



Delivering Effective Internal Communications

Delivering ROI through Employee Engagement

Industry Benchmark Analysis
& Best Practice Advice

from denise cox
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NEWSWEAVER²
powering communications

Executive summary

The world of internal communications (IC) is evolving rapidly as organizations realize the positive impact effective communication and engaged employees have on business performance.

In this whitepaper Newsweaver's Lead Communications Consultant, Denise Cox, presents new research and benchmarks for internal communicators: shining a light on how IC is developing, and offering expert interpretation and insight that helps you apply the results to your organization.

Denise goes on to offer best practice advice and techniques you can use to deliver more engaging and effective communications, boost employee engagement and demonstrate the ROI of your internal communications.

Key internal communication benchmarks

- Roles and titles within the IC function still show significant variation, but standards are slowly emerging
- Employee engagement is the biggest goal for IC professionals today
- The biggest challenge IC teams face is managing information overload
- Intranet and email are the most popular IC channels, and perceived to be most effective
- Demonstrating communication effectiveness and ROI is growing in importance for IC teams

Key best practice takeaways

- Engagement is about being timely, targeted and relevant - sending the right information to the right employee at the right time
- Giving employees choice empowers, fuels engagement and promotes buy-in
- Personalization improves perceived relevance, which boosts engagement
- Social elements entice engagement, enable employee voice, and offer valuable insight into how employees interact with your content
- Measuring and benchmarking are the key informed decisions that deliver sustainable employee engagement
- Measuring engagement helps demonstrate the value of internal communications to the organization.

Data collated from a Newsweaver-commissioned study conducted across Newsweaver's network of more than 400 blue-chip and FTSE 100 companies spanning 96 countries. The results have been cross referenced, where relevant, with the Melcrum "Key Benchmarking Data for Communicators" report.

Do you know how well your internal communications are working?

Effective communication matters. It matters to your employees, it matters to your managers and it matters to your shareholders.

Research confirms that keeping employees informed with personal, relevant and engaging communication gives organizations an edge in the market and has a real impact on bottom line results. But how do you know if your communication strategy is working, and how can you tell which elements of your communications strategy you can improve?

How do you measure engagement and benchmark it over time?

In the pages that follow we'll:

- Offer a snapshot of the emerging IC landscape through industry benchmarks and research driven insight
- Explore current IC best practice and measurement techniques
- Introduce strategies and best practice you can take away today to boost employee engagement and improve ROI

**Keeping employees informed
with personal, relevant and
engaging communication gives
organizations an edge.**

Section 1:

Industry benchmarks - know where you stand

In a fast-moving business discipline like internal communications it's important to keep abreast of how the practice is evolving. Internal communications benchmarks give us a convenient snapshot of where things stand today, let us see where we sit on the spectrum of IC strategy, and provide valuable clues to where things might be heading tomorrow.

The benchmarks we present in this section are based on our Newsweaver client survey, cross referenced where relevant with industry-wide benchmarking data taken from Melcrum's "Key Benchmarking Data for Communicators" report.

The who and where of internal communications.

There's still a lot of variation out there when it comes to both the titles assigned to IC professionals, and where the IC function sits within the organization.

The breakdown of roles was as follows:

- 3% of respondents held a managerial, specialist or supervisory role
- 38% of respondents held a director / senior management role
- 13% of respondents held an executive / advisor / analyst role

Key takeaways:

- Titles and roles in the field are still evolving as IC continues its transition into a stand-alone business discipline
- Look for consolidation and standardization of roles and titles within IC as the discipline continues to mature

Internal communications in the organization hierarchy

The research also shows significant diversity in terms of where IC currently sits within the organization. In both our own study and the Melcrum benchmarking report a significant chunk of organizations (24% Newsweaver study, 48% Melcrum study) have their IC function bundled into the broader category of Corporate Communications. About 20% of organizations have the IC role sitting within their HR department, while only 14% of organizations have a dedicated IC department (Newsweaver study), and 10% of organizations see their IC as part of Sales & Marketing.

An interesting figure here is the “Other” category - which accounted for more than a quarter of organizations on average (30% Newsweaver study, 24% Melcrum study). The prominence of this catch-all category - which spans the organizational spectrum from PR (8%) to IT (2%) and everywhere in between - suggests that IC is still finding its place within the organizational hierarchy.

