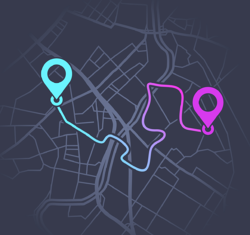
How to Create an Internal Communications Plan in 7 Steps

A best practice for internal communications teams is to have a plan. That may sound basic but all too often we find that internal communications departments don’t have plans in place – and it shows in how the team works, how well employees are communicated with, and, in many cases, the kind of impact the function has on the business.

An internal communications plan articulates what the function is uniquely qualified to do to help drive business outcomes for the organization.

**Why an Internal Communications Plan Is Beneficial**

An internal communications plan is necessary for many reasons. It:

* Provides a clear roadmap for consistently communicating with employees, so they feel informed about goals for your organization, or a specific initiative, so they can take action and help achieve those goals;
* Defines what internal communications strategies are important to focus on, how and when they’ll be implemented and how they’ll be measured to demonstrate value and impact to the business;
* Keeps the internal communications team focused and guides their efforts so they’re spending their time on the right things that are most important to the business in a most efficient and effective way; and
* Enables important conversations and engagement with business leaders and partners about internal communication strategies that can best deliver on key business needs and opportunities.

Think of it like your roadmap for how to take your communications forward so you can move employees to action.

**What’s in an Internal Communications Plan?**

There are many ways to do an internal communication plan. Our best advice is to pick a format that works for you and always have a plan in place!

That said, here is a model for an internal communication plan that works and is easy to use.

A traditional internal communication plan has these key components:

* A current situation of your business
* What you want to accomplish (your business goals and communication goals)
* Who you need to talk with (your audience)
* What you want to say (your core messages)
* How you will communicate (your internal communication strategies, tactics and channels)
* When you will communicate (your calendar), and
* How you will measure your progress

Your communications plan doesn’t need to be long – a few pages is fine or even one-pager works.

**What an Internal Communication Plan Is Not**

An internal communication plan is not just a list of tactics. The tactics are instead, part of the overall plan and should reflect what you’re going to do to achieve your business objectives.

**How to Create an Internal Communication Plan in 7 Steps**

Communication plans are needed for any of a number of topics – developing a plan to turn strategy into action, help employees with a change, address important industry issues, sensitive employee topics, create an internal campaign to reduce safety incidents, and more. Any time you have a lot to say, think about having a communication plan to orchestrate how best to say it with your audience and outcomes in mind.

Whatever your communication need, these seven steps can serve as a framework as you develop your plan.



**Summarize**  
**the Situation**

Provide a situation overview and what’s prompting the need for communications. Mapping the current situation, considering business needs and talking to key stakeholders can help with this process.

For example, is there a shift in organizational priorities because of the marketplace or industry? Low employee engagement scores? New products or services? Are you starting a new employee initiative and you need to keep them informed and engaged in the process?

This section includes research and analysis and addresses what’s currently being done to address the issue.

It’s situations like this that signal when a communication plan is necessary.





**Determine Your**  
**Desired Outcome**

* **Organizational Outcomes (the business need) –**When you define the business need, don’t start with what you need to do, but why you need to do it. Indicate – as best you can – a direct connection between the organization’s objectives or bottom line. Be sure to list specific and measurable desired organizational outcomes in this section. Think: What will be different in the business when we’ve achieved our plans?
* **Communication Outcomes / Objectives –**Think about the business outcome you want to achieve through communication and what role communications can play to help achieve the business need.

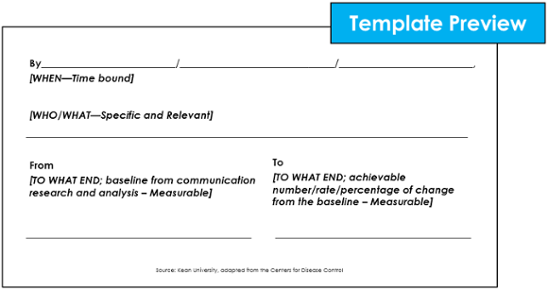
For example, is it to increase engagement so you can benefit from things that come from higher engagement like less absenteeism and better safety and quality performance? Is it to increase order fill or to create a behavior change among employees? 

**Ensure You Use SMART Objectives**

* + **Specific** – what are we going to do for whom?
  + **Measurable** – is it quantifiable and can we measure it?
  + **Attainable / Achievable** – can we get it done within the time frame and with the resources we have?
  + **Relevant** – will this objective have an effect on the desired goal or strategy?
  + **Time bound** – when will this be accomplished?

