Another campaign urged employees to put a customer chair in every room so that they always consider things from the customer perspective. The idea took off, and in some meetings an employee is assigned to play the role as customer.

Says Grove: “Those kind of behavioral shifts are the outcome that we’re looking to drive.”
Case Study

Measurement Shows Cleveland Clinic Whether Messages Are Sinking In

Hand hygiene. Book signings. United Way drives. The hospital’s metrics help it sharpen communications—and ramp up manager participation and roadshows when needed.

For the last seven years, an internal group at Cleveland Clinic has pushed for continuous improvement, urging every employee to ask, “Where am I being inefficient in my work?”

The people behind the initiative came up with “a brilliant model” that breaks down the steps for improvement, says communications manager Kevin Kolus.

Formerly, communicators might have been reluctant to detail the multistep model in an email, because without measurement, they had no way of knowing whether they were successful.

“When you can start measuring,” Kolus says, “that allows you to take risks and see, ‘Was this better? Was this worse? Is it something we should replicate in the future?’ It helps you to innovate.”

The communications team at the world-renowned hospital broke the model down into bite-size chunks in an e-news format, demystifying a topic that previously may not have seemed immediately relevant to many employees’ workaday lives. This is something they never would have attempted in the past, Kolus says.

Cleveland Clinic was able to see that the message was opened, read and absorbed, and the leaders could see the effect on the organization. “It was a wild success,” Kolus says. “Managers loved it. They got a ton of feedback on continuous improvement, and it really helped get the word out.” Again, it demystified the information.

‘Are we being effective?’

Communication is a challenge in any organization with 43,000 employee caregivers, among them 11,200 nurses and more than 3,000 physicians and scientists. The clinic has 27 institutes providing care in 120 subspecialties, drawing patients from all 50 states and 133 countries.

The hospital’s staff is also spread out worldwide. In addition to its 167-acre main campus, there are regional hospitals and 18 family health centers throughout northeastern Ohio. The clinic has locations in Florida, Nevada, Toronto and Abu Dhabi.
Like the rest of the staff, communicators embrace the goal of putting the patient first and delivering superlative care. With that in mind, they ask themselves, "Are we being effective by being as agile as we can be? Is the message getting through?"

The hospital measures email metrics with PoliteMail, which enables it to measure open rates, click-troughs and other important factors.

These numbers help the team understand how effective their communications are, Kolus says. Though the clinic doesn’t send email as frequently as other most organizations, it targets specific groups of employees, such as physicians, managers and leaders, and others. Each has a distinct recap of the news and a call to action.

The ability to track opens and click-troughs “was really eye-opening to squash some skepticism about, ‘Are people really reading these emails? Are they reading them as frequently as we’d hoped?’” Kolus says.

Measurement doesn’t provide lessons for communicators alone. Let’s say employees aren’t embracing an emailed executive directive as had been expected. When you can prove that 75 percent of the audience did open the message, leaders can see that there must a different reason why staffers aren’t following through.

The next question is this: What can be done differently to create the outcomes you seek among your employees?

“Oftentimes it can be they really desire their manager to be interpreting and coaching the message,” Kolus says. “So, we can go back and say, ‘You might want to consider doing a roadshow at some of the leadership meetings around the organization.’”

Redesigned intranet

Cleveland Clinic recently redesigned its intranet to unify sites that had been created in willy-nilly fashion over the years, without an overall plan. With the help of Google Analytics, it can seek answers on who is reading stories or viewing content, Kolus says. Can pages be consolidated or transitioned elsewhere?

The clinic has also started using “scorecards” to judge the success of its campaigns, whether it is a plug for flu shots, a request to take the engagement survey, or a plug for the United Way campaign.

The scorecard requires communicators to state the goals of the campaign, which must align with team goals. These in turn must align with the organizational goals. What’s the effective message? Who is the intended audience? Is the message helpful? Did it inspire you?

Through its measurement tool, the clinic can take polls as well. “It was great feedback,” Kolus says. “It was feedback we never had before.”
Cleveland Clinic seeks to go beyond pure numbers to make sure staffers are prioritizing messages correctly. “We want to make sure that people to feel that hand hygiene is more important than one of the book-signings of our cafes,” he says.
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