How to Create an Internal Communications Plan: A Guide
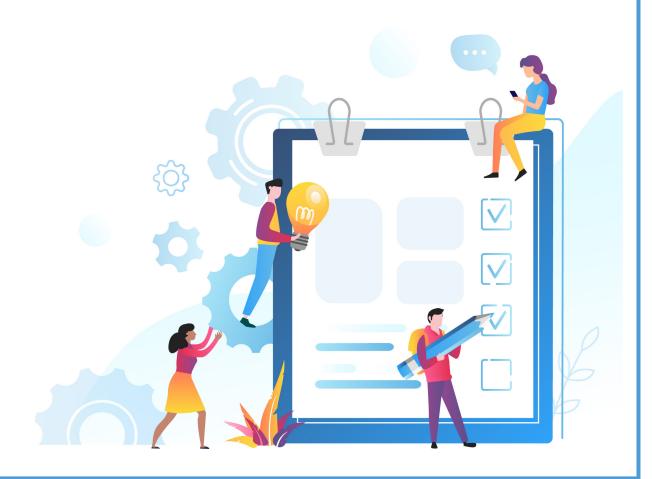
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Introduction

As an internal communications professional, you're probably already:

- Sending out emails internally

- Planning and executing on internal communications campaigns

- Suggesting real-time internal communications channels (e.g. Slack)

- Putting effort into your social media presence and employer branding initiatives

If your efforts haven't been paying off, you might be seeing lowered employee engagement levels in exchange. It doesn't mean that you're not in the right mindset, but it could mean that you need to change your approach.

Having a solid plan in place for internal communications will make it easier for you to streamline your outreach process, and involve other stakeholders that may need to be involved.

For instance, if your internal communications team grows, you'll have a framework to present to them during their onboarding process. If someone in leadership needs information communicated to employees, you'll be able to guide them through how employees are used to receiving company updates.

In this guide, we'll take you through:

- What an internal communications plan is

- Why it's important to have an internal communications plan

- How to assess your plan if you already have one

- How to build out an internal communications plan

- How to use the data you receive once the plan is in motion

By the time you get to the end, you should have all of the general tools you need to be proactive in the way you communicate with your fellow employees.

What is an Internal Communications Plan?

Before we get into how to put together an internal communications plan and strategy, we should talk about what it actually is. Traditionally, an internal communications plan includes seven components:

- **Analysis** of the current state of the business (where things are at, what the future commitment will be to internal communication efforts

- **What** the internal communications plan is going to accomplish (overall business goal and communication department goals)

- **Who** your audience is (entire organization vs. select teams)

- **What** your message is (what topics you want to address, why, and how)

- **How** you will share your messages (internal communication strategies, tactics, and preferred channels – like email)

- **When** you will send your internal communication messages (what time are employees most receptive to internal collateral)

- **How** you will measure internal communication performance (what are your key metrics and what do you need in your communications tech stack)

After you think through and account for these seven components, you'll be able to start building your plan. The end goal is to possess a personal guide on how to communicate with employees - and be consistent about it.

Stick to a consistent schedule for emails and newsletters, and make your layout easy to follow; design is just as important as content.

As an internal communicator, you're responsible for giving employees information about the business that you feel they need to know. In return, you hope that they take action to achieve the company goals outlined. Think of employees just like you think of your customers – the only difference is that they're internal.

You may also want to ask yourself:

- Who needs to be involved in building the internal communications plan?

- What will the approval process look like?

- What areas or topics should we focus on as a company?

- Where should the bulk of our internal communications team efforts go?

If your internal communications plan is done well, it should encourage conversations and engagement with executives and other key stakeholders about effective internal communication strategies that aid in fulfilling business needs.

Why Have an Internal Communications

When you have a thorough internal communications plan, you're more likely to be able to hone in on areas of strength or weakness. You'll be able to determine what's working in your favour, what's resonating with employees, and what you can scrap entirely.

Here are five statistics in support of having an internal communications plan:

- According to Gallup, businesses with highly engaged teams experience a 20% increase in productivity
- Culture IQ reports that companies with engaged employees perform 200% better than those without
- A case study by Standard Chartered Bank reports that bank branches with highly engaged employees attained a 16% increase in profit margin growth when compared with those branches experiencing low levels of employee engagement
- Fabick CAT was able to improve industry net sales by 300% through focusing on employee happiness
- According to the Gallup State of the American Workplace report, almost 70% of employees are disengaged at work, costing companies $450-550 billion every year

The moral of the story: Quality and consistency with internal communications will have a positive impact on employee engagement, and overall morale. Taking the time to lay out your organization-specific goals and practices for internal communications will improve the bottom line.

