

11 Tips for Communicating Internal Policy Effectively

- 1) Develop an on-going program to communicate policy
- 2) Use distribution lists and group the policy information that different groups need
- 3) Identify the behavior changes needed
- 4) Use an appropriate tone and language
- 5) Develop a priority system for communications relating to policy
- 6) Use engaging ways to capture staff's attention
- 7) Introduce interactive elements into policy communication
- 8) Use multiple communication channels to reinforce important policies
- 9) Evolve policies and keep them top-of-mind
- 10) Ask staff to acknowledge important policy communications
- 11) Measure acceptance and understanding regularly

All organizations have guidelines and policies to protect them. However, your staff can be less familiar with these policies than they should be. Employees don't usually break rules on purpose; they're just not fully aware of some internal policies and how their actions can affect your organization.

What policies do staff need to be aware of?

Legislation, such as the US's HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act), the Sarbanes-Oxley Act, and the EU's Privacy Directive require organizations to put safeguards in place to keep information confidential and secure. These safeguards may include using e-mail appropriately, using strong passwords and restricting how your organization sends and stores confidential information.

Policies may also cover receiving gifts, dress code, appropriate behavior, using your organization's resources like the internet, etc.

What is the risk if employees do not comply with internal policies?

These are some of the risks that organizations face if their staff fails to follow policies and guidelines:

- Legal liability
- Destroyed business relationships
- Lost data (with an associated impact on productivity)
- Negative PR
- Dissatisfied customers
- Injured staff (if they fail to follow safety guidelines and policies).

In less overt cases, failing to follow policies and guidelines can result in sexual harassment, bullying and subtle exclusion. All these situations can affect productivity and increase your organization's legal liability.

So why aren't staff aware of internal policies?

Not top-of-mind. Legal and IT teams are usually very aware of the serious risks your organization faces when staff lose information or breach security. However, this is not usually top-of-mind for staff outside these areas. They are simply busy doing their jobs with limited resources in the best way they can.

Out of sight, out of mind. Your IT or legal team may not be communicating policies and guidelines in the best way. For example, they may be sending them out in mass emails or putting them on your intranet. Unfortunately, when most staff today face 'information overload', communicating in these ways is unlikely to 'cut through'.

Policy communication tool – screensaver messaging

Tip 1: Develop an on-going program to communicate policy

Treat communicating policy as a program, not a one-off event. This means rolling policies out and reinforcing them regularly over time.

**HR COMPLIANCE AND ENFORCEMENT
FOR 2011: WHAT'S HOT AND WHAT'S NOT**

WEDNESDAY, MAY 4, 2011
11:30 – 1:00 P.M.
(LUNCH PROVIDED)

**Does it meet Company Policy?
Ask Yourself.**

For more information on our Internet & Email Policy click on the screen.

POLICIES & REGULATIONS

Tip 2: Use distribution lists and group the policy information for different staff needs

Set up distribution lists that group staff by the types of policies they need. For example, shop floor workers may need to understand health and safety policies that affect their roles; sales teams may need to be more aware of policy that covers how they use customer data.

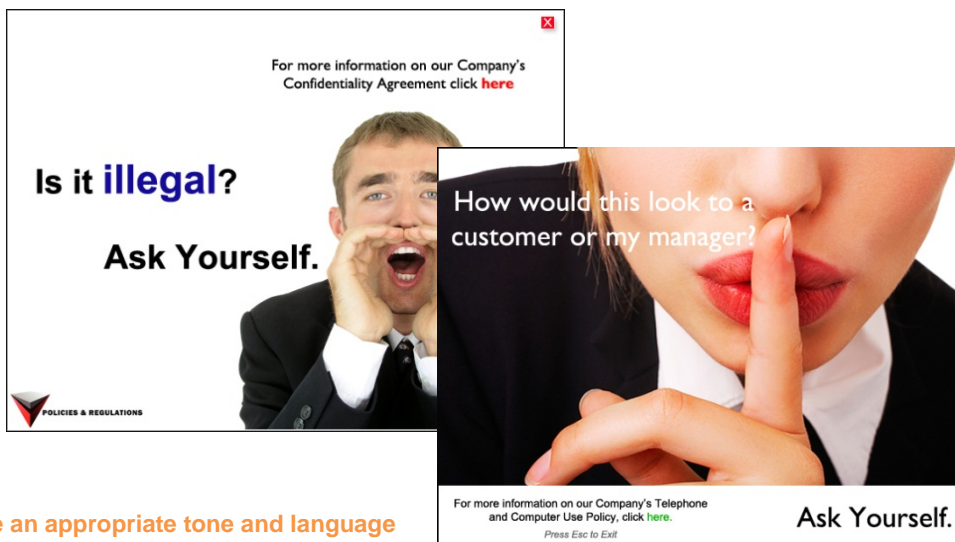
Think of all staff. Don't forget remote staff, shift workers, contractors and outsourced staff. Schedule and target policy communications to these staff too. The SnapComms messaging tools let you target and schedule communications and also to expire out-of-date content.

