

Here,
There
and
Everywhere:
Mobile
Working
By Eloise Hinds

Foreword

For many of us, work is now a thing we do,
not a place we go.

Whether the result of industry, choice or
upbringing, workers are increasingly less
likely to be based in a single location.

How then can we make physical distance
unimportant when it comes to engaging a
workforce?

The answer lies in understanding our
audience and in focusing on content rather
than getting weighed down by how we
deliver it.

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Tailored to suit: defining the mobile masses

The topic of a 'mobile workforce' is increasingly raised at conferences and discussions among the internal communications community. It has always been key to our philosophy to put the audience at the heart of everything we do; understanding them is the only way we can create communications that will reach them in more than a purely physical sense. So let's start with a definition of the 'mobile workforce'. We believe mobile employees fall into three related and overlapping groups.

> **Mobile because we have to be**

This group consists of employees who are not based in one place all the time. This is the norm for a diverse range of occupations from those working in sales, healthcare and utilities to postal delivery workers and police officers. Often, the mobile technology given to them by their employer will be functional at best and may not give them easy access to online communication channels, such as intranets and even email that desk-based employees take for granted.

> **Mobile because we want to be**

More employees are choosing where and when they work - at home, in the office, with clients, on a plane. They might work in professional services, finance, education, media or a range of other industries. They may be contractors, freelancers or consultants, for example. There is no common standard in technology given to them by their employers. Some have all the IT they require to work remotely, including access to internal communication channels. Others find both their devices and systems frustratingly slow and outdated.

> **Mobile because we are**

For the incoming generation of workers, mobile will not be an added bonus, but a basic assumption. They are so used to the technology in their personal lives that they won't just want it from their employers; they will expect it.

Each of these groups presents challenges for internal communicators who are tasked with keeping these employees informed, motivated and engaged. How do you ensure these workers are up to date with business and operational news and able to contribute and collaborate across teams, towns, communities or continents?

The answer is not just a suite of carefully chosen, flexible channels, but developing enjoyable and engaging content that captures employees' attention when it is possible to get it in front of them.

Mobile because we have to be

The challenge: being mobile

Gallup research shows that the sectors with the worst engagement scores are consistently those who are least likely to be based at a desk: manufacturing and production workers, transportation workers, service workers, repair workers and sales workers.

This lack of engagement represents a major business risk, especially for those organisations whose people are the face of the brand, dealing directly with customers on a daily basis. Atlanta-based consultancy Tribe researched the communications deficit affecting non-desk employees, and found that 84% of these employees did not feel they were getting enough communication about the business. They concluded that it would be crazy not to make it a business priority to engage them.

A meaningful dialogue between managers and their mobile frontline workforce is vital. Mobile employees need information, background and context in order to serve customers effectively. Equally, their desk-based colleagues need to understand the challenges, and appreciate the successes, of a mobile frontline if they are to lead them.

Too often, those out on the road with the greatest customer contact feel the least well informed. The frontline is an enormous untapped resource for advocacy and advertising as well as insight and innovation. While it can be harder to get messages through to a 'moving target', it is by no means impossible, and the productivity and customer service gains will make the effort worthwhile.

Solving the problem: channel this

Our first recommended step for an internal communications practitioner seeking to reach a mobile workforce is an in-depth channel audit. What channels do these employees rely on today, what works well and, frankly, what would they scrap tomorrow given the chance? How do these employees receive news, updates and opinion and, just as importantly, how would they like to receive this in the future? Look beyond what your organisation does today to their wider non-work behaviour. How are these people using web-based technology today? What are their online habits, favourite apps and websites? Would your employees be willing to access work information on their own devices?

The death of print?

Despite some premature obituaries, print is far from dead. It is still the ultimate portable and accessible device. Numerous studies have demonstrated the greater credibility that people attach to printed communications. Even in the rapidly changing world of newspapers there are examples of print's advantages over digital, and circulation figures show that more than 10 million Brits still buy a newspaper every day.

