

8 Internal Communication Strategies during a Recession

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Recession means uncertainty. And uncertainty is bad for business. Few people thrive when they are feeling nervous and insecure. Most of us work best when we have a clear picture of where our organization is heading and what we need to do to contribute.

Regular, clear, engaging internal communications. During a recession it is more important than ever to give employees a clear picture of the future, share information as soon as it comes to hand and answer employee's questions and concerns quickly and honestly.

The investment is small compared with the value. Effective employee communication during a recession can help;

- Maintain productivity
- Ensure the business remains profitable and competitive
- Retain your best staff
- Protect your culture and your internal and external brands

Tip 1- Customize internal communications

Employees may have different needs. Employees are likely to have different needs based on factors such as; their age, life-stage and prior experience of change or recession. Internal communications may need to be customized to suit your target employee audiences. Then, once you have customized messages, you need to deliver them. This can be tricky via some types of generic internal communications channels, e.g. the intranet or printed magazines, but where possible, customize delivery of employee communications to suit different needs.

Tool = SnapComms Targeting Features using Active Directory Integration

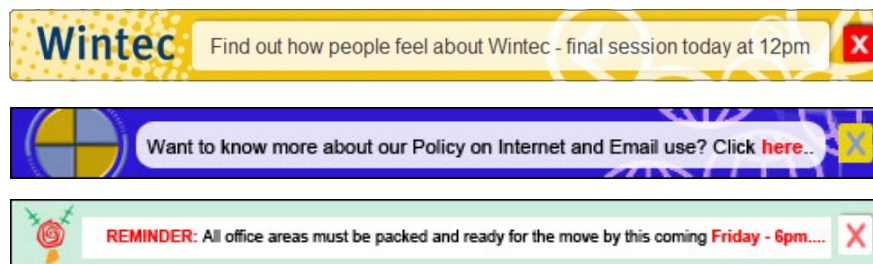
Tip 2 – Be timely with internal communications

Put new information out quickly. Employees should hear company news from the company first. Nothing is worse for employee morale than learning about changes to their organization from the media or family and friends before they hear about them from their employer.

Coordinate your internal and external messages. Sometimes, however much you would like to, you cannot brief staff before you release information publicly (e.g. to the stock exchange). In these cases, organise a staff briefing or schedule message delivery to coincide with your public announcement.

Fast response internal communications tools. For some types of messages, a fast response tool with high message cut-through is essential. In these circumstances consider using a Desktop Alert that is delivered directly onto the targeted employee's computer screen. Desktop Alerts can contain important messages such as; a senior manager resignation, importance financial results, buying or selling part of the business. Message recurrence options ensure that important updates achieve cut-through before employees hear the news from other, possibly incorrect, sources.

Scrolling news feeds are another way to update employees quickly. This format is ideal for call centers as it lets you keep people informed of the latest updates without interrupting their flow of work.



If you use RSS feeds in your press releases or web site, set up a scrolling news feed to deliver RSS headlines and direct staff to further information. This will give staff the release headline automatically on a scrolling ticker bar, as soon as it becomes public. And it's efficient: automatic RSS feeds mean staff don't need to take the time to opt in. Alternatively write a special announcement and schedule it to appear at an appropriate time.

Tool = SnapComms Desktop Alert and Desktop Newsfeed



Tip 3 – Pre-schedule message

Keep track of when staff last heard from you and schedule in regular updates, even if you do not expect to have anything 'new' to report.

Pre-schedule messages. Pre-schedule your messages so that employees receive information at the same time as you release it externally (e.g. to the stock exchange or media).

Even if you don't know what the outcome will be, for example if the business is up for sale, but the buyer is not confirmed, you can set up variations of messages and then publish them when you have final information.

Tool = SnapComms Message Scheduling Features

Tip 4 – Ensure message cut-through

Good timing is only part of the story. We need to make sure we are getting cut-through for important messages too. This is becoming increasingly difficult due to noise which may be increased during uncertain times.

Reduce information overload. Use internal communication tools built to bypass email, a channel which is overused and often fails to get important messages across. Collating general news and updates in an easy-to-read, internal newsletter.

Message Recurrence. Set internal communications messages up so that they recur or even stay on screen until employees have seen and acted on the information. This is particularly helpful for updates that need to be read.

Acknowledgement buttons in messages can be particularly useful for HR updates, Health and Safety communications and so on. Also, in some countries there are legal requirements to notify employees when there is a change to the business that might affect their role.

Measurable. Monitor readership to gauge whether staff are aware of your messages and reading your materials.

Ensure your communication channels allow you to report on who has or has not opened the full message and clicked on the links that it contains. So you know exactly who has seen what.

Repetition to communicate with employees and repeat important messages without their becoming 'wall paper'.

Tip 5 – Engaging internal communications

Internal communications need to be authentic and engaging because people may be more cynical or worried during a recession. Email is not an effective internal communications channel under these circumstances.

Get creative and consider other ways to communicate with employees. For example:

- Desktop Alerts can draw employee's attention to important or urgent messages and updates.
- Corporate Screensaver Messaging can help make staff aware of important information in a visual way.
- Internal Social Media channels can help involve and engage employees and make managers more accessible.

Track performance. Use staff surveys to assess how well your employee communications are working, measure attitudes and understanding and spot trends. Consider desktop surveys that pop-up on the computer screens of chosen staff and includes a range of communication channels built-in reminders to encourage staff to take part.