Key takeaways:

- As with titles and roles, IC as a function is still finding its place within organizations
- Look out for a significant increase in dedicated IC teams as organizations realize the value it can drive across the enterprise
- IC is a cross-departmental discipline. Wherever your IC function sits, make sure you partner with other departments to deliver effective company wide communications

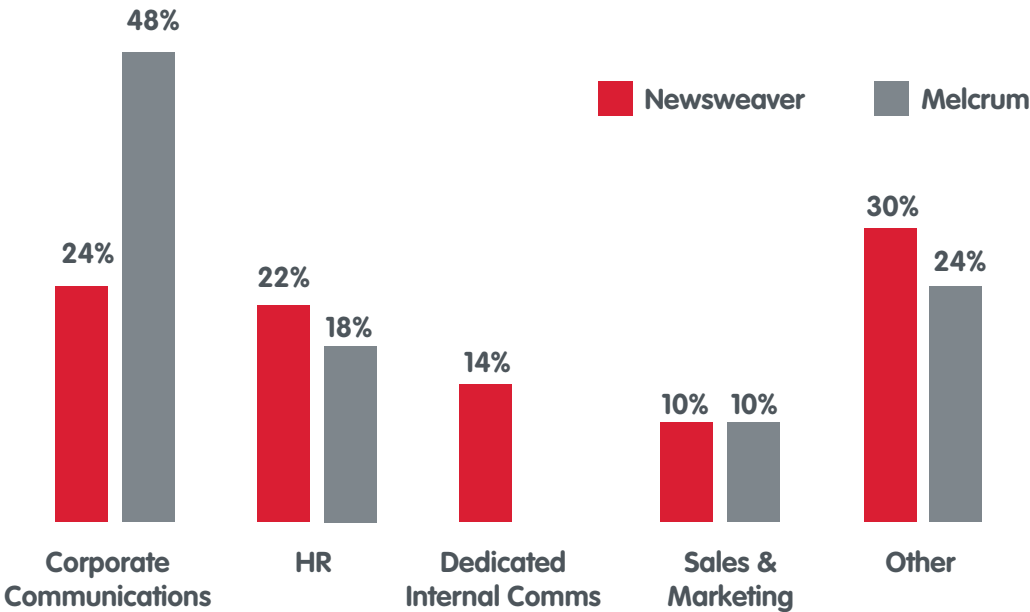


Fig 1: Where does internal communications sit within the organization - Newsweaver and Melcrum data

The goals of internal communication teams

For measuring success it's important to know what you're trying to achieve - and the range of goals expressed by IC professionals is quite revealing.



Fig 2: What survey respondents are hoping to achieve with their IC strategies

Top of the list for more than three quarters of respondents, perhaps unsurprisingly, is Employee Engagement (76%), followed by building a culture of open communication (55%) and enabling change (49%).

Surprisingly, Measuring the Effect of IC (38%) and Demonstrating ROI (15%) are lower on the list of goals. That's interesting, because accountability, and the ability to quantify the value internal communications contributes to the bottom line is becoming increasingly important.

Without the right tools, effective measurement and the ability to quantify ROI becomes difficult, if not impossible. That could be a significant factor impacting the low ranking of these very important goals, and we'll look at some ways to track and measure important IC metrics when we explore best practice later.

Another noteworthy item is the desire to develop the communications skills of managers (15%). This

is one to watch, as managers across different departments and different geographical locations are likely to play an increasingly important role in communication delivery as IC evolves and organizations grow.

Key takeaways:

- Engagement is the "big one" that everyone is talking about, because it has a real impact on an organization's bottom line
- Measurement and ROI are growing in prominence as organizations demand more accountability from communicators. It's important to put effective tools in place to allow you to track and measure performance
- Line managers play a vital role as cogs in a well-oiled IC machine. Recognizing the value of their contribution, and investing more in developing their communication potential, is an area that deserves more attention

The biggest challenges in internal communications

When asked what their biggest challenges were IC professionals gave remarkably consistent answers. Naturally two of the most prominent to emerge were General Employee Engagement (48%) and Gaining Employee Buy-in (54%). But the biggest challenge, by a substantial margin at 64%, is the sheer Volume of Communications flowing through the organization.