As creative communications specialist Steve Crescenzo puts it: "Bad print is dead!" He offers a recipe for good print that focuses on getting the frequency right, adopting elements of consumer magazine style to catch readers' attention, hooking them into reading on with good headlines and varying the pace and style of articles. This emphasis perhaps explains the crossover of modern internal communications with mainstream journalism; many of the AB team began in traditional print media before moving into internal communications. Remember, whatever their virtual, flexible or mobile status, the people working in your business are media consumers outside their job and are used to the highest standards of concept and execution in print.

Print, like every other channel, needs to be designed based on the needs, expectations and tastes of the audience. There is no point in producing a glossy, text-heavy magazine for a workforce made up of predominantly tabloid readers. Presenting a message in a form that is palatable and familiar to the audience will make communications infinitely more powerful and successful. We recommend that before creating anything internal for your employees, you consider and investigate what they are paying to read.

Print meets digital

While paper still has its place, it certainly makes sense to use your print publication to direct readers to online sources even if workers cannot connect to the internet in their day-to-day roles. Online, readers can access film or audio files that enhance the story, or interact with it themselves by commenting on, rating and recommending content. This then provides useful data on what and when employees are reading, which gives the internal communicator valuable insight in designing future communications.

Where workers don't have access to protected intranets, it often makes sense to place content like this on external websites, which mobile workers can easily access from staff rooms, mobile devices or at home. This is what Royal Mail, Asda and the Post Office have done with myroyalmail.com, greenroom.asda.com and wow-mag.co.uk respectively. While some communicators may balk at a publicly accessible site, it's important to remember that this is what your customers are already looking at, and messages both internal and external should always align. Equally, it's safe to assume that almost any communication produced purely for an internal audience will find its way to external eyes.

Business TV and radio

If computer screens are not available, then other media can always be used. Whether it's a corporate TV channel, a radio station over the depot tannoy or a podcast for drivers to listen to en route, the key is to make sure communications are targeted and engaging. If you look at what employees are paying to read when developing an in-house magazine, then make sure to do the same when developing these channels. Wow's

YouTube channel has a mix of strategic business messaging, and people-centric videos such as colleague makeovers. Employees might not get the chance to turn your broadcast messages off, but they can certainly decide not to listen if they don't see the benefits of doing so.

Solving the problem: it starts with a conversation

While these workers may be mobile, we should not dismiss face-to-face communication opportunities such as town hall meetings or leadership walkabouts. Personal relationships and face-to-face communication become all the more vital when digital is impossible and print is logistically complex and costly. It always takes time and patience to speak to people face-to-face, especially when they are widely dispersed and may only call into a local depot or unit occasionally; but the effort pays off.

From the horse's mouth

Communicators need to clearly signpost the relevance and importance of each message and remember that big picture initiatives, which appear to have little or no immediate impact on employees' day-to-day work, will often fall to the bottom of their reading lists. However, given that these employees may spend their working lives in direct contact with customers, they need an appreciation of why their organisation is different and better than the competition and an understanding of its future plans. So, how do we stop them from immediately hitting the delete button?

We have repeatedly found that frontline employees - whether mobile or desk-based - want to hear about business strategy directly from senior leaders. Employees are often sceptical about corporate strategy when they hear it from people they know are not responsible for it - such as their line managers. Senior managers are more persuasive communicators when it comes to this sort of messaging due to their perceived authority, their role in the decision-making process and their understanding of the strategy. As a result, when it comes to bringing plans to life, they tend to talk with more ease and credibility than middle or line managers.

Or, perhaps the communication you need to deliver is about a new policy or programme? Again, senior leaders will be far more convincing than those who have heard about the initiative second or third hand and who may have a very limited role in ensuring the initiative's eventual success.

Hitting the road

When senior leaders take time to communicate face-to-face, it shows commitment. Particularly when the frontline is miles away - literally and figuratively - from the 'ivory tower' of head office. In 2008, DHL Express CEO John Mullen took this approach at a major global logistics hub that was failing. "We stayed with the staff during the night shift, went

to the floor and physically handled incoming shipments, affirming our commitment to 'walking the talk,' he said. "I can't tell you the effect that had on our staff at the site."

