

Want to transform employee communication in 2020?

These 20 trends will show you the way.

Make an impact. Impress your boss. Kick it up a notch.

Let's start with a prediction: This is going to be the best year ever for internal communication. Senior leaders recognize the value of engaging employees. Technology is advancing. Employees want helpful information and meaningful connections.

More good news: You have the power to make changes that will dramatically improve employee communication this year.

All you need to do is take the first step. Use these trends as your guide to jump-start your program:

1



The quest for convenience

Nearly 80% of American consumers say that convenience is key for a positive customer experience, according to a PwC survey. But when employees bring expectations to work, they're often disappointed by how communication is delivered—slow, complicated and way too difficult.

Listen to employees when they say, **"Make communication easy. Simple. Useful.** And help me save time by designing communication that's targeted and convenient." For example, rather than creating content that employees have to struggle through, be clear about what they need to do.

2

Print's resurgence

A decade ago, experts were predicting that books and other print publications would soon be extinct as e-books made paper obsolete. But surprisingly, **print didn't die:** 6.5 billion books were sold during the past 10 years, compared with 1.8 billion e-books, according to The NPD Group.

All we are saying is **give print a chance.** Yes, print is more costly than sending an email. And, yes, using print *appears* to be less environmentally correct (despite the fact that trees are farmed). But print still has a unique power to reach employees and get their attention. Smart organizations today are using print to communicate critical, complex content. So should you.



3

Active listening

Podcasts are making a lot of noise these days. Literally. Fifty-one percent of U.S. consumers—144 million people—have listened to a podcast. Plus, podcasts are sticky: 62 million listeners tune in every week.



It's just this simple: **Start playing with podcasts.** But be sure the result is interesting enough to keep employees' attention. A great model is "Inside Trader Joe's" podcast. While it started as a vehicle for employees, the podcast has become popular with customers, too. Why? Because it provides practical advice about products as well as updates on company happenings.

4

No one-size-fits-all

Generation, culture, gender, race, geography—no matter how you define it, **diversity in the workforce** is more prevalent than ever. For example, in many organizations, up to five generations are currently working together.



Guess what? The more diverse employees are, the more varied their communication needs. That's why you need to thoroughly **understand employees' preferences**, then build your communication system to fit every size and style. For instance, provide a variety of methods, including push (email), on demand (apps) and face-to-face (town halls).

5

Clutter, solved

In the Netflix series, "Tidying Up," Japanese organization guru Marie Kondo helps people **pare down clutter and create order.** According to Sabrina Helm, associate professor at the University of Arizona, "In an age of overconsumption, getting rid of unnecessary items can bring people a sense of personal relief and pride."



A surge of tools and technologies has created an overflowing internal communication closet. So channel Kondo by **conducting an audit** to find out which tools deliver value—and which are just adding clutter. Got a tool that isn't helping employees? Thank it for its service and kick it to the curb.

6

More and more mobile

The past decade has seen the steady encroachment of mobile devices into every aspect of people's lives. As Brian Wieser of GroupM writes, "The distinction between mobile devices and any other internet-connected devices has been rendered mostly meaningless. Advertisers . . . now presume that most of their **messages will reach consumers' mobile devices.**" The next frontier for mobile? Inside organizations, since mobile creates equal access for every employee.



Make sure communication works as well on mobile as it does on bigger screens. Sound obvious? Many leaders (Baby Boomers, we're looking at you) still prefer long written communication. It's high time to **make communication short, snappy, visual**—and to dramatically increase the use of fast-moving video.

7

The persuasive force

One of the fastest growing marketing trends is appealing to "micro-influencers"—active users of social media whose followers pay close attention to what they recommend. The power of micro-influencers is that **"people are more willing to trust the opinions of people they know and look up to,"** according to social media expert Myriah Anderson.



There are micro-influencers inside your organization, too. Think about the supervisor in a manufacturing plant whom everyone knows and respects. Or the HR manager whose colleagues always ask about pressing issues. **These influencers can be a powerful force** when you ask them to be change champions, who share relevant content with their peers.

8

The rise of remote

If you're wondering where your colleagues are right now, here's the answer: **working remotely.** In fact, **remote work grew 44% over the past five years.** And 80% of U.S. employees say they would turn down a job that didn't offer flexible work arrangements.



Show remote workers that you care by designing communication that includes them. How? Embrace technology so all employees have an equal experience. For example, run your next town hall meeting so that it's completely virtual—everyone is remote. And use techniques like video, polling and chat to engage every participant.

9

Old news

Journalism is changing: According to a 2019 RAND corporation report: **"The media ecosystem has experienced a rapid technological evolution over the past three decades.** These digital-age changes have revolutionized how news content is produced, consumed and disseminated."



Rather than reporting "news" stories that are not interesting (or new) to employees, **focus on information** that helps employees be more successful at work. For example: "How to set performance goals" or "What this award winner can teach you about improving quality."

10

Activism on the march

The vast majority of **U.S. workers believe they have the right to speak up**, whether they are in support of (84%) or against (75%) their employers. Employees want to express themselves about social issues (such as LGBTQ rights, gender equality and the environment) or work-related issues (such as pay, sexual harassment and discrimination or treatment of workers).