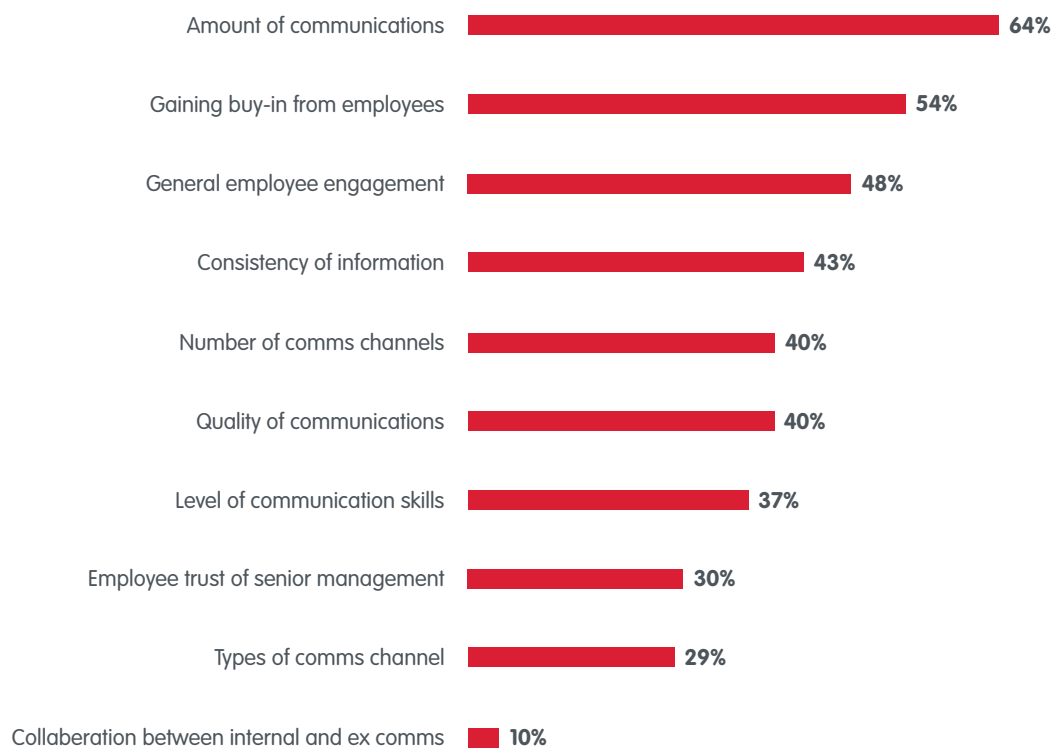


Fig 3: What are the biggest IC challenges faced by your organization?

Information overload: time to turn down the volume?

When you combine the number of communications channels that IC professionals work with, and the sheer volume of information and communications flowing through large organizations today, you get a very real problem.

With so much information coming at them from every conceivable angle, employees are simply filtering out anything they don't feel is personally

relevant to them. That could mean your critical communications remain unread / unheard / unwatched by people who really need the information.

Most internal communicators cite this as their single biggest challenge... and we'll explore some strategies for dealing with it when we look at best practices later.

Turning your communications inside out

An interesting result here is that so few respondents cited Collaboration Between Internal and External Communications as a challenge (10%). It is possible that IC professionals find such collaboration easy, but the reality of internal communications within most organizations suggests otherwise.

It's important for internal and external communicators to work closely together for a variety of reasons. By mirroring some of the strategies your organization is already using to communicate with customers, prospects and partners outside the company, drawing on the experience and expertise of people already using these methods, you can find new ways to enhance the reach and engagement potential of your internal communications.

Key takeaways:

- Dealing with information overload is the biggest recognized challenge for most IC professionals
- The opportunity for collaboration and consistency between internal and external comms is generally underestimated and is worth exploring
- You need to ensure your communications are relevant, timely and engaging if you're going to get through to your target audience

Main focus of internal communications

This was an open ended question in the survey, but what was striking was the level of consistency in the responses we received.

The key focus areas for IC professionals today include:

- **Corporate strategy:** Communicating company vision and values, making sure employees are aware of the strategic direction the business is taking and understand its priorities for the future
- **Business development:** Letting employees know what's happening across the organization, communicating successes, highlighting challenges and generally keeping the workforce up to speed with industry news and improving internal brand awareness
- **Change management:** Ensuring employees are kept up to date with any plans to change or restructure the company, including new acquisitions, business integration, downsizing and redundancy
- **Employee focus:** Announcing staff changes, new hires, promotions; promoting cultural diversity - something that's becoming more important as workforces continue to expand and diversify; building employee engagement
- **Communicating to employees:** Distributing and explaining policy changes to employees, streamlining the communications process, providing education and training, addressing the problem of information overload
- **Technological advancements:** Enhancing intranet functionality and features to drive employee engagement, exploring collaboration and social platforms and how they can help enhance the internal communications experience

Communications channels: the most used and the most effective

What are the most used internal communication channels?

