

GREAT PROGRAMME COMMUNICATIONS INSPIRE EMPLOYEES, DRIVE RESULTS

Companies that benefit fully from their employee reward programmes do so by putting thoughtful consideration into all supporting elements, not the least of which is communications. One best practice that highly successful planners will suggest is this: When developing a communications schedule, too much is always better than too little. The lesson to be learned here is simple: Incentive and employee recognition managers who fail to get the word out create uncertainty, which in turn hurts results.

Under-communicated programmes underperform on all levels. They suffer from low user adoption, inconsistent utilisation, incomplete data collection, and along the way, diminished executive standing.

So here is the basic rule of thumb to follow when staging the communications sequence for programmes – before you can inspire, you must first inform.

During the initial stages of the programme's introduction, your communications must set the stage for success. Whether it's a new programme being introduced for the first time or an enhancement to an existing one, you must carve out a high level of awareness across the targeted employee or sales audience. Good communications do this by explaining the rationale for the programme, introducing the supporting tool(s) and summarising how the process of earning, giving, and receiving rewards will work.

Keep in mind that the tone of your content - and the tactics you deploy - should most likely vary across the spectrum of stakeholders. Messages for eligible employees, managers with budgets, managers with approval and access rights, and, of course, senior sponsors will all vary. To gain their attention and participation, you must prepare a sequence that will best serve each audience. And while content that introduces the reasoning and resources behind the programme is essential during the early stages of its launch, you should also be prepared to revise and revive messages that can be directed at any individuals who may be slow to adopt or are under-utilising the platform.

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Tailored messages have greater attention-grabbing power when they take into account the roles and responsibilities of each participant. Not simply where they work and what they do, but how well they have performed in the past and what they need to do to get closer to peak performance.

THERE IS ALSO THE MORE PRACTICAL ISSUE OF EXECUTION TO CONSIDER: WHAT COMMUNICATION COMPONENTS REPRESENT THE MOST EFFICIENT DISTRIBUTION MIX?

When it comes to choosing the ideal combination, seasoned planners know that efficiency is a product of two variables: Absolute costs and the impact of every dollar spent. The analysis begins with the comparison between traditional communication components (like print and dimensional items) versus digitally-delivered alternatives. Both options elevate awareness, but each has a different price structure. Traditional print pieces cost money to design, produce and distribute, while web-driven components have only the creative considerations.

Depending on the audience size, digital pieces can have a significantly lower cost-per-unit calculation. And in terms of impact, they can set the stage for a more enduring emotional relationship as the content can be increasingly customised over time. That's one reason why the use of inter/intranet communications is outpacing paper-based components (like posters, flyers, and printed catalogues) by a margin of two to one.

Digital communications across information-centric employee bases that are tied to technology are of course a no-brainer. Employees who use web-based tools throughout the day; who interact via instant messaging and email and are computer-dependent in their jobs are prime candidates for digital components. But what about workers who toil on factory floors or have limited access to the web during the day? Don't eliminate them from web-based options so quickly. With over 94% of the American population having access to broadband, many via smartphones, the ubiquitous nature of internet and mobile communications (both at work and in our personal lives) has made all employees legitimate candidates for web-based communications.

Of course, you may want to mix and match communication components differently across various audiences, and you will need to rely on print early in the process to build awareness within traditional labour forces more than with knowledge-driven groups. It's time to rethink the notion that web-driven communications cannot be leveraged in one way or another for all employees.

Whatever form your communications take, above all remember that consistency and frequency are essential to any programmes successful communications campaign. Informed participants are inspired participants, and inspired participants drive results that are sure to boost your bottom line.

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