Getting On The Path To

Better Employee Communication



Alere™ Wellbeing

Executive Summary

Most companies know that communications are essential to the overall success of any wellness program. But once the posters are up on the walls and the email campaigns have been distributed, do you really know if they are effective in helping your employees understand the program, what actions you want them to take and why? Do you know if your employees are even reading your communications?

Companies that communicate effectively are far more likely to be successful financially, according to a survey by Towers Watson.[1] It should be no surprise then that communication also plays a key role in the success of a wellness program. If you take the time to build and develop a strong communications network, you are more likely to experience higher participant engagement rates and better health outcomes.

This white paper will share:

- Five steps for building an effective communications network,
- Tips for creating effective newsletters, emails and blogs,
- Suggestions for how to use social media to drive participation, and
- A success story on how innovative communications helped increase participation.

CITATIONS

[1] 16th Annual Towers Watson National Business Group on Health Employer Survey on Purchasing Value in Healthcare, 2011

Five Steps to a Strong Employee Communications Network

You may be wondering what comprises a strong communications network. It's not as simple as starting a couple of communications channels like a newsletter or a series of town hall meetings. It takes a sustained commitment throughout the organization and resources supported by a clear strategy. **Here are five steps you can take to build a strong communications network:**

1. **Understand your culture.** Your communications strategy will most likely fail to get the desired results if it is inconsistent with your organization's culture. You need to: make sure your plan does not clash with your company's routines and procedures; understand your employees' communication preferences; and determine how you will communicate with employees in all your locations.

2. **Conduct a communications audit.** Identify and make a list of your communication channels, such as emails, newsletters, town halls, etc. Identify the channels that have received a favorable response from your employees. Conduct employee surveys to learn how your employees prefer to be communicated to by the company.

3. **Decide the best ways to communicate.** Once you have a deeper understanding of your culture and employee communication preferences, you will have the knowledge to select the communications channels that have the greatest likelihood of successfully driving participation and engagement in your population. Examples include print materials, electronic communications, multimedia tools, wellness champions, team meetings, etc.

4. **Determine who will communicate.** The person or group of people who communicate the message is a critical aspect of your communications strategy. You want to make sure your employees trust and generally have a good rapport with your "messenger". For instance, if your culture distrusts managers, it may be better to focus on neutral communications like newsletters or have your emails generated from your HR department.

5. **Determine frequency of communications.** The timing and frequency of various communications will differ depending on your initiatives. When talking about wellness programs, it is important to communicate with employees before key events so they know key dates and what's in it for them. You also want to communicate during active wellness challenges, after challenges to report results and periodically during the year to promote your programs.

How to Make Your Newsletters & Emails Impactful

Create Compelling Content

Remember, your employees have to actually read and be inspired by your communications if you want them to have the desired impact. Consider these helpful tips to make your content more impactful:

- **Make sure the "what's in it for them" is at the top!** Don't bury the most important or exciting part of the story or email message. Get it up as high as you can so your employees don't miss it.
- **Write attention-grabbing headlines.** The number one function of a headline is to sell your story or campaign! There's an art to it. Make sure it focuses on the key benefit to the employee. Google "how to write catchy headlines," and you'll find a ton of tips.
- **Know your audience.** Understand the cultural characteristics of the population(s) you are trying to reach to more effectively target your messaging. Use language that is at the same level as your audience. Provide your content in other languages, too, if you have people for whom English is not their first language.
- **Incorporate art, graphics, and callouts in newsletters; create eye-catching email templates.** A visually appealing design can draw in your employees. Here's a link for free email templates.
- **Don't write a novel.** People don't have time to read long, in-depth articles. In fact, they may shy away from newsletters or emails packed with too much copy. Keep your communications short, meaningful, and actionable.
- **Highlight success stories in your newsletters.** Show how real people are benefitting from participation. Employees are more likely to be inspired when hearing about positive experiences.

Measure Your Success

- **Set your goal and metrics.** Always know what you are trying to accomplish and define your metrics so that you can demonstrate results.
- **Make sure you have a clear call to action in your email campaigns.** Make it easy for your employees to take the next step (e.g., login link, link to registration page, etc.) and give clear instructions. Make sure you can track participation (number of logins, etc.) to show your progress.