Senior management events on the shopfloor need to be organised during key times like shift changes or when employees can be spared from their day-to-day activities, but they do not have to be elaborate, costly affairs. The aim is to have a meaningful conversation.

It would be naive to suggest that all leaders are comfortable with these kinds of events. Many are not and, in our experience, one-on-one training to help individuals improve their personal communication skills can be highly beneficial. Equally, not all employees are willing or comfortable taking a participative role in these types of events. You should expect some 'tumbleweed' moments when there is no response from the floor. In truth, leaders have to earn the right to have meaningful conversations with their employees - they cannot expect people to spontaneously erupt into fruitful conversation if no one has been listening or conversing with them in the past. We all need an appreciative audience.

Honesty is the best policy

More than just impressive announcements, it's the honesty behind 'walking the talk' that is so important. As listening expert and hostage negotiator Richard Mullender told us: "Trust is death; lose this and you've lost everything." Announcing your corporate values is easy, but being true to them at all times is much harder. Anglo-American CEO Mark Cutifani was keen to signal a new approach to unions when, as then head of mining company Inco, he set out to avoid threatened strike action over pay and restructuring plans. He instructed his communications team to make large posters showing the company values, and had them mounted in the room where the pay negotiations were about to take place. When the union representatives arrived, Cutifani pointed to the posters and said: "These are our values. If you see me, or any of my senior team, behaving in a way that is not commensurate with them, I want you to tell me right away and we'll fix it." The deal was done, and a strike averted.

Our research over the past 50 years of employee communications shows that being honest, even when the news is bad, is far better than bending the truth or remaining silent. We hear this time and again when carrying out our qualitative research Acid Test. We ask staff from every level of an organisation a series of probing questions about communication inside their company. One question we often ask is: "Do you like to hear it warts and all, even when the answer is bad news or 'I don't know'?" This gets the most consistently affirmative response. Similarly, respondents to Tribe's research clamoured for explanation rather than obfuscation. Hearing the detail behind difficult decisions, rather than purely the outcomes, makes it much more likely that cuts will be accepted or changes implemented.

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The big set piece

Sometimes a face-to-face event needs to be more complex. Faced with a need to raise safety awareness, reduce injuries at work and increase interest in environmental activity, Tata Chemicals turned to non-traditional communication methods to deliver safety, health and environmental, or 'SHE', information to workers at a number of chemical plants around India. Given the relatively low literacy rate among a number of its workers, the company designed a programme based on storytelling through theatre to ensure widespread engagement and understanding.

The team devised a campaign featuring a traditional style production that delivered key messages in dramatic form. The play was titled 'It's all about her... who is SHE?' and the overall campaign was branded 'Oorja', meaning 'energy'. Managers' buy-in was secured first

through email and intranet communications in four languages to ensure support for teams to attend the shows. A competition in which workers were encouraged to devise their own skits or short plays based on the SHE messages was then run at regional and national level, with national recognition for the winners. The campaign represented a massive exercise in planning, logistics, delivery and evaluation. Perhaps not surprisingly, 'Oorja' received an award of excellence at the 2010 IABC Gold Quill Awards.



Don't forget the basics

While strategy needs to come from the top, remote workers still rely a great deal on local relationships when it comes to communications. Team briefings provide crucial opportunities for engagement and communication - both to and from employees. Line managers must be prepared, and trained, to speak to their staff, but more importantly, to listen to them.

HSBC has begun to tackle this challenge with Exchange sessions - initially internally nicknamed the 'Shut up and listen' project. The process revolves around agenda-less meetings, where managers are the chair, but it's employees who do the talking. Global co-head of communications Pierre Goad explains that the bank is trying to "create a speak-up culture" that is less reliant on a strict hierarchical cascade. The scheme is still in its early days, but its effects are already filtering through - and upwards - and the recurring concerns of employees are now being heard at the highest levels.

Mobile because we want to be

The challenge: go my own way

There are workers who do not need to be out and about to do their jobs, but who increasingly appreciate the ability to work remotely from whatever surface is closest to hand - be it their kitchen table, a coffee counter at the local café, or in a corner of their client's offices after an off-site meeting.