**Follow this SMART Template to Guide You**

To develop SMART objectives, use the SMART Objectives Template and 3-page Guide by clicking the image below. It covers what SMART objectives are, provides an example and concludes with the template you see here:

**[](https://www.yourthoughtpartner.com/cs/c/?cta_guid=7bee0c95-8b7e-4431-85e9-02fb21473a0e&placement_guid=178a70d3-ec7d-4979-9e61-22bd017d5751&portal_id=83405&canon=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.yourthoughtpartner.com%2Fblog%2Finternal-communications-plan&redirect_url=APefjpEY08EkCos2yu8hCxez38-hrw11e-oqKViYR8Slswv3lbc36RK2BhF_9-j7-LhirmSWBflXfL7MppR6zedrTesy4fBqqSoczstbArKHmZdnH6xv8kLNwWVSjzr6Htw6_2lC77_83ZJe74GvUCP-mCc2v_WpiQ&click=eecdb121-43a6-47cf-a9e7-f216c569b27f&hsutk=74dc60484c3e27171ed2e97c7cffd8f0&signature=AAH58kFErzZXDJgNb2tnJDHlgOzVfMvAVQ&utm_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F&__hstc=25110501.74dc60484c3e27171ed2e97c7cffd8f0.1587473369663.1587473369663.1587473369663.1&__hssc=25110501.1.1587473369667&__hsfp=978839328&contentType=blog-post)**

You don’t need to limit yourself to one [**desired outcome**](https://www.yourthoughtpartner.com/blog/bid/37814/define-the-outcome-as-first-step-to-effective-communication) but you should try to cap it at three.

**HERE'S A TIP:** All too often communication plans only focus on communication goals. Remember to take your plan to the next level by linking the communication goals to specific business or organizational goals.



**Define  
Your Audience**



To help you think through how best to communicate with different groups of employees, it’s important to define who they are. Who are the most relevant groups you need to influence and drive to action?

List different audience groups (sometimes referred to as job families), their mindsets (where they’re coming from on the topic you’re communicating) and consider what you want them to think, feel and do as a result of your communication with them. That will help you focus and, when necessary, adapt your message for different audience segments.

Audience types may be a specific business unit, senior executives, sales teams (national/regional or local) shareholders, employee affiliate groups or people leaders. Depending on your organization and industry, additional audience types may range from physicians and nurses if you’re in the medical field, and call center employees if you have a large customer service department to plant employees if you’re in manufacturing.

Consider using a template like this to outline relevant audience types and what you what them each to [**think, feel and do**](https://www.yourthoughtpartner.com/blog/6-steps-for-effectively-connecting-with-your-audiences) as a result of your communications. It’s a great way to stay focused on the key audiences and outcomes you want to achieve.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Example Audience types** | **Mindset** | **What I want them to Think** | **Feel** | **And Do as a result of the communications** |
| All employees |  |  |  |  |
| <Insert additional audience types as needed> |  |  |  |  |

**WATCH OUT:** Don’t confuse the audience(s) with stakeholders. Stakeholders are the people and organizations that have an influence on the desired outcome. Audiences are the receivers of messages.



**Develop  
Your Messages**

Based on your audiences, next outline the most important messages (or points) you need to communicate to your audiences. Remember to keep it to about three messages (that’s usually all that people can retain!). Then consider supporting points to reinforce those key messages. Are there facts, data, anecdotes and stories that support and bring your points to life?

**5 Ws and an H**

Want to ensure you don’t forget a critical detail in your communications? Think [**5 Ws and an H**](https://www.yourthoughtpartner.com/blog/bid/53902/the-5-ws-and-an-h-to-communicate-virtually-anything) to ensure you’re not missing an important detail, sharing the all-important context, and making it relevant for your audience.

* **What -**What’s the decision? What does it mean? What should I know? What’s in it for me?
* **Why -**Why is it the right decision? Why now? Why is it important?
* **Where -**Where is this decision coming from? Where/what locations will it affect? Where can I get more information?
* **When -**When is this happening?
* **How -**How was the decision made? How will it be implemented? How will communications flow internally and externally? How does it impact me?
* **Who -**Who made the decision? Who’s in charge? Who does it impact?

In communicating your message, the order is important. Adult learners want to know the “what” first and then the “why.” The rest can follow logically.  

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Here are some additional tips to [**make your messages stick**](https://www.yourthoughtpartner.com/can-you-hear-me-now):

* **Keep them simple:** People remember things based on simple ideas
* **Be unexpected:** When you take people by surprise they tend to remember it later
* **Communicate clearly:** Human actions and sensory information, images and proverbs help people understand an idea
* **Be credible:** Use facts, figures and examples and believable sources
* **Inspire and create an emotional connection:** People remember things that tap into their emotions – whether it’s something funny that makes them laugh or causes them to reflect
* **Tell stories:** Narrative can influence feelings and sometimes behavior

No matter how you develop your messages, be sure to use a template to keep yourself organized, consistent and concise. For example, we use our award-winning **[messagemap methodology](https://www.yourthoughtpartner.com/message-map" \t "_blank)** to get all the most important messages organized and prioritized on one page.



**Decide What Your Strategy Is and  
What Channels and Tactics You’ll Use**

How you deliver your messages is as important as what you say. Now’s the time to identify your internal communications strategies – in other words, how you’ll approach communicating with your audiences. In this step, you’ll also outline specifically which channels and tactics to use to reach your audience and connect with the key messages.

Tip**TIP:** It helps to strategize potential tactics and channels as a communications team. Organize a session with plenty of post-it notes, flip charts, and pens/markers to generate ideas and stick them on the wall. Vote on the top 6-8 tactics for each objective, repeat, and consolidate.

Very often communicators are asked to jump right into producing materials and delivering tactics first. After you have defined the business need and set out clear objectives to show how communication can meet this need, you first need to outline what internal communication strategies to use and then which tactics are the most likely to be effective to support those strategies.

The channels you choose will depend on what you want to achieve from your communication and the audience you need to reach. The right channels for raising awareness would probably be the wrong ones for gaining ownership and commitment. Similarly, the needs of desk-based employees will be very different to sales force or factory workers.

A well-coordinated use of multiple voices and channels will be needed to ensure maximum impact. How much time you have will often dictate which channels you choose.

**NoteNOTE:** It’s also important to draw on any employee communication data and insights that already exist in your organization. Look to engagement surveys, channel feedback, and more to help you determine which channels and tactics to use.

**Keep in mind these communication best practices:**

* [**Face-to-face communication**](https://www.yourthoughtpartner.com/blog/bid/44390/Leading-in-Person-6-Reasons-to-Communicate-Face-to-Face) is best for making a personal connection and overcoming resistance to change.
* **Meetings** are best for communicating more complicated ideas or when you want input from team members
* **Paper** (such as handouts at a meeting or a flier on a bulletin board) is best when details are important, or dates needs to be referenced
* **Electronic** (such as email or an intranet page) works well for those who have frequent access to computers
* **Video**is best to use when you want to appeal to visual and audio senses and to tell a story. More and more companies are using short, grassroots type videos to get messages across
* **Internal social media**is most effective to build a culture of collaboration and rapport among dispersed team members

Think about how frequently you’ll use different channels. For example, huddles with your team could happen daily, while town hall meetings might be best quarterly. 

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**Actionable Communication Strategies Make Your Tactics More Impactful**

The tactics will help you explain how you plan to make the internal communication strategies happen. Make each tactic relate back to at least one (if not multiple) strategies. Include key deliverables and prepare to monitor execution.

It’ll be helpful to put them all down onto paper to ensure you aren’t missing any.

Then plot key activities into a high-level calendar so you can see how the communications will unfold throughout the year.

In this section, too, add in any considerations that might negatively or positively impact the success of the implementation, for example: employees have noted in engagement surveys that they prefer small-group meetings to receive information from their managers.



**Measure  
Your Progress**

List how you will measure success. This should connect directly back to your outcomes or SMART Objectives (see Step 2). It’s how you’ll know if your internal communication strategies or working or not.

For example, will it be through improved survey scores? Feedback forms from specific communications events? Increased share value or product sales? Increases in employee sign-ups? Better retention rates?

You can use a combination of measurement techniques, but the main thing is to [**make sure you measure**](https://www.yourthoughtpartner.com/blog/bid/48187/7-good-reasons-to-measure-communications-in-your-organization).

Remember – what gets measured, gets done.





**Populate Your  
Communications Calendar / Timeline**

Having a full view of the variety of communications channels and tactics used to implement your plan (and timing to go along with it) will be most effective when you have a project tracker to work from. Look at the year ahead and note which communications will be happening when. That will help ensure you have a consistent cadence of communications, which will contribute to a more informed, engaged workforce.

Use a template like this to map out your action plan (adding as may rows as you need):

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Vehicle / Deliverable** | **Owner / Sender** | **Timing** | **Notes** | **Status** |
|  |  |  |  |  |

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