We asked respondents to identify the communication channels they were currently using, those that they planned to use, those they don't use and those they have stopped using. Interestingly our results here mirrored those observed by Melcrum in their Key Benchmarking report. The responses here offer insight into the general direction in which IC is evolving.

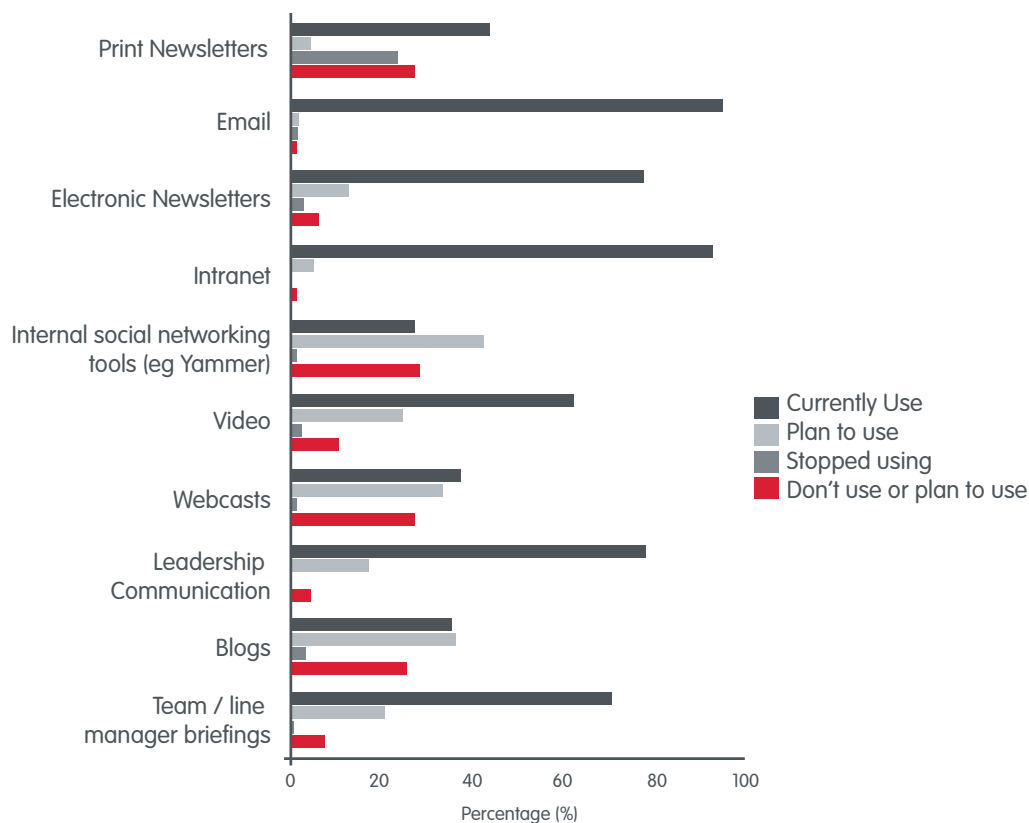


Fig 4: Channels used for internal communications (source Melcrum)

Here are some of the key findings:

- Use of print newsletters continues to fall... however there is still a place for print, which can be a very engaging medium when used effectively.
- Face-to-face, intranet and email are currently the most used communication channels.
- Video, webcasts, blogs and social networking are among the biggest “plan to use” channels.
- Video is perhaps one of the most valuable communication tools available to IC professionals. Used effectively it is an incredibly engaging medium that employees are familiar with, it delivers a lot of information in a short space of time, and it's easy and convenient to consume.
- Internal social networking is still in its infancy, but has a lot of potential, particularly in the areas of employee collaboration, engagement and buy-in. Watch this space.

What channels are most effective?

Again our results here were very much in harmony with Melcrum's study.

Current leaders are intranet and email - followed by leadership communication and face-to-face communication by line-managers. Interestingly while the number of organizations currently using these channels approaches 100% (see Fig 4) when we're talking about effectiveness the numbers are far lower.

Lack of consistent and effective measurement is likely to be one of the main culprits here. A lot of IC professionals simply aren't sure how effective their respective communication channels are, or how they can harness multiple channels to invoke a sort of communication synergy.