It has been argued virtual or remote working, already in evidence for some years in the UK, was given a boost by the London 2012 Olympic Games. According to the BBC, "millions of London-based workers" were given the technical support and permission - many for the first time - to work from home, or to hot desk from other locations, rather than come into the city and risk potential delays because of overcrowding on transport links.

In a survey conducted by Vodafone immediately after the Olympics ended, nearly three-quarters of those who had changed their working pattern reported increased productivity because of the time saved by not commuting and from experiencing fewer interruptions. In 2013, incoming Yahoo CEO Marissa Mayer caused controversy by seemingly denying the evidence and banning employees from working remotely. She told them that effective collaboration and communication would come from "being physically together", but employees complained the edict was "outrageous and a morale killer".

Indeed, research by business communications systems provider Mitel claims that 81% of workers now want to break free from a typical 9-to-5 culture and have greater flexibility when it comes to when, and where, they work. The more a company can demonstrate willingness, and the capability to allow their staff this freedom, the more likely it is to attract talented workers, and to reap the benefits that come from treating staff as capable and responsible individuals.

Solving the problem: meet BYOD

Any time, anywhere

That 'wonderful world we can share, any time any place, anywhere' from the famous 1980s Martini advert has seemingly arrived. A recent Forrester report characterises 29 per cent of the global workforce as "any time, anywhere information workers" using many different applications on three or more devices from multiple locations. The number of mobile workers will continue to rise. BT research found that more than 80% of companies already allow BYOD (bring your own device) schemes, or are planning to introduce them within the next 24 months.

BYOD is about choice. If we had a choice, we would prefer management not to restrict our workplace or working hours. Likewise, we would prefer not to have IT departments tell us 'here's your Wintel box, off you go'. Ideally, we want to choose a manufacturer, device and operating system that best suits our lifestyle, interests and job.

We're so clear to have this choice that some employees are now buying as well as bringing their own devices. With upgrades every couple of months, it is little wonder that the devices being used at home are now frequently more current than those an employer can provide, given that a centrally mandated change for them requires significant investment and an organised roll-out. As a result, Forrester's report claims almost 30 per cent of information workers are "willing to put money in" to get their preferred smart device.

Power in the palm of their hands

Whether the phones people use are personal property or were issued by the company for business use will soon become irrelevant. Even where they are not issued by the company - or even allowed on the shopfloor - we have heard evidence that maintenance workers on production lines are using the camera and text messaging on their personal phones to get repairs to machinery sorted more quickly. Here, even the typically disconnected employee can reap the benefits of new technology.

With major enterprise resources like salesforce.com and Oracle now available through cloud-based services, employees out in the field can be more productive and more flexible in the way they get things done. At Coca-Cola Enterprises, sales representatives are now all issued with smartphones; as a result they can interact with managers constantly, checking displays and ordering stock. While recommending that businesses base their virtual working strategy on tasks rather than apps, Forrester suggests that being "cloud-first, last-wireless-mile-ready, and device agnostic" is the way to keep your competitive edge.

Don't forget about IT

Initially, IT departments sought to restrict workers' use of their own devices, out of data security concerns and the scarcity of broadband access. But it seems that IT departments are slowly becoming enablers, not blockers, as the demand for better, more agile technology rises up the corporate agenda. While IT departments in some large enterprises are establishing user groups to share tips and keep up with upgrades and enhancements, it is still a challenge for communicators to ensure that they can balance the channel-specific demands of new devices and apps with the content-specific needs of the business and its leadership. In order to get this balance right, practitioners need to be much better at understanding and embracing new technology.

When tools such as intranets began to develop in the 1990s, they were often passed along to IT. Communicators may have controlled the content, but they had little involvement in terms of functionality and accessibility. We can no longer offload or avoid dealing with how, where and why our employees will be using technology in the future. Such things are not the responsibility of IT alone. The IT of today is all about enabling collaboration and easing communication, all of which falls squarely within our influence.