How to Assess Your Current Internal Communications Plan

If you're already a step ahead and have an internal communications plan in place, now may be the perfect time to ensure that you've covered all of your bases. The hope is your internal communications plan, like any other business initiative, will show improvement year-over-year (YoY).

Here are four steps you can use to assess the current state of your internal communications plan:

1. Run an Internal Communications Audit

Running a proper internal communications audit is essential to getting an accurate representation of the present state of your communication practices. If you don't feel comfortable doing this on your own in-house, hire a consultant to get fresh eyes on your data.

2. Conduct an Employee Survey

Surveys are an effective, direct means of gathering qualitative feedback from your employees. ContactMonkey offers quick ways to gather employee feedback from your employee newsletters. With our email template builder, you can create newsletter templates that include employee pulse surveys, eNPS surveys, star ratings, Like buttons, and the ability to gather anonymous comments.

3. Host Group Interviews (sampling)

Another effective way to gather qualitative feedback is to plan a group interview. Since it's impossible to talk to everyone in a large organization, interviewing a group representative from each department and employment level will help you to form a clearer picture of who makes up the organization.

4. Gather Quantitative Data

Do you have a tool to track your internal communications? If not, you can also build a spreadsheet with metrics you want to track going forward. Look at the main channels you're currently using, the metrics associated with them, and how they tie back to overall company goals.

How to Create an Internal Communication Plan

If you're creating an internal communications plan from scratch, remember that it doesn't have to follow a specific format. The aim should be ease of use and understanding for yourself and your team, and usually something on the brief (but well written) side can help. If you can get everything you need on a single page – even better!

Before you start drafting your internal communications plan, here are three questions to ask yourself:

- This past year, did you and your team get close to achieving your communication goals?
- Where do you want your internal communications to be?
- What do you need to do to get there?

There are four main steps to follow to ensure that you've considered the full scope of what an internal communications plan should include. Everything from goal setting, to crafting a plan that considers diverse teams.

Step #1: Define company goals, then align your team's goals with them

By knowing your company's "big picture" goals you'll be able to align your own communication goals with the overall strategy of the organization.

When the time comes to ask the executive team for a bigger budget or an addition to your communication tech stack, they'll be more likely to approve if your goals align with the goals of the company.

Although you won't be dictating the goals coming from senior leadership, it's important that you're present when these conversations are taking place.

How to connect with senior leaders when creating the framework your internal communications plan:

1. Request a meeting at the beginning of the year with your executives. Use this meeting to get a sense of goals for the year and understand the vision for your department in regards to them.

2. Explain the importance of including your team in conversations early. If there are big initiatives in early planning stages, you should be aware of them so you can communicate them to your team.

3. Stop talking about having a 'seat at the table' and start working towards building yourself as trusted advisors. As IC pro Advita Patel puts it, "working with leaders on a 1-2-1 basis and building trust is more impactful than sitting around a boardroom table."

4. Understand your organization holistically. As IC expert Rachel Miller puts it, "Being a strategic internal communicator and trusted adviser means you are demonstrating your detailed knowledge of the business."

Step #2: Define your objectives and key results for a successful internal communications plan.

Once you determine the main objectives for your team and the company at large, you need to define how you will achieve those goals.

We suggest you use the Objectives and Key Results (OKR) model to build the Internal Communication department's strategy.

How to write an objective for your internal communications plan:

Objectives are the qualitative goals in any plan or strategy. The objective should help in achieving company goals and align with the corporate strategy.

Our friends over at Upraise.io came up with a handy list of questions you should be able to answer about your objectives:

- Does the objective have a broad outlook?
- Is the objective inspiring?
- Does the objective help in achieving the company goals?
- Does the objective align with corporate strategy?

How to write a key result for your internal communications plan:

Unlike objectives, which are broad and inspiring, key results are measurable and specific. They are measurable indicators of how close you are to achieving your internal communications goals.

Questions to ask before defining key results for your internal communications plan:

- Does the Key Result (KR) adhere to SMART? (Specific, Measurable, Actionable, Relevant, Time-Bound)
- Is the KR a result and not just another task/activity?
- Does the KR help in achieving the objective it belongs to?
- Is there a timeline identified for the KR?
- Does the KR belong to either a stretch or an operational goal category?
- Is the KR important enough to appear in the top 5 KRs for the objective?

Step 3: Determine the key metrics for your internal communications strategy.

Like with many aspects of your business, you'll need some key performance indicators (KPIs) or metrics to analyze your internal communications plan or strategy.