Key takeaways:

- Email, intranet and face-to-face are currently judged to be the most popular and the most effective channels for IC.
- Emerging channels like video and internal social networking are gaining traction and are likely to feature more prominently as communicators become more comfortable with them.
- Measurement and the ability to gauge effectiveness consistently across and between communication channels is a major limiting factor for IC professionals.

We've covered a lot in this section, building a fairly comprehensive picture of how the internal communications landscape looks today, and some of the key trends shaping its evolution. In the next section we'll look at engagement in a bit more detail, and explore best practice advice that will help you craft more engaging and effective communications.

Section 2:

The rules of engagement

Fact: More effective and engaging communication results in better business performance.

What drives engagement?

Engaging communications typically share three key characteristics: they are timely, they are targeted and they are relevant. From an IC perspective that means getting the right information to the right employee at the right time.

But it's more than that...

Engaging communication delivers value, and goes beyond information broadcast to entice dialog and interaction. It's about treating employees as individuals, personalizing communications to make them more relevant and giving people choices about the type of information they want to receive and how they consume it.

Effective communication and financial performance are strongly related: companies that are highly effective at communication are 1.7 times as likely to outperform their peers.

(2011 – 2012 Change & Communication ROI Study Report, Towers Watson)

Making communications more engaging

It may seem counterintuitive, but the key to creating more engaging communications is measurement. Engagement is a constantly evolving process, and measurement gives you the information you need to understand it. Measuring how recipients interact with your existing communications provides insight into what resonates with your audience, what makes them tick, and what ticks their boxes.

The following best practice advice draws directly from experience working closely with Newsweaver clients, but we present them here as best practice ideas that apply regardless of the specific platform your organization uses.

1. Engaging by design

Design is important. Whether it's the corporate intranet, your email newsletter or a print flyer the look and feel is a critical first step to engagement.

- Use consistent, branded, cross-platform design that makes your communications instantly recognizable.
- Include design elements that make it scannable and easy for your audience to find their way around - to navigate quickly to what's important to them.
- Understand your audience and use responsive design that adapts seamlessly to suit the device being used to access it.
- Print can also be a great way to reach unconnected employees - to make your communications inclusive and accessible. At Newsweaver our design team makes sure all our client designs work well as printable PDF files.



2. Communication frequency

How often should I send out communications?

It's a common question we get asked all the time. Unfortunately there's no "cookie cutter" answer; it depends on your goals, the information you're sending, the channels you use to connect and, of course, the preferences of your audience.

Send too often and you'll lose them; send too infrequently and you'll lose them. It's a delicate balance, and it's different from organization to organization, and even for different audience segments within an organization.

The only real constant is the fact that you should avoid contributing unnecessarily to information overload. Ask yourself these questions to ensure your communications are relevant and targeted.

- Does what you're sending add value for the recipient, the organization or, ideally, both? If not, then why are you sending it?
- Would the information you're sending be more relevant to a targeted subset of employees? If so, only send it to those people.
- Is there a better way to make the information available to those who want it, without adding to inbox clutter for those who don't?

3. Think accessibility - think outside the box

Get creative when it comes to making your communications more available to employees, however they choose to access them. Give them the option to consume your information in a way that suits them.

By offering employees a choice you empower them... it shows you respect their time and their preferences, and that immediately makes your communications more engaging.

Working with platform constraints

In an ideal world of course we'd offer employees all sorts of choices... but you don't have a magic wand: you have to work within the constraints imposed by the communication platform used across your organization. That can mean working with legacy systems that aren't really designed to be engagement-friendly.

It just means you need to get a bit more creative.

Newsweaver case study

We work with a number of clients who use Lotus Notes. That can be a challenge when it comes to delivering engaging interactive communications.

Our solution was to develop a design that used Notes as the primary delivery channel, but offered recipients an easy way to transcend the limitations of the platform. We gave them a choice: they could stick with the Notes version, click through to read a full interactive version on the company intranet, click through to a mobile-optimized version from their preferred device or click to get a print copy.



Another Newsweaver client took a novel approach to making communication more accessible. They created rich, interactive newsletter microsites using Newsweaver. They then created print notices with a QR code linked to the online newsletter and posted them in prominent locations around the organization. Innovative, effective engagement by thinking outside the box.

Ask employees what they want

We've already said that choice empowers. When an employee actively tells you they want information on a given topic, department, product-line etc., they're going to find communications that deal with that topic much more engaging.