Solving the problem: communicating to a human cloud

The new office is a hub

Advances in virtual technology put the focus on patterns of work, not just location. If you get the job done, does it matter if you mix work and domestic or other tasks during the day and are not at your post, physically or virtually, for the standard 9-to-5 shift? The Vodafone survey found that employers are "more open-minded" about flexible working patterns. Mitel's findings revealed a massive pull towards non-standard working hours from employees, for all kinds of reasons.

The scenario conjured up by the Mitel research dubbed workers "Generation Work 3.0" describing them as a "human cloud" by operating from entirely new types of locations. Some will be dedicated workspaces but very different from the office as we know it today, while others will be more of the 'third place' variety such as coffee shops and leisure centres. Companies might even fund new working spaces that they do not directly control in much the same way that they might now fund a company car.

The Harvard Business Review discusses this move towards such 'urban hubs' in a February 2013 article, 'The Third Wave of Virtual Work'. The article concludes that such environments provide for the kind of collaboration and physical connection that can be lost with home working, while moving away from office spaces designed to house expensive technology and reinforce organisational hierarchy.

An agile approach

Unilever's Agile Working commitment shows that if organisations want to truly embrace more flexible working practices, how we manage and lead people needs to change. Its programme aims to deliver an approach based on maximum flexibility and minimum constraints, and plans to make 30% of roles 'location-free' by 2015. The programme is not promoted as an HR project or benefit, but a business strategy that seeks to optimise performance, while cutting the need for fixed office space and business travel. It is investing heavily in mobile technology to enable both remote personal productivity and virtual collaboration.

The Agile framework includes performance management based on results rather than attendance or 'presenteeism'. Managers receive an annual assessment of how well they are supporting their teams' agile capability, and the company benefits from the stronger focus on results. Unilever believes that the improved diversity that follows from making the organisation more accommodating to people with different lifestyles and commitments will strengthen the company.

Keeping connected

As teams spend increasingly less time physically together, the role of line managers changes. As everyone works to their own schedule, it

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is going to be harder to get large groups together for regular briefings and events. These challenges can often result in staff feeling isolated. Indeed IBM, where at one point more than 45% of its employees and contractors worked remotely, was internally said to stand for 'I'm By Myself'. Communications will be key to limiting the likelihood of such isolation.

As a result, local meetings will be vital. There is plenty of good practice in the field, such as providing templates to support regular one-to-one conversations and team briefings. Helping line managers develop their willingness to listen to team members' ideas is also valuable, whether they're on a conference call at home or huddled together in a hired room. Communicators can also play a key role in helping managers to understand the impact of cultural differences on communication effectiveness, both within organisations and in teams spread across different countries.

Michael Watkins, performance coach and author of bestseller *The First 90 Days*, recommends creating a team 'rhythm' by establishing regular catch-ups and group sessions. Patrick Lencioni, a business consultant specialising in organisational



health, similarly promotes the need for a programme of meetings, whether in person or otherwise, with a clear focus and purpose, including a daily chance to discuss immediate administrative concerns without a fixed agenda. For Lencioni, "no action, activity or process is more central to the healthy organisation than the meeting", so it is worth taking the time to do these right and make them useful for all concerned.

Watkins also advocates explicit agreement on terminology and the interpretation of key concepts (particularly important in cross-cultural teams) to lessen the likelihood of misunderstandings. He believes teams should create a "communication charter", which focuses on being "extremely clear and disciplined about how the team will communicate". It certainly makes sense to lay down some ground rules about basic housekeeping, like minimising extraneous noise on calls, taking turns and not interrupting, choosing the most robust platforms to avoid disruption, and so on.

At a more strategic level, there are opportunities to develop engagement by building a sense of shared purpose, enabling team members' autonomy and emphasising personal connections with

teammates. Without being physically close, it could become easier for employees to feel psychologically remote. What will unite them is a strong sense of organisational vision, and a clear understanding of shared goals. Having an engaging and consistent message that goes out to all staff - albeit tailored to target groups - will help maintain a sense of a single organisation as opposed to a collection of disparate freelancers.