As you've probably noticed, your high-level internal communications philosophy needs to be "measure everything you can." Based on your OKRs, you now know what to measure to keep track of your internal communications performance.

Your list of what to measure will depend on the objectives and key results you've picked. For example, if your main goal is to increase employee engagement via your email channel, you should be looking at the following metrics:

KPI: Email Open Rates

Email Opens let you know whether people are being informed and in the know of important company announcements. From a high open rate you can deduce that people received the information you wanted them to and that your subject lines are working. You can get a strong handle on engagement metrics with ContactMonkey's add-in for Outlook and Gmail - in real time.

If your open rates are low, you may need to come up with catchier subject lines. Test different subject lines to see which ones your audiences prefer.

KPI: Link Clicks

Keeping an eye on link clicks allows you to see whether your audience is engaged.

A high click-through rate (CTR):

- Tells you the content you're sending out is relevant to your audience

- Serves as the biggest sign that employee engagement is healthy

A low click-through rate can be a sign that:

- Your links aren't relevant to your employees

- What the subject line promised isn't being delivered on in the body of your internal emails.

KPI: Location

If you've teams based in different offices and regions metrics based on location will help you identify highly engaged or disengaged teams.

With ContactMonkey, you can identify which locations engage most with your internal communications. This will help you define engagement goals based on the needs of different teams, departments, and offices.

KPI: Device

The rate of email opens on mobile has grown 5X in recent years, so meeting your audience where they are is extremely important. With ContactMonkey, you can also measure what devices your employees are using to interact with your communications. This will help you identify if you need to build out communications designed for mobile and desktop.

KPI: Employee Feedback and Responses

If you aren't already surveying your employees, now is the time to start! Surveys can be the best way of understanding what your employees have engaged with when it comes to internal communication. With ContactMonkey's drag-and-drop email template builder, you can now use your email channel to gather employee feedback.

You have the option to add employee pulse surveys, eNPS surveys, Like buttons, star ratings, and emoji reactions to your employee newsletter template. You can even take it a step further and gather anonymous comments to really understand what resonates with employees.

Collecting all of this data is a means to very specific ends: increase employee engagement, send better communications, and help the overall business performance of your organization.

Here are a few other metrics to consider (if applicable):

- Social shares
- Intranet usage and logins
- Employee app usage

Step 4: Ensure your internal communications plan is built for diversity and inclusion.

We're sure you're aware that the modern workplace is more diverse than ever before. Thanks to more women and people of different ethnic backgrounds joining the workforce, we are seeing changing landscapes in organizations.

In response, companies are waking up to the need to introduce initiatives revolving around Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) in the workplace.

However, one of the biggest challenges many companies face is communicating about these efforts both internally and externally. If an employee doesn't see themselves re-presented on the leadership team, they may feel discouraged from pursuing leadership roles.

Progress with D&I can be painfully slow, but communicating about your long-term commitment to improving things will help keep young talent motivated as you work towards the change you want to see.

How to implement diversity and inclusion change:

1. **Being clear about why:** Don't approach D&I as something you are obliged to do; tell the story about why enhancing your workforce in this way is important to your company.

2. **Having a strategy with clearly defined goals:** Lay out the steps you need to take as well as clear goals along the way. Your employees should know this is a corporate commitment to change.

3. **Talking the talk:** Keep your workforce informed through regular internal communications so they know what's going on behind-the-scenes. Don't forget to measure those internal communications to know what is resonating.

4. **Communicating on multiple channels:** Don't limit your communication strategy to the odd email or intranet post; get the message out there on all relevant platforms so that your message isn't lost.

5. **Being honest:** Even if one component of the plan doesn't work out, tell the story so employees know the intention.

How to Prove the Success of Your Internal Communications Plan

As previously mentioned, it's important to keep in mind that when crafting your internal communication plan, everything is subject to change as the year progresses. In order to prove your plan's success, you need to continuously test different ideas, update your goals and OKRs to reflect your team's new reality, and be ready to adjust accordingly.

In software development, "continuous delivery" is the ability to get changes in motion and into the hands of the end user safely, quickly, and sustainably. When applied to internal communications, continuous delivery allows communicators to always be in a fast-paced, nimble state.

Here's how to stay nimble:

A. **Come up with a repeatable process.**

For example, if you're creating an weekly internal employee newsletter, you should have a predictable process in place for reviewing, perfecting, and sending out your content.

We recommend using our email template builder so you can use drag-and-drop tools to easily build your branded newsletter templates.

B. **Book recurring meetings with your executive team.**

You don't want to be blindsided by new changes in company goals. For that reason, you need to make sure that your execs are aware of what you're working on and vice versa.

C. **Make your work visible to your team.**

Just as you don't want to be blindsided by your execs, the rest of your team members should know if there are any changes in what you're working on.

If you haven't already, we recommend adopting a project management tool such as Trello, Asana, or CoSchedule while still having face-to-face meetings when necessary.

Conclusion

Before you get into amending or creating your internal communications plan, spend some time assessing your current strengths and weaknesses as a communicator, and think about where you want to take your internal communications plan and strategy. Ask yourself:

- What are your end goals?

- Are your goals relevant to the growth of the organization?

- What resources will you need to achieve your goals?

- How far away are you from reaching your goals?

- What needs to be done to help you and your team achieve these goals?

- Which strategies can you implement that will help you achieve your goals?

- What is the timeline for developing stronger internal communications?

5 Key Takeaways: Creating an Internal Communications Plan

1. Review your internal communications plan regularly

High performing communications teams regularly meet to review and update their plans. It's a great way to evaluate what part of your internal communications strategy is working and what needs continual improvement.

2. Plan consistently

Your communications plan should be in a consistent format that all communicators are using across your organization. This way, you don't have to reinvent the wheel each time you need to create a new plan.

3. Remember that one size doesn't fit all

It's good practice to do a channel audit and look at the channels you're using most, ideally by target audiences. Chances are a channel that

4. Measure internal communications data consistently

Keep checking how your communications are performing in your organization. This could be email open rates, pulse survey results or Intranet analytics.

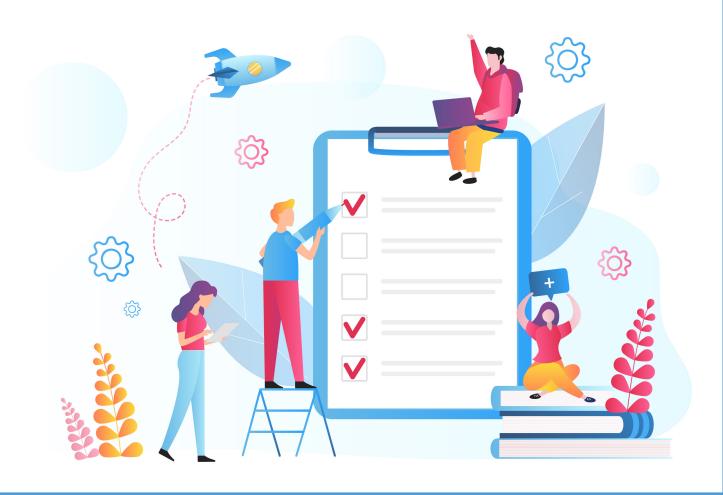**5. Streamline your internal communication planning**

You may want to try using some online collaboration tools to streamline your internal communications planning.

6. Don't be afraid to experiment with new channels and campaigns

The standard intranet news piece alone just won't cut it anymore. Don't be afraid to try something different such as introducing innovative campaign ideas and constantly experiment with new platforms.

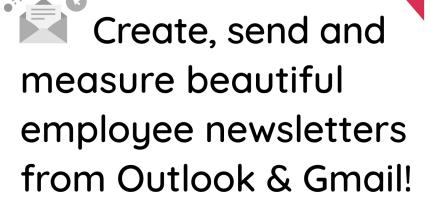# Additional Resources

IC Plan Cheatsheet

Step	Description	Your Notes
Analyze	**Describe the current state of your internal communications strategy.** What will the future commitment be to internal communication efforts?	
Set Goals	**What is your internal communications plan going to accomplish?** What are your SMART goals?	
Audience	**Who will be receiving internal communications?** Will you be sending emails to the entire organization or select teams? Or a mix of both?	
Messaging	**What takeaway are you leaving with your employees?** What topics you want to address, why, and how?	
Select Channels	**How you will share your messages?** What are your preferred internal communication tactics and channels? (for example, email!)	
Make a Schedule	**When will you send your internal communication messages?** What time of the day are employees most receptive to internal collateral?	
Measure the Data	**How will you measure internal communication performance?** What are your key metrics? What do you need in your communications tech stack?	

"Email tracking for us feels like a necessity. I should know how many people are opening, clicking and reacting to my emails. It ultimately ends up informing long-term planning."

"Mettler Toledo saves 25 days a year by streamlining internal communications with ContactMonkey."

"Giving the chance to interact with pulse surveys monthly has allowed us to informally check in on our team without sending bulky engagement surveys."

Create, send and measure beautiful employee newsletters from Outlook & Gmail!

Boost employee engagement from your inbox

- Create responsive company newsletters with drag-and-drop email template builder
- Boost engagement with personalized communications
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