Policy communication tools – SnapComms registration alert and message scheduling and targeting options



Tip 3: Identify the behavior changes needed

The change in behavior you are seeking could be as simple as encouraging staff to ask themselves questions before they act. Use a series of screensavers to prompt staff to ask themselves questions like “*Is it illegal?*”, “*Does it meet company policy?*”, “*Is this the right thing to do?*”, and “*How would this look to a customer or my manager?*”



Tip 4: Use an appropriate tone and language

You do not always need to use a top-down, ‘stick’ approach to enforce policies. Most staff are ethical, responsible and want to do the right thing.

An interactive ‘carrot’ approach can be more effective. For example, explaining to staff what happens if they breach the policy and communicating policies in an engaging, visual way is likely to encourage them to comply.

Don't damage employee engagement by sounding like a sergeant-major. Staff are likely to resist a fixed list of do's and don'ts. Instead, invite their feedback, give them opportunities to discuss the policies openly and allow them to provide feedback on policies they find inappropriate or too restrictive.

Use plain English. The staff who write policies and guidelines often work in your IT and legal teams. As they may not be your best communicators, consider coaching them to use plain English and make the policies easy to understand.

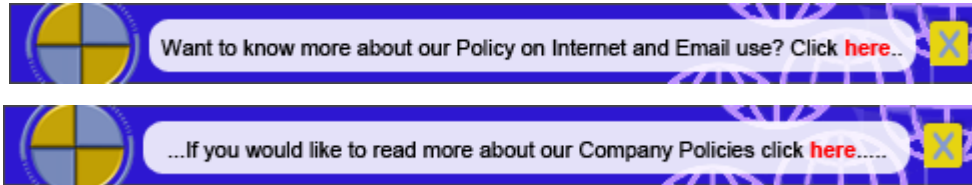
Policy communication tools –Internal Social Media and Desktop Survey

Tip 5: Develop a priority system for messages about policy

Send the policies staff need to do their jobs to them directly. A desktop alert is a good option for important policy changes.

Load policy information on your intranet for staff to read when they need it. But make sure they know this information exists and how to find it. Desktop messaging tools like screensaver messaging and scrolling headlines can be a good way to spark staff's interest and help them navigate to more information on your intranet.

Policy communication tools – Intranet, Screensaver Messages, Desktop Alerts and Scrolling Tickers



Tip 6: Use engaging ways to capture staff attention

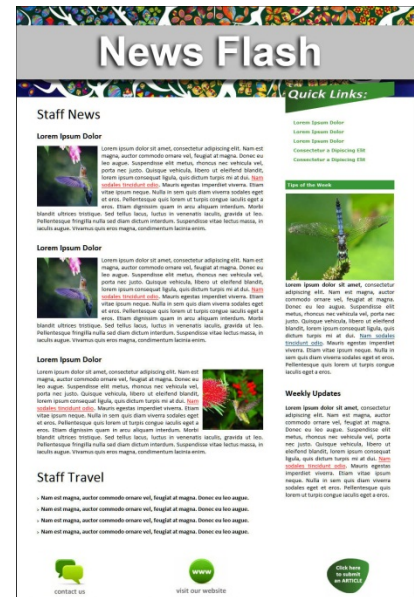
Email is an ineffective channel for communicating policy. Most employees receive more emails than they can manage. If they can choose to ignore any emails, it'll be boring ones that seem unrelated to their role – that is, the ones about policy! Communicating visually using screensaver messaging can be an effective way to get attention, highlight policies and make staff aware of what happens if they breach policy.