Solving the problem: a healthy approach

Maintaining a balance

Any time, anywhere working can end up being all the time, everywhere working, leading to stress and anxiety. The end result can be that the productivity gains and value-adds of virtual working are lost. As Sheffield University researcher Dr Carolyn Axtell notes in a report for internet provider iPass: "There is a fine balance between reaping the benefits of greater flexibility and control over when and where a person works versus working longer hours that may encroach detrimentally on personal life."

The penalty for having your own device always connected is that you can receive messages from the office at all times of the day (and possibly night). Everything from emergency notifications to business alerts and sales leads can be pushed to your device, and through a variety of channels. And there can be no escaping the message; some platforms now include message acknowledgement for compliance and regulatory checks.

The danger is overload, with recipients getting all manner of operational, social and corporate messages from work, unable to figure out what is really important and consequently missing out on it. If people feel bombarded and invaded by the raft of internal communication they receive - and many employees tell us they are - they are likely to stop reading even the most carefully crafted or beautifully written content. To keep these workers engaged and enthused, we have to ensure that the constant communication is always two-way. If employees feel able and empowered to speak up about their personal concerns and desires, then it will be much easier to identify the 71% of individuals who, according to PwC, feel that their work demands interfere with their personal lives. Where appropriate, organisations can then work to reduce these pressures before they lead to a loss of talent or a growing resentment manifested in declining engagement.

Allowing employees the chance to make decisions regarding information they want to receive is important. We always advise providing an 'unsubscribe' option to any employee email or newsletter. By giving employees this option you will avoid forcing information on uninterested or overloaded staff, and will gain a better understanding of what your employees do want and need. If everyone unsubscribes to your communications then you may need to revisit the content.

Let it start in the basement

The Harvard Business Review article on mobile working warns that "too often attempts to support remote work and encourage collaboration are dominated - sometimes crushed - by an obsession with sophisticated technology". We've seen this for ourselves, as companies are keen to jump on the bandwagon of enterprise social networks or similar new tools, without considering how necessary or appropriate they really are. As a result, a shiny new site takes up a huge amount of energy and, in some cases, funding, to be established, but then goes largely unused.

If you are keen to introduce a new initiative such as an enterprise social network, then it should be left to volunteer users to grow the site organically. The best collaboration tools are more likely to evolve from the work of frontline employees in the basement than emerge fully formed from a corporate boardroom. When content becomes so vital, or so valued that employees are actively seeking it out, you know you have been successful.

Mobile because we are

The challenge: managing expectations

The static, co-located workforce rigidly sticking to 9-to-5 is disappearing fast. As new technology and new attitudes have revolutionised the world outside of work, it is little wonder that an incoming generation do not just want the ability to be mobile, they expect it.

For a generation who have grown up with all the knowledge of Google and Wikipedia at their fingertips, information that is difficult to get hold of, hard to read, or only accessible in limited formats or locations is rarely worth the effort. We will need to work even harder to keep the corporate narrative engaging and inspiring, particularly as the traditional contract of organisational loyalty in exchange for secure long-term jobs changes. Employees are increasingly working 'tours of duty' at multiple companies, and often in multiple sectors, or coming in as contractors and freelancers on a project basis. As a result, communications will be vital to ensure that employees feel committed and connected to their organisation - even when mobile or based off-site.

Solving the problem: up, down and side-to-side

Speaking up

The way to secure employee devotion without a guarantee of security is to target these incoming generations with a sense of purpose that is greater than pure operational success. Employees are increasingly placing an emphasis on workplace culture and a sense of community. Communicators will therefore find their role is less about broadcasting a corporate message down, and far more about facilitating conversations and collaboration horizontally as well as vertically.

Once again, it is the experiences we have in our daily lives that affect our attitudes internally. We have the right to vote, rate and comment on almost all the content we find on external websites, so it seems bizarre to be blocked from doing so when it comes to our working world. As our opinions as consumers are being sought, and increasingly listened to, we are beginning to demand that the same be true of our views as employees.