Personalizing employee communications based on self-selected preferences can be an incredibly powerful tool for communicators. You can stop guessing what people want, and start delivering what they've asked for. You retain control of your core message - put your "must read" information front and centre - but now you can augment it with supporting content that you know the individual employee is interested in.

That's engaging, empowering and effective.

Stop guessing what people want, and start delivering what they've asked for.

Make prioritizing information easy

Relevance can also be influenced by how important a particular piece of information is perceived to be. You can encourage more employees to engage with critical communications by giving them an easy way to prioritize information.

Is the communication you send for keeping them up to speed with the latest company news... or does it demand urgent action? Give your recipients a convenient way to gauge the significance of what you send.

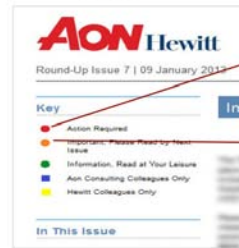
Newsweaver case study

Newsweaver client Aon Hewitt implemented a traffic-light like colour coded system to prioritize newsletter articles for their employees - red = action required, amber = important, please read before the next issue and green = information only, read at your leisure.

Additional colours and symbols were used to indicate relevance to specific business areas.

It's another example of choice - giving employees convenient flags that help them decide what's relevant to them.

Guides engagement



Newsletter courtesy of : Aon Hewitt UK



4. Let's get personal

Personalization is another very important aspect of crafting engaging communications. If your message is generic, bland and corporate - if it's addressing a mass audience rather than the individual - then, let's be blunt here, it will bore most people.

Here are some of the key ways you can make your communications more personal:

- Who sent it? The source of the information is important - employees make a judgement call on relevance based on their personal relationship with the sender. Think about who your communication should come from: the CEO (lends urgency to weighty topics), their line manager or the IC team... choosing the right source will encourage engagement.

- What's it about? The subject line of an email, the headline of an article, the caption of a video - all crucial slivers of content that give you a lead-in opportunity to communicate relevance and kick-start engagement.
- Personalized content: There is enormous opportunity to make content more relevant and engaging - you can personalize by team, by language, by location, by personal preference (as already mentioned), or any combination of these and other content elements.



5. Adding social engagement to your communications mix

Making communications more social - encouraging interaction and dialog - is a great way to boost engagement, and to garner valuable feedback directly from your employees.

You're giving employees a voice, encouraging collaboration and letting them know somebody's listening.

Most of all you're fostering the ownership and employee buy-in that is such an important part of any effective IC strategy.

Encouraging engagement

Encouraging engagement with your communications is a challenge, but a few simple steps can have a big impact. Ask your employees for their feedback, tell them what you'd like them to do, and then make it easy by providing convenient, intuitive tools.

Here are a few suggestions we offer as standard features of the Newsweaver Internal Connect platform:

- **Article comments:** ask your employees for feedback in the body of your article, and encourage them to start a conversation there and then in the comment section - a conversation that can happen across the organization (with their peers) as well as up and down
- **"Likes" and ratings:** like buttons or article ratings offer a quick-and-easy one-click way for employees to let you know what they think of an article. They are a great way to encourage interaction, and can give you remarkable insight into the type of content employees find most engaging
- **Surveys & polls:** surveys are a great way to collect detailed employee feedback on a wide range of topics, or on complex issues. Polls are much simpler, and typically provide a snapshot of employee opinion on a single issue or question. To boost engagement show employees you're listening by sharing results in real time (for polls) publishing results in the next edition of your communication (for surveys), or even demonstrating how their valuable feedback was put to good use

6. Produce engaging content

Great content starts with two things - clear goals and a thorough understanding of your target audience. Without either it's really difficult to create compelling and engaging content.

Here are some things to keep in mind as you're crafting content for maximum engagement:

- **Deal with the WIFM factor:** What's in it for me? It's a fundamental question employees subconsciously ask themselves all the time - if they're going to invest their time in your content, what are they going to get out of it. Be explicit about the benefits up front - give people the information they need to decide if this content is worth their time
- **Make it easy to navigate:** Employees often won't read your entire communication - so its important to make sure they can get to the most important bits quickly and easily. Deliver your key message first, and add supporting detail later, and use descriptive headings and lists to break up content and make it more scannable
- **Deliver easy to consume 'chunks':** Your content should be as long as it needs to be to deliver your message in an effective and engaging way. Bear in mind what you're trying to achieve, and how your audience chooses to consume your content. There is no hard and fast rule

here, but as a rule of thumb summaries should average around 25-35 words, and full articles between 500-700 words

- **Sell the sizzle:** Borrow some ideas from your colleagues in marketing. While you're not aiming for the hard-sell here, your content needs to "wow" readers from the outset and keep them engaged if its going to deliver results
- **Call to action:** Another one borrowed from the marketers - but it's particularly relevant for employee engagement. If your goal is to encourage action, don't assume people will know what you want them to do. Spell it out to them with a clear and compelling call to action

Beyond words... augmenting your story with multimedia content

We live in a multimedia age - so why limit your story telling to words alone? Use photographs, video, presentation slides, webinars... to augment and support your core message and drive enhanced engagement.