Reach More Employees with Social Media Content

More companies are looking at social media as another strong way to promote their health and wellness programs and engagement. Social media programming within a health and wellness program makes the content more relevant and current to the participant, not to mention engaging and fun.

Examples include entertaining health games, online support groups, tracking programs linked to useful tips and information, and opportunities for participants to share their personal experiences with one another. **Here are some ways that companies can use social media to promote engagement:**

- Use Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and a blog to post tips and information for health and wellness.
- Tweet testimonial quotes by participants; link to success stories.
- Write blogs about participant success stories.
- Use Facebook to promote your programs and challenges; post useful information and tips to help your employees engage.
- Ask for feedback on Facebook and use it to make improvements to your programs, then share about it on Facebook to let your employees know you are listening!
- Post videos on YouTube of participants sharing about their positive experiences.
- Create online support groups for people with specific health issues.
- To ensure privacy, allow users to opt out of certain sharing features and design your program in a way that prevents sharing too much personally identifiable information.

Creating robust member networks can help organizations increase engagement and optimize health outcomes. Social networks aren't going away, and organizations that design forward-thinking social strategies now may reap the benefits for a long time to come.

Tips for Starting Your Own Blog

A blog can be an effective communication tool to help you promote your health and wellness programs and develop a culture of health. Even though you may send this information via email and social networks, having a blog means your audience has an easy way to find past communications.

You can use a blog to:

- Announce health initiatives
- Share success stories
- Promote enhancements to your programs
- Provide words of encouragement by your wellness champions

Important! If you want to have a positive, far-reaching impact, you need to be committed to updating the site with fresh compelling content that continually encourages your employees to care about their health and reminds them how your programs can make a difference in their lives.

Four Key Steps to Launching Your Blog

1. **Select your blog software.** There are a number of free software vendors to choose from, but the most popular choice right now is WordPress. Sign up with a free account at WordPress.com or host a blog on your website by downloading and installing the free software at WordPress.org.

2. **Develop your strategy.** Know your blog objectives. Determine what categories you'd like to write about. Decide what voice you'll use to deliver content. Determine frequency of posting and who will be responsible for content.

3. **Develop a promotion plan.** Promote each blog posting with an internal email that shows the headline, photo of the author or image used in the post, and first three lines of the blog. Then give the blog post's link. Come up with creative strategies such as sponsoring a contest in which you reward employees who make the best comments.

4. **Measure your blog.** Determine ways to measure the effectiveness of your blog. Use Google Analytics to see how many visits you're getting. See which blog posts get the most hits to help you create content in the future that is more targeted and compelling.

Large Employer Leverages Innovative Communications to Drive Participation

A large employer that covers 80,000 lives, including 40,000 benefit-eligible employees and their dependents, was having trouble increasing participation in their health and wellness programs.

In partnership with Alere, the employer developed an award-winning incentives program backed by other engagement strategies, including an innovative communications program that was instrumental in getting the word out and attracting participation. **Communications strategies included:**

- Using an Alere onsite health promotions manager to create a communications strategy and manage communications and messaging.
- Integrating email communications and newsletters with Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube sites and a health and wellness blog to promote the incentives program.
- Tweeting testimonial quotes.
- Inserting success stories in welcome packages.
- Posting videos on YouTube of health and wellness experts providing tips and advice.
- Writing participant success stories for the newsletter and blog.
- Using company emails to promote and provide links to company communications.

Other engagement strategies included Alere's nationally recognized Quit For Life® program and evidence-based behavior change solutions. The employer won an award from a recognized industry awards program.

Results[2]

- Increased participation from 15% to 75%
- Significantly reduced health risks
- Reduced hospital admissions for participants with heart failure by 10.8% and for participants with diabetes by 20.4%
- Produced total cost savings of $5 million
- ROI: 2.86

Effective communications played a crucial role in the employer's health and wellness program success. The organization took the time to develop a communications strategy that incorporated compelling content through newsletters and emails, a blog and the use of social media in fresh, innovative ways. By understanding their culture and