Luckily new technology presents a huge number of useful tools for doing this, with open forums and social networks. As consultants, we advocate collaboration rather than broadcast and believe that traditional channels - even the quarterly magazine - can be adapted to suit these new demands. In essence, it involves moving from a corporate voice to the employee voice, be it in the internal magazine, intranet site or targeted strategic campaigns. Capturing the genuine issues and concerns of staff - using their language, tone and terminology - will engender a sense of unity and community where workers feel valued and represented. Start simply, by giving your staff bylines, asking them to interview a new director, printing the most challenging and controversial letter you receive and, above all, openly admitting when you might have got something wrong.

The generation game

Limiting ourselves to new technology, or directing our efforts solely to engage a younger workforce will not be sufficient; the workplace is more complicated than this. People are now working longer than ever before, and with working lives spanning 50 years, organisations are having to adapt to an increasing number of generations in the same workplace at a single time. The task for corporate communications teams is to respond positively to the needs of this multi-generational workforce, all of who will be used to different ways of working.

Allied with this need for variety, there is a danger of becoming overreliant on generational classifications to differentiate our communications. We might assume that a workforce of predominately baby boomers would have no use for an enterprise social network, or that a millennial group would not want or expect to receive anything in print. It is wrong to assume that all millennials are fully tech-savvy and paper-free workers, just as it is dangerous to rule out the possibility of keenly mobile and hi-tech older employees. As Euan Semple preaches in his celebration of the power of social media, Organisations don't tweet, people do, "not everyone sees the world the same way or has the same needs so mixing up different tools with different strengths allows people to find one that works for them".

Solving the problem: optimised for everything

Let's get engaged

The job of corporate communicators is not getting any easier, but the silver lining of these growing challenges is that the internal communication function is now more important than ever before. The power of an engaged workforce is increasingly being acknowledged and promoted by organisations like Engage for Success, while mobile workforces of all kinds clearly demand a greater emphasis on communication even if purely for the operational messages. CEOs are beginning to believe the evidence and want more dynamic engagement with employees.

Messages will need to be better thought out and professionally constructed if they are to cut through in an increasingly noisy world. We need to focus on content, on stories that employees can connect to. Interactive elements, and content generated by employees themselves, will help to ensure communication is, as it should always be, two-way within an organisation.

A focus on a solid, engaging narrative that adapts to the needs and desires of employees cannot be sporadic. While it is easier to develop a strong story for certain messages, and while communication deadlines and budgets vary wildly from project to project, communication professionals must get used to pushing back when asked for the impossible. Purely functional and operational broadcast messages might seem like the best option in the short term, but remember that once an audience receives dull or irrelevant content from you, it will be all the more difficult to persuade them to listen to you in the future. How often have you turned over from a TV programme when the adverts came on, and then forgotten to turn back, sticking instead to something new you have discovered?

Once we've crafted the right message, the channels should be less of a problem. We need to spend time getting to grips with new technology and software, as well as better understanding our existing tools - knowing when a tweet will be useful, and when something deserves to be printed and handed out in physical form; when an informal lunch with the CEO will do more than a whole company conference. We need to accept that one-way will never be the right way.

All messages need to exist in formats and in multiple locations. They need to be tailored to the audience likely to find them there, and they need to be telling the same story across all mediums. Whether it is a point-scoring personal development app or an HR briefing from a team leader, the core values and the key messages must remain consistent.

Case studies

Engaging crown employees with a Wow!



We always start by looking at what an audience is paying to read. Few clients have the bravery and vision to follow this through to its logical conclusions - creating a publication that truly competes for attention with newsstand magazines. Wow is the exception, and research shows it's working. 90% of readers asked 'Does Wow help you to understand how the Post Office is changing?' said yes.

Faced with branch closures, consolidations, relocations and redundancies, Post Office branch colleagues were in danger of disengaging with the business. The organisation's network transformation programme is part of a five-year plan to bring the Post Office back to profit. To achieve this, the organisation needs to take its frontline staff with them on this journey.