- Embed images, video, audio or presentations into your content to add an extra dimension to your story
- Provide links to image galleries, video libraries and related content on the company intranet that helps add context and depth to your article

7. Measurement: unlocking the potential of employee engagement

The best practices we've outlined above are a sure-fire way to increase engagement, but we've already mentioned that the real key to unlocking the full potential of employee engagement is measurement and iterative improvement based on real data.

Modern internal communications platforms like Newsweaver's Internal Connect give you an integrated suite of sophisticated tools that make collecting, analyzing and reporting engagement metrics very straightforward. Whatever platform you use, it's important to make sure you have the necessary tracking and reporting tools available so you can analyze and understand how your communications are performing in terms of both engagement and bottom line value / ROI.

While the exact metrics you track and the numbers you can expect will vary depending on your particular circumstances, here are a few best practice engagement metrics that are universal, and offer valuable insight:

NB. the measurements highlighted in this section are based on those tracked and reported by Newsweaver's Internal Connect... other systems will report similar statistics, but may use different terminology, and present them in a slightly different way.

- **Core readership:** this offers insight into how often employees are engaging with your communications - are they interacting with everything you send out, with one-in-three communications you send out... whatever. Obviously the more often your communication results in engagement here the better
- **Content popularity:** by looking at which content items in your communications employees engage with the most - tracking beyond

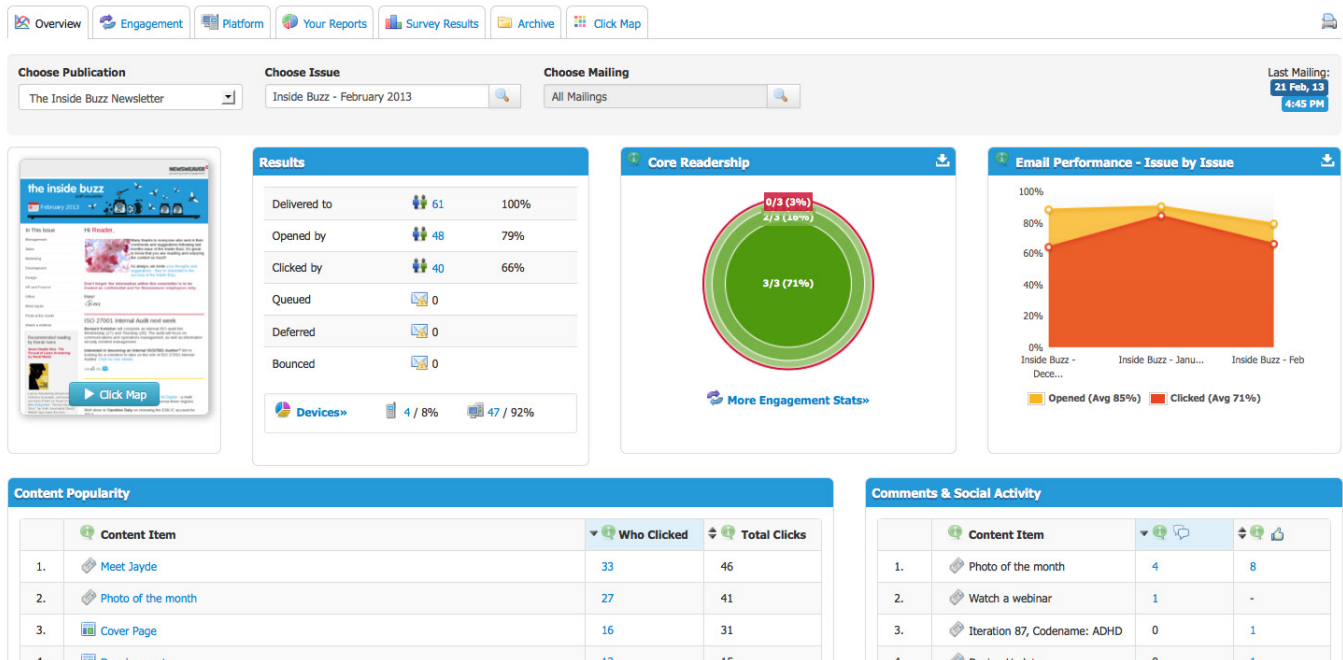
opens to click-throughs and more - you get a really clear picture of the content employees find most engaging, and that helps you deliver more engaging content in future