Tip 6 – Use two-way internal communications channels

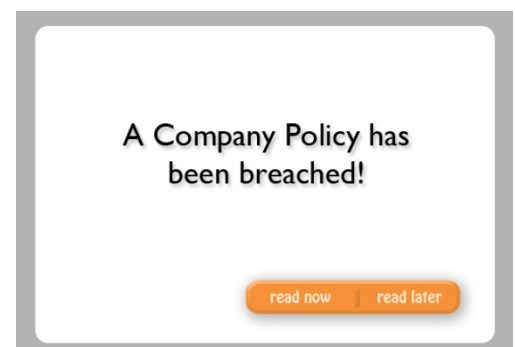
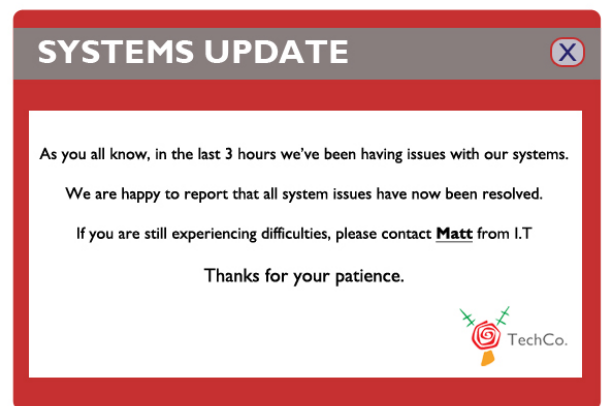
Drive performance. Encourage staff to share their ideas for saving costs or working more efficiently and to reinforce important messages and new ways of working.

Build community. Let staff to tell their own stories in their own words in the internal newsletter or on the intranet. Use Internal Social Media channels let them take part in online discussions and blogs with their colleagues.

Investigate specific issues. E.g. understanding of business strategy, or take a quick temperature check to get a sense about what's bothering people. For example, "What process or rule is preventing us from growing our business?"

Gather feedback on the business strategies to address recession. Review employee understanding, feelings, and collect suggestions for improvement.

Keep lines of internal communication open. Run and open opt in staff surveys (advertised by an interactive screensaver message and/or on the intranet) for less critical but important issues to give employees a voice and keep lines of communication open.



Extend the value of face to face communications. Use Internal Social Media channels to encourage staff to provide questions or issues prior to a face-to-face communications and to give feedback and suggestions after face-to-face meetings.

A CEO or senior manager blog can act as an ongoing 'town hall meeting'. The direct, informal nature of blogs appeals to many employees and encourages them to approach their senior team with questions and comments.

Employee discussion forums can provide a way for staff to explore ideas and provide feedback. They can also help to gauge the feeling within the organization. Just the type of questions being asked (e.g. "is my job safe?" versus "what career opportunities are there?") give a good indication of how people are feeling.

Q&A discussion forums can be a real asset if things are changing e.g. processes, services, products. It provides a means for employees to get quick help and stay effective. Ensure moderator(s) receive a desktop alert when a new question is posted. They can then tag questions which then become part of an evolving searchable repository of knowledge. It saves you time having to construct FAQ's ahead of an announcement and the questions evolve quickly based on real needs rather than having trying to predict the future.

Rumors. If you are brave enough, consider setting up an employee discussion forum as a 'rumor mill' to let staff post anonymously any rumors they are hearing. Bringing them out into the open lets you address them quickly. When people are worried about their job security innocent things (e.g. cutting flowers in the office areas) can trigger rumors ("they are closing this office!"). This allows internal communicators to act as a "voice of reason". SnapComms tools provide a range of moderation options and are highly secure which can reduce fears of leaks outside of the organization.

Tools = SnapComms Desktop Survey and Internal Social Media

Tip 7 – Be visible, honest and open

No news is good news? For your employees, it's rarely the case – and certainly not in a recession. In fact, research shows that 71% of people felt that their organization should be communicating more about the current economic downturn than they are (Weber Shandwick).

Use face-to-face effectively. SnapComms RSVP Invite tool is a meeting request that behaves like a desktop alert. This tool is ideal for getting the best out of events like employee briefings or CEO road shows. You can include explanatory text with targeting and desktop alerts and ask employees to choose the session they want to attend. When they reply, the meeting can be automatically entered into the employee's Outlook calendar. Simple reporting tools in SnapComms Content Manager let you see which staff are attending which sessions. This helps you plan logistics (e.g. room sizes and catering) and lets you close off specific time slots as rooms fill. The RSVP invite tool is particularly useful in uncertain times when it is so important to communicate in smaller interactive groups. The targeted pop-up format and recurrence options help ensure that employees come along and participate in these sessions

Use video if face-to-face leadership communication is not possible. Credibility, conviction and passion are best conveyed visually. When a face-to-face leadership communication is impossible, use video to let staff see the commitment and intent in your senior leaders' eyes (and hear the passion in their voices). Deliver video to the desktops of the employees you select. To make sure as many staff as possible get the information, you can set desktop video alerts up to prompt staff to watch the video and encourage them to click through to a discussion forum or intranet pages for further information.

Tip 8 – Measure your impact (and demonstrate your value!)

Demonstrate the value of internal communications. During a recession, it can be particularly important to demonstrate the value of the internal communication function to senior managers. Use staff surveys to do this. You can measure understanding, awareness or behaviors before an internal communications campaign. Then after the campaign, benchmark again and measure the shift to demonstrate value. Target messages to specific employee groups and consider using a control group to measure against if it is possible. Sample employees rather than target everyone so that employees don't get 'survey fatigue'.

You can also use surveys to measure the effectiveness of managers as communicators and to review the effectiveness of other internal communications channels.

Related Resources

- Measuring Internal Communications
- Improving Manager Communication
- Communicating Change
- Improving Executive Communication

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