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internal audience and put messages in writing that employees can review at leisure. Newsletters traditionally have been hard copy, but today more and more are published in electronic form called webletters. This electronic format takes advantage of technology and may contain video clips, pictures, links to pertinent websites and a host of other attachments.

An organization often has more than one newsletter targeted at particular audiences. Your college or university may publish various departmental newsletters, a university employee newsletter and an alumni newsletter. Each has a slightly different focus, but all are meant to communicate with and unite a specific audience.

Studies suggest employees want more truthful information from their employers. In an online survey of a 1 000 working Americans, representing a cross-section of companies with at least 1 000 employees, participants were asked how they would rate their companies' communication efforts. Those surveyed felt their employers were more truthful to their shareholders and customers than to them. Almost half of those surveyed indicated they received more credible information from their immediate supervisor than from the CEO (Schumann, 2004, pp. 30–31).

This study, and others like it, point out the need to evaluate newsletter information regularly. What do employees think of its contents? Which stories receive high readership? Is the newsletter readable? Is distribution adequate? Is necessary news left out? What kinds of news do employees want and expect? Is there an easy process to gather feedback and comments?

Getting answers to these questions ensures that the time, effort and money that go into newsletters are not wasted, that the right topics and information are included and that employees recognize they have the opportunity to provide feedback.

Strategic Thinking



Emergency ... you have information your employees need to know ASAP. No time to call a meeting ... no access to in-house video ... and you want them to know the news before they see it on the television. Email? But how do you break through the clutter of messages?

The Australian Tax Office with more than 21 000 employees at 96 sites sends a pdf to each employee's desktop within two hours. Its employees know that this message demands immediate attention (Palframan-Smith, 2004).

This practice may not work for organizations with lots of employees without access to desktops. How about instant messaging?

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Blogs

A newcomer to the internal communication roster is the **blog**. "Blog" was the Merriam-Webster dictionary "word of the year in 2004", based on online definition seekers. In 1999, blog was defined as "a website that contains an online personal journal with reflections, comments and often hyperlinks provided by the writer" (Merriam-Webster Online, 2006).

The blogosphere is growing. Technorati, an Internet company that tracks blogs and their links, says there are more than 60 million blogs worldwide. The site posts the following figures of global blogs:

Anglosphere (US/Canada/UK/Australia/NZ)

= 36.2 million blogs

and researchers sense this is a low estimate as some blogs are posted on sites that do not report their figures

Asia (Japan/China/South Korea/Malaysia/Singapore/Thailand/ Philippines/India/Pakistan)

= 24.35 million blogs

again, this is a suspected low estimate as current reports are difficult to get from some countries

Europe

= 2 million blogs

many European bloggers use Anglosphere sites and are thus included in previous figures

Middle East

= 100 000 blogs

most are probably out of Israel; the Iraqi blog count was 151 as of 25 May 2005

Africa

= 10,000+ blogs

<http://www.blogherald.com/2005/05/25/world-wide-blog-count-for-may-now-over-60-million-blogs/>

This new medium communicates with present and potential customers, accesses new markets and trends, keeps track of the competition, influences the mainstream media and deals with information and rumours. Marketers are discovering new and different ways to use blogs to enhance communication.

Internally, a blog is an informal way to communicate regularly with your employees. Blogs may be set up either on a commercial website or password protected on a company's website or Intranet. A company blog site is easily maintained, updated by

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multiple people and shared by all employees or a chosen group. As blogs are more easily updated than web pages, they provide a timely way to disseminate information. Blogs ensure that all employees have access to information at exactly the same time.

The IAOC (International Association of Online Communicators) suggests the purpose of internal blogs should be viewed differently by management: "If a CEO launches a blog to let the company know what he is thinking but doesn't allow – or welcome – comments, then the "so-called" blog will be something different, but not a blog. It is all about openness, transparency and a candid interest for what everybody has to say. It is not about reading CEO's speeches. You have emails for that. Blogs need discussions" (IAOC, 2006).