- **Engagement across the organization:** this gives you a high level breakdown of engagement across different parts of the organization or different regions. It helps you identify where the problems are, letting you pinpoint and eliminate barriers to engagement, and switch to alternative channels (like face-to-face) to make sure important information gets through where necessary

- **What devices are employees using to engage:** how are employees accessing your communications? What proportion are accessing it from their desk? How many are using their mobile device? How does that impact your content and your design?

- **Social engagement:** measuring how employees interact with social elements in your messaging can be a key indicator of enhanced engagement. It also lets you assess which social elements are relevant / work best for your organization, and lets you experiment with new features to see how they impact engagement

Newsweaver's Internal Connect Reporting Dashboard



Conclusion

In this whitepaper we've explored how the internal communications landscape is evolving, looked at where things are heading, and offered some best practice advice you can apply in your own organization.

By understanding the challenges we all face as communicators, adopting best practice principles and measuring your results you can make informed choices that will improve your internal communications performance. Choices that will ultimately deliver more effective communications, more engaged employees, and a demonstrable ROI for your business.

Newsweaver, Powering Internal Communications

Newsweaver **Internal Connect** empowers internal communication teams. Its suite of easy to use tools helps you manage the flow of communication across your organization, leading to better team collaboration, improved social interaction, enhanced engagement and more control over a consistent corporate brand.

It also delivers valuable real-time measurement and insight into all of the communications you send, helping you build a clear picture of how engaging and effective your communications are, and comparing performance to industry and organizational benchmarks.

Effective communication drives workforce engagement. It's also what drives the team here at Newsweaver.

We live and breathe communication, and love helping our clients generate stellar ROI through relevant, targeted and engaging communications. It's what we do best, and why more than 400 blue-chip and FTSE 100 organizations in 96 countries choose Newsweaver to help them inform, engage and inspire the people who matter most to them: their employees.

If you're ready to take your employee engagement to the next level, just **click on this link**, scan the QR Code or call us on +353-21-242-7277 to book your free, no-obligation online consultation and demo.



About the author: denise cox

denise is Newsweaver's Lead Communications Consultant, providing consultancy and best-practice guidance to companies around the world, helping them maximize the impact and engagement of the communications they send.



At Newsweaver denise brings her passion for effective communication to our global customer base, including Saudi Aramco, Shell, Philips, KBC, KPMG, ACCA, Nextiraone, Aviva and many more.

denise speaks regularly at conferences and seminars and conducts hands-on communications workshops around the world. She also contributes to a wide variety of publications, blogs and email newsletters.

Newsweaver Internal Connect

Dramatically improve the results of your employee email communications with Newsweaver Internal Connect.

Boost the engagement of employees by sending emails that are high-impact using the full interactivity of the web – and which provide you with actionable insights and metrics to transform your internal communications.

Newsweaver is the global leader in Internal Communications Management with proven technology, comprehensive services, and expert guidance that is helping more than 400 blue-chip and FTSE 100 companies.

Cutting Edge Communications

Cut through inbox clutter and grab your audience's attention with memorable messages that are on-brand and viewable on any device. Newsweaver allows you to keep their attention with stylish embedded images and videos.

Gain Audience Measurement & Insights

Monitor email performance so you can shape your content strategy with powerful insights into content popularity and engagement. Boost your credibility with powerful intelligence that proves ROI and drives real organizational change.

Champion Two-Way Communication

Newsweaver Internal Connect is packed with social features that allow you start conversations across your organization. Give employees the ability to comment, rate and like content, and participate in surveys and polls; while gathering valuable intelligence with every communication sent.

Manage Events More Effectively

Take the hassle out of event management with our smarter event management tool that brands invitations, manages registrations and targets communications by response, and then measures your success; all from one, intuitive system.

Newsweaver is recognized with ISO 27001 Accreditation for protecting your employee data.



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We know that every organization faces different communication challenges. Call us now if you'd like to discuss yours with one of our IC experts.

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