Once you help leaders understand that open dialogue is actually a good thing, **create ways for employees to express themselves** in a safe and productive way. Develop forums, such as town hall meetings or social message boards, for employees to speak up. And encourage leader participation—and action—so employees feel heard.

11

The end of zombie video

Think video is hot now? It's getting even more torrid—in fact, video is becoming consumers' favorite way of learning about almost everything. And the most sizzling trend is called **"live video,"** which is exactly what it seems: the ability to watch something that's occurring right now. People spend three times longer watching live video than they do the pre-recorded kind.



It's time to **kill traditional corporate video**, whose zombie qualities—pompous talking heads, lack of action, stilted script—don't even appeal to the undead. Go live by streaming events and experiences that appeal to employees. Share a local event with all. Follow the CEO on her travels. Give a behind-the-scenes view of new product development. It's all happening right now.

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Managers unbound

Organizations may be focused on helping managers learn technical skills, but the top priority should be soft skills—innovation, change management and communication—according to a survey by Udemy for Business. That's because **managers are more important than ever for getting the best out of their team members.** And technical competence doesn't help managers motivate.



You can **play an important role in developing managers' skills** in key areas like storytelling, listening and facilitating dialogue. Since managers are too busy to take a traditional course, develop on-the-go learning that integrates skills development into managers' days.

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The visual story

Consider this: **500 million people are daily active users of Instagram Stories.** What are all these people doing? Using photos and other visuals to share their experiences with others.

Three words: **encourage visual sharing.** Make 2020 the year that you give employees the opportunity to showcase their accomplishments, especially through photos, videos and even DIY GIFs. You don't need fancy apps, but you do need to make it a snap to share.

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Measure to measure

CEOs are increasingly asking every function to measure their efforts, but internal communicators are struggling. **One-third aren't measuring** their internal communications efforts at all and only 22% are satisfied with their ability to measure their programs.

It's time to **become a measurement master.** Even if math's not your favorite thing, you can develop your expertise. For example, focus on techniques that demonstrate communication outcomes: Is communication meeting employees' needs? Do they understand key issues? Are they taking appropriate action?

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A focus on conversation

With the rise of workplace collaboration tools—such as Yammer, Slack, Workplace or Chatter—comes an increase in employee dialogue. In a study of 4,200 companies conducted by the McKinsey Global Institute, **72% reported using social tools** to facilitate employee communication.

Take charge of your organization's collaboration tool so it's used effectively. Embrace your new role as a facilitator—not a distributor—of communication. Use social forums as a way to kick-start conversations on key topics, increase accessibility to leaders and encourage employees to share what's on their minds.

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Email reimaged

Sorry, while you may be over email, it's not going away any time soon. In fact, **95% of organizations still use email** as their primary mode of communicating internally. And 63% of communicators think email will never (ever) go away.

Since email is here to stay, **give it the love it so desperately needs.** In fact, email deserves an extreme makeover. Reduce the number of emails you send by 30%. While you're at it, cut the word count by 25%. Reimagine subject lines—the way marketers do—to encourage clicking. And create emails that are visual and skimmable, so they can be digested quickly and on any device.

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All about experience

Uh-oh, trouble. Leaders are starting to worry that, in a tight labor market, it's getting harder to attract and retain talented people. So organizations are **focusing on the employee experience**, defined as what employees encounter, observe and feel while they're at work. Almost 80% of executives worldwide rate employee experience as important to their organization.

Bring your organization's employee experience to life. Instead of pushing content, use the channels you manage—large meetings, intranets, social networks, events—to connect people, facilitate interactions and build connections.

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Your strongest advocates

As the lines between corporate and personal social media continue to blur, companies now **actively recruit employees to become social media brand ambassadors.** Macy's, for example, has enlisted 300 employees to be part of the store's Style Crew, to share what they love about fashion.

Your first step? **Choose employees who are eager to be advocates.** Put a call out for volunteers and then select the employees who best represent your organization. Host workshops to show your new ambassadors how to use their own words and images to tell your company's story.

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Well-deserved recognition

It's a no brainer: **Employee recognition plays a vital role in improving engagement.** However, organizations are falling short in delivering the credit employees crave. Forty-five percent of employees say they have not been recognized in the past six months.

The best people to deliver meaningful recognition? Managers, of course. And you play an important role in helping managers improve their skills. **Create tools and advice to show managers** why recognition is important and suggest a variety of ways to praise and encourage their direct reports.

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Quest for community

In a pressured world, employees are seeking more from their organizations than a paycheck. In fact, according to "The Harvard Business Review," one thing employees value most **about their companies is community.** "Community is about people: feeling respected, cared about and recognized by others," the authors write. "It drives our sense of connection and belongingness."

You are in the best position to **create a sense of community for employees.** After all, you manage platforms—like the intranet and internal social media—that serve as a launch pad for building community. And you influence leaders, who can turn venues like town halls into interactive forums. Yes, creating community takes effort—even rethinking your role—but the results are significant.

Sources on file. For more information on sources or trends, contact Alyssa Zeff.