Supplemental internal publications

An institution's functional messages are presented to employees in any number of handbooks or policy books as well as sent in electronic form. These publications inform employees what the company expects from them and what they can expect from the company.

Information in these publications can be divided into three main types of content: employee information, reference materials and organizational information (Table 8.1).

The newest additions to policy handbooks are computer rules and regulations and Internet use guidelines covering acceptable limits of email sending and receiving, data protection regulations, privacy issues and security parameters. Spelling out what is, and what is not, company policy cuts down on inappropriate behaviour and wasteful use of company resources.

Efficient organizations post this needed information online, but employees often have difficulty locating it. This results in unnecessary time loss and increased requests for help to locate the material. A simple search engine of minimal cost can facilitate employees' search for important documents and forms. Employees who can quickly find forms, related documents and updated calendars have time to be more productive in other areas.

Employee information	Reference materials	Organizational information
Pamphlet welcoming new employees	Folders outlining fringe benefits	Brochure outlining mission statement
Dress code guidelines	Forms for leave time or travel	Fact sheet on company products
Telephone numbers of employees	Brochure on training	Background paper on company's history

Table 8.1 Internal Communication Types of Content and Material.

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Strategic Thinking



US courts have ruled that employee handbooks are considered binding contracts.

In 2002 a university employee, laid off in a mass reduction of positions, sued the organization because the procedure for firing had not been followed as outlined in the employee handbook. The employee won the suit in spite of a disclaimer in the handbook stating that its contents were not a binding contract. Attorneys say using a disclaimer in a handbook is good, but it will not protect against lawsuits. They suggest using flexible language and general terms in handbooks as well as staying clear of specific procedural processes.

Advice to companies: indicate that all situations will be handled on a case-by-case basis, at the discretion of the company and according to the law.

For example, since the 1990s, Cisco Systems, an international systems corporation, has utilized an Intranet called "Cisco Employee Connection" to help employees navigate online resources more efficiently.

Protecting Your Company Image from Within

A company image is the aggregate perception people have about the company, its employees and its products or services.

Although this image is often associated with a public viewpoint, it has its roots within the organization. Time, study and resources go into creating an organization's image. Satisfied loyal workers help ensure that a company is well received by the public and the community. A company's image also will be evaluated on seemingly insignificant details such as how a phone is answered or how employees dress.

Any action an employee takes, whether during office hours or over a fence chatting with a neighbour on a Saturday afternoon, reflects on the company's image. Will an employee brag about the company's efforts to set up a better than average pension plan, or will she comment on the lack of her manager's business ethics?

Experts say the surest way to garner the trust of internal publics and establish a reputation as a sincere company is to communicate honestly, openly and frequently with all employees. They are the links to clients, trade partners, suppliers, customers and

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competitors. Management must work with this influential audience to develop a sense of commitment and loyalty to common goals and objectives.

A study by the Opinion Research Corporation (OCR) reported that 97 % of manager respondents said that company image added to "a significant measure of the successes and failures of their organizations" (Marken, 2005).

Building a successful corporate image requires satisfied employees who can act as ambassadors of goodwill.

Chapter Summary

Communicating with employees is vital to management success. Today there are more ways than ever to disseminate vital information. But it is the wise management team that uses the correct communication channels to distribute this information.

More important than making information available is ensuring that this information is needed and easily accessible to all employees. These communication tasks can be achieved through a variety of formats, including memos, emails, company newsletters, blogs, in-house television and policy handbooks.

Frequent communication with employees builds trust and company commitment. Encouraging employee feedback, sincerely addressed and evaluated, should be a primary goal of any internal communication vehicle. It gives employees a stake in the future success of the organization.

How employees represent a company inside and outside the workplace is crucial to a company's image and reputation. Employees can help reach company goals and objectives or they can work as obstacles thwarting progress.

As a manager, it is your responsibility effectively to utilize multiple communication channels. Knowing what your employees want and need to know, in which way and under what circumstances is a start in the right direction. ■

Learning From Others

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