We launched Wow and wow-mag.co.uk, a pair of channels working together to foster a sense of community and educate employees about the upcoming changes. Publicly accessible, wow-mag.co.uk can be viewed from any internet-enabled device - smartphone, tablet, PC or laptop. The design and content of both echoes that of the publications we know our readership were buying - Heat, Chat, Take a Break and Woman's Own.

Just a few months after launching, Wow has already been recognised by the CIPR, and is shortlisted for a 2014 excellence award.

visit www.wow-mag.co.uk

Make it the Highlight of their day



The 11,000 employees of KPMG UK, one of the country's prestigious 'Big Four' professional services firms, have a broad range of media at their fingertips. They work from client sites, in multiple offices across the country, as well as on the go. They want to choose where and how they receive their information. So we produce Highlights, the firm's bi-monthly magazine, in three different formats - paper, an interactive PDF, and an iPad app.

Both digital versions of the magazine carry more imagery, embedded video content and animation, enhancing the readers' experience. They have proved to be highly popular and within just 24 hours of the launch issue going live, nearly half of the KPMG workforce had viewed the interactive PDF version.

However, when we ask colleagues what makes Highlights so popular, it's not the array of formats, but considered editorial and design. As readers have told us "it's light-hearted and readable, yet intelligent in its themes. Overall, it's a bit cheeky and is probably the only KPMG publication I read from cover to cover".

Helping transform a 350-year-old organisation



The Post Office has the largest retail network in the UK, serving 20 million customers a week. There are around 11,500 post offices around the UK and the vast majority are run by subpostmasters who are similar to franchisees. The geographic spread of subpostmasters alongside budgetary cuts mean that face-to-face meetings are difficult to arrange.

We produce Subspace, a bi-monthly magazine exclusively for this audience, aimed at creating a sense of community among this diverse and disparate group. Alongside the magazine we created subspaceonline, a fully integrated companion site.

As the audience has become more digital savvy, we have developed the site, and recently relaunched with far more content - articles and videos - plus added functionality.

For both channels, our reporting team travels the UK sourcing stories and interviewing subpostmasters. The content offers information on news, product updates and a place to share ideas and opinions, both positive and negative. It has won praise from industry bodies including the IABC and IoIC, but most importantly has proved hugely popular with the target audience.

visit www.subspaceonline.co.uk

Engaging with one of the largest workforces in Europe



Royal Mail has around 150,000 employees, sorting mail in offices across the country, or walking up garden paths to deliver mail. Employees' comfort with technology is highly varied, but it is the minority who have access to a computer during their working day.

Courier is the organisation's core channel - a monthly tabloid newspaper sent out to home addresses, and in existence since 1964. AB began working on the publication in 2011. The same year myroyalmail.com was launched, an employee website open to all. Both channels are easily linked. We use QR codes in Courier to help readers of the newspaper find content easily on screen, and run competitions in the magazine which direct readers to the website.

The organisation is in the midst of dramatic changes, with privatisation and a growing focus on parcels. As a result, providing for two-way dialogue between management and frontline workers is essential. The letters page in Courier is regularly voted the most read part of the magazine, and we work hard to ensure that readers' queries are thoroughly and honestly addressed.

visit www.myroyalmail.com

About AB

AB is a full service internal communications agency celebrating 50 years in the industry in 2014. We win awards every year for our work. In 2013, the Institute of Internal Communication gave our work 13 Awards of Excellence, and crowned AB Agency of the Year. Our consultants help clients create, manage and measure their communications strategies. Our designers and editors deliver employee communications on screen, paper and film. AB is the UK's longest established independent IC agency and a leading voice in our field.

About Eloise Hindes, consultant, AB

As a consultant with AB, Eloise has been responsible for researching the views of thousands of employees. She regularly runs online surveys, focus groups, one-to-one interviews and paper-based questionnaires. She strives to gain a deep understanding of audiences, and help companies meet their needs most effectively. She has worked for organisations including Royal Mail, the Post Office, KPMG, London Probation Trust and Laureate Online Education.

Get in touch

We welcome your views on the challenges of a mobile workforce, get in touch by emailing Eloise directly – eloise.hindes@abcomm.co.uk.

With thanks to Ezri Carlebach for his input in this report.



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