Communicate what could happen if the policy didn't exist. Consider what could happen if your organization didn't have policy. Then use screensavers like a series of billboards to build an engaging story. Start with a teaser and build the story with a set of screensavers, displayed over time.

Tell positive stories in the internal newsletter. Share stories about employees who follow policy well and how it has a positive impact.

Remind staff that you may be monitoring them. Most employers monitor employee email for inappropriate use. Staff may not see the harm in circulating a dirty joke by e-mail, and you may need to remind them that they are breaching company policy.

Policy communication tools – Internal Newsletter, Screensaver Messaging



Tip 7: Introduce interactive elements into policy communication

Let staff have their say and give feedback about how policies affect their day-to-day work. Some policies can backfire, making it hard for staff to do their jobs effectively. For example, are your policies stopping your customer-facing staff delivering the kind of service that will keep your customers happy?

Survey staff regularly. Ask simple questions like *“Which rule or policy is preventing you from delivering great customer service / meeting your objectives?”* This will help you understand where your policies need to be more flexible.

A desktop survey can be an effective way to encourage all staff to give feedback. Desktop pop-up surveys have built-in recurrence options. This means the survey can prompt staff to give feedback until they do. (Resulting in representative information capture).

Whistle blowing. Even if you communicate your policies well, some staff may fail to comply. Offer channels for feedback and whistle-blowing. Consider employee hotlines and online help which let staff report practices that concern them, possibly anonymously.

Policy communication tools – Hotlines, Face-to-face meetings, Suggestion Boxes, Internal Social Media and Desktop Surveys

Tip 8: Use multiple communications channels to reinforce important policies

Even if you communicate your policy well, staff may forget the details of it over time. Reinforce policies and guidelines regularly using different internal communications channels. For example:

Week 1 – Communicate policies in team meetings and use screensavers and the intranet to provide supporting information.

Week 3 – Send desktop quizzes to selected staff to test how well they have retained the information.

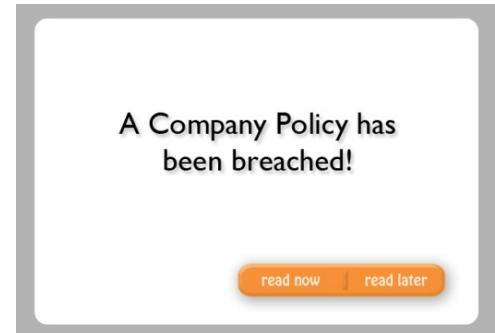
On-going – Reinforce messages consistently, using every communication channel you have available. For example, tell stories in your internal newsletter, provide headlines related to the policy on desktop news feeds, send desktop alerts when someone has breached the policy, and continue to use visual screensaver messaging to make staff aware of the risks involved if they fail to follow the policy.

Tip 9: Evolve policies and keep them top-of-mind for employees

Organizations are changing at a faster rate than ever. They are creating data at an ever increasing rate too. The McKinsey Big Data Report projected a 40% growth in global data each year. Faced with this deluge of information, many organizations struggle to update and communicate their policies regularly enough.

Consider using social media to evolve policies. For example, consider creating an online forum or wiki for policy and guidelines. Staff can give feedback and guidelines can evolve as they need to. A Q&A forum can help identify policies which staff find ambiguous.

Policy communication tools –Internal Social Media and other communications channels



Tip 10: Ask staff to acknowledge important policy communications

Desktop messages can ask staff to acknowledge that they have read and understood an important policy. Message recurrence options let you continue to display messages for selected staff until they acknowledge them.

Reporting options let communicators assess regularly how well staff across the organization are aware of and understand policies, and then develop strategies to fill any gaps.

Policy communication tools – Desktop alerts with message acknowledgement

Tip 11: Measure acceptance and understanding regularly

Use desktop quizzes and surveys to benchmark and track how aware staff are of your organization's main policies.

Policy communication tool - Internal communication measurement tips

Related resources

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