

E-Mail Announcements Are Not Enough

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The number one complaint in most organizations is lack of good communication from management. Too many managers believe that putting out an announcement in an e-mail is adequate communication. Unfortunately it is not – not by a long margin. Information needs to be communicated in numerous forums and in various ways to accommodate the learning styles of all people and reinforce the message. An e-mail announcement is a good thing to do because it is in writing and has a specific date for revision purposes. Beyond that, it is a mistake to think proper communication has happened by posting an e-mail.

The hit rate of people actually understanding and absorbing the words in an e-mail is often below 50%. Some estimates are as low as 10% in terms of getting people to absorb complex or detailed information. Reason: people tend to skim e-mail communication or not even open it due to the sheer volume of information flying by on the computer every hour (note, we used to say every day). So, when managers say, “I cannot understand why people are confused, I put out an e-mail explaining the process,” they reveal that their own clueless meter is running on empty.

In the Edelman 2010 Trust Barometer, Richard Edelman points out that the trend is for people to insist on multiple exposures to information before they start to believe it. This is a result of the low level of trust in business worldwide fueled by confusing signals coming from management in the past. Smart managers communicate important information in 3-5 different ways, yet numerous managers continue to believe one e-mail is good communication.

My good friend and communications expert, Tim Hayes, calls this phenomenon the “single cannon shot mentality,” or the idea that you can win a war with a single shot. Tim says, “Communications professionals know better. We know human nature. We know that people just aren’t that perceptive. Or alert. Or interested. Or smart. You don’t win a war with a single cannon blast. It takes lots of cannon, air cover, artillery and infantry. It takes repetition. Establishing the most relevant and persuasive messaging based on careful research and insightful writing, then sending it out to the most appropriate audiences over and over. Consistency and constancy win this race” (T. Hayes, BLOG entry dated 9/28/2009).

Below I identify some of the communications options available in addition to a standard e-mail announcement. Note, these are only a dozen of the possibilities. Creative leaders will think of unique ways of communicating that fit the individual situation.

1. Short Informational Videos – These quick-hit communication bullets are super for amplifying a written announcement. For example: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-8ycThI1Gcg>

2. Podcasts – These audio files allow the manager to give information in a more user friendly format that people actually pay attention to. For example: [Podcast Upgraded for Article](#)

3. Website references – Augmenting an e-mail with a website entry explaining the key points in another format gives the ability to highlight information in a corporate context. For example: <http://www.leadergrow.com/TRUST9e.png>

4. Use graphics rather than words or use Attached files – A simple diagram can be an effective augment to an e-mail describing complex issues. If a diagram is not in the e-mail itself, an attachment is often an effective way to amplify the message in ways people can print out and remember better than a lot of text. For example:

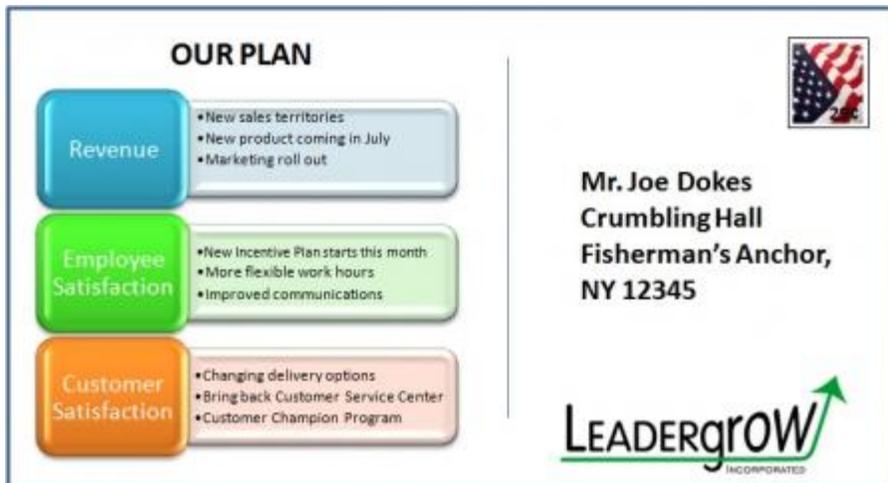


5. Webinars - Interactive online conferences are becoming more prevalent for sharing information in a virtual world. They work well because they are real-time and can have a very broad participation.

6. Voice Mail Messages – these can be quick and simple, but they allow another chance to amplify a message if done with care and infrequently.

7. Conference Calls and video conferencing - Conference calls have been used for decades and are effective at getting dialog on the issues from a diverse and geographically decentralized population. Adding video to conference calls is now available to the masses with services such as SKYPE.

8. Hard copy memos - You might use a kind of post-card memo that contains the important considerations in an announcement. It is something that can be put on a person's bulletin board for future reference. For Example:



9. Town Hall Meetings or other Physical Presentation Modes – These face-to face meetings allow for interaction on questions for clarification.

10. Cascade communication in small groups. This format requires a kind of “press kit” to be prepared so all levels of management are giving the same information. Often these small group meetings allow for feedback up the chain on potential concerns.

11. One-on-one discussions – In extremely complex or sensitive areas it may be best to meet personally with each individual in the group and explain the significance of an announcement.

12. Feedback Surveys – This method gets tangible data on how well people have absorbed the message. Surveys should be quick, user friendly, and anonymous for the most accurate information.

Good communication involves not only sharing information; it is about obtaining understanding and buy-in. Using multiple forms of communication can help managers reach more people with a more complete package of information that will create a lasting and positive impression.