What's next? Breaking through with an employee communication app

How to ensure your digital platform is successful

DAVIS
& COMPANY

Time to put on your strategy hat

Before you pull the trigger on a new internal communication app or platform, follow this two-step process to ensure it will be a successful addition.

The world of digital platforms designed for internal communication has exploded in the past few years: From email tools (such as PoliteMail and Bananatag) to intranet-like systems (such as Poppulo and Staffbase). And let's not forget social tools, such as Yammer and Slack. Where should you invest your time, budget and energy? It's a challenging world to navigate.

These platforms are often positioned as a silver bullet for employee communication—helping communicators break through and reach ALL employees. It's as simple as plug and play.

But even a shiny new communication tool needs strategic thinking behind it: How will the tool fit in your system (your collection of communication channels)?

Try this two-step process to help you assess the options and be ready for implementation:

1. Explore how the tool will support your internal communication strategy

2. Develop your model to sustain the tool

Do you need an intranet tool or an employee communication platform or…?

Navigating the world of apps and platforms is exhausting. Fortunately, the folks at streamGO created a summary of essential internal communication tools sorted into 11 categories. It's a helpful way to consider your options.
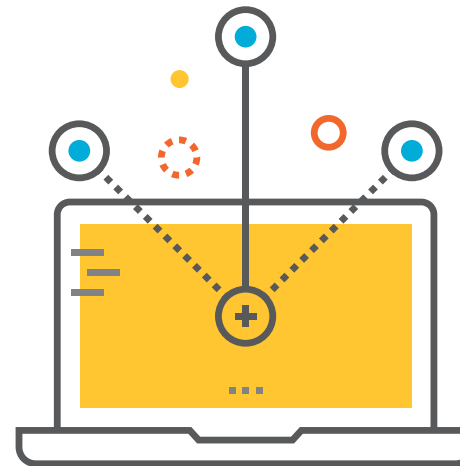
What's inside

Explore how the tool will support your internal communication strategy

Let's back up a bit and talk strategy—your first step. Having a clear sense of what you need to achieve (objectives), will support better decisions about the tools you need—including new digital platforms.

Good employee communication objectives are specific and measurable.
Try asking yourself four questions to get started:

1. How will communication support key corporate initiatives, such as improving customer satisfaction?

2. Are there attitudes I want to influence? For example: Are employees proud to work for the organization? Do they feel a sense of community? Do they feel recognized for their work?

3. What are the key topics employees should understand?

4. Do employees understand the vision of the organization, the plan to get there, how they contribute and how the organization is doing?

When you have answers to these questions, you'll be in a great position to develop specific and measurable objectives. And that will help you determine the right mix of channels to achieve those objectives.

That mix will include channels that build **awareness**, such as email, posters/ digital signs and digital platforms/intranets. As well as communication tools that build **deep knowledge** or help employees adopt new behaviors, such as Q&A with leaders, how-to videos and problem-solving sessions focused on interaction.

Keep in mind that many digital platforms combine the best of both worlds: features that focus on awareness and tools that contribute to deeper knowledge, such as discussion threads.
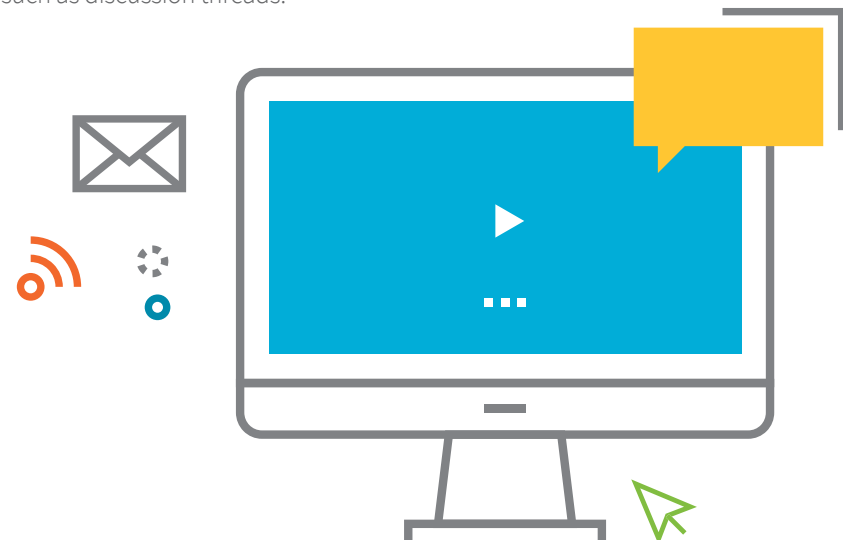
Develop your model to sustain the tool

Simply launching a new employee communication app doesn't mean you'll see participation with the tool (also known as engagement) go through the roof. **Here's your second step: Plan how you'll sustain the tool—how you'll encourage participation and manage content.**

Access

A big advantage of many off-the-shelf platforms is their ability to reach all employees—especially those who have been challenging to reach since the early days of internal communication: frontline team members. They're the people in customer-facing roles, in manufacturing environments and on the road selling products.

But these employees typically have precious minutes to spend on your communication. And a new tool likely won't convince them to spend that time on your content.

Time for research: Investigate with those who are hardest to reach. When are they able to look at communication? How much time do they have to spend? What information would be most valuable? Would they be willing to load an app on your personal smartphone?

Focus groups or one-on-one interviews are an efficient way to get answers to these questions. With the insights you gather, you'll be able to decide if a platform will be a useful addition and the types of content that will encourage participation.

Step 2. Develop your model to sustain the tool (continued)

Content

We often chat with our clients about their new internal communication platforms, and the conversations usually turn to content: "Yeah…content. [Sigh.] I didn't realize how much work it would be!" It's a fact: Employee communication platforms require care and feeding to keep the tool fresh and useful. You need a content strategy.

Start with a list of the key topics that are important to your organization and how often you want to talk about those topics (your frequency targets). Let's say Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DE&I) is among your key topics; your frequency targets may look something like this:

- Two news stories per month on the digital platform/intranet
- An agenda item for two town halls this year
- A regular update in the people leader brief (published quarterly)

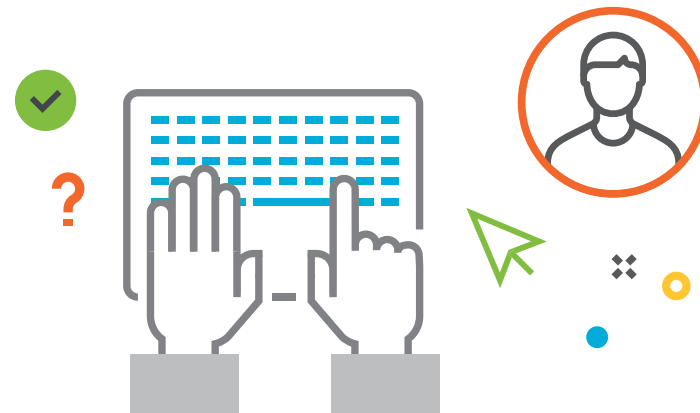Take a moment to compare that list of key topics with your research in Step 1. Where do you see opportunities to shape your topics, so they align with employees' information needs? Perhaps it's time to add a topic (or two) that didn't make it on your original list.

The second part of your content strategy describes how you'll gather content and how it will be published. You may need to form an editorial board or communication network to help you find (and track) content that represents every part of your organization.

Here's an example of a distributed approach to content development that ensures you don't become a bottleneck (that is, the only one adding content):

Content creator	Trusted source	Subject Matter Expert (SME)	Internal communication team
Role	Develop and post content	Provide draft using a template	• Maintain content tracker • Assign content development • Draft and post priority content • Review supplied content (from an SME)
Type of content	Global, business unit/function or regional	Special initiative or site	Global, large change initiatives
Examples	HR, IT, primary business unit	Site-focused news	Strategic plan and progress with the plan

Interested in forming a network to help with identifying, developing and publishing content?

Download our smart guide, <u>Create a communicator's network</u>.

Smart guide
Create a communicators' network
7 steps to build a network that increases the effectiveness of employee communication

A case study: Meet Suzanne

Here's a scenario to bring these ideas of strategy and governance activities to life. Suzanne is a communicator for an industrial manufacturer, and she has made it her mission to improve communication for those in plants. She has a sense that something is missing among her communication tools—especially a way to connect with those on the shop floor.

Starting at the beginning

Research is Suzanne's first step. She conducted several one-on-one interviews with her colleagues at manufacturing sites. Here's what she learned:

- Most mentioned they don't have time to read communication during a shift. But several said they often stop at the bulletin board to see if there is anything new. And many spoke about huddles during shift changes.

- When it comes to valuable information, most spoke about day-to-day details—key numbers that help everyone do their jobs. Many expressed interest in hearing about the direction of the company, new services/products and how the company is doing. And some spoke about how challenging it is to get information during emergencies. (The pandemic certainly proved that point.)

Three-month pilot
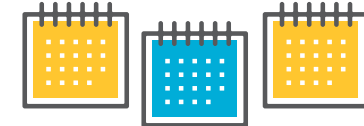
Armed with this feedback, Suzanne decided to run a three-month pilot at three plants. She reshaped bulletin boards creating standards: everything from font size to a governance process. She added digital screens to high-traffic areas that featured key data for the day (such as safety stats) sprinkled with high-level corporate details. And she decided to try a new communication platform—designed for mobile-first—that includes a mechanism for emergency notifications.

Ready to add an employee communication app to your channels?

A case study: Meet Suzanne (continued)

More research

After three months, she collected more data: conducted more one-on-one interviews, observed how her colleagues review content on the bulletin boards and digital screens, and analyzed data from the new digital platform.

She learned her mix was hitting the right notes, but she had to do a better job with content on the new digital platform since she wasn't getting the participation she wanted. Suzanne decided to cut the length of posts—targeting 100 words.

Refining the system

She tapped an extended group of colleagues to find information and stories that are better aligned with employees' information needs. And added separate channels for each plant. She also decided to provide line managers with three bullets (featuring corporate-level information) for their weekly huddles.

Next steps

By tweaking her entire communication system, Suzanne considered the new communication platform a worthwhile investment. While she prepared to roll out her system to the other plants, she created a governance plan so the effort would be sustainable and contribute to business goals.

The leaders in internal communication

We're Davis & Company, the employee communication experts. Since 1984, leading organizations have depended on us to reach, engage and motivate their employees. Our strategic mindset, creative spirit and practical know-how can solve your toughest communication challenges. Give us a call. We'd love to help.

To schedule a consultation, contact <u>Vaishali Benner</u> or call 1-877-399-5100.

Take change communication to the next level.

We can help you:

- Develop an effective change champion strategy
- Set **SMART** objectives to guide your program
- Recruit the right team members
- Equip champions to accelerate your change initiative

5 things to know about us

Global. We've created communication programs that reach employees across the world, in nearly every continent (but not, we admit, Antarctica).

Experienced. We have decades of experience in communicating change, initiatives, HR programs and policies, and many other topics.

Collaborative. Our favorite way of working is to meet with our clients and put our heads together.

Client-focused. Our mission is to help you solve your problems. To set you up for success. To make sure you get the recognition you deserve. (We think you get the picture.)

Acclaimed. We've won hundreds of awards and routinely earn the praise of clients and colleagues.

DAVIS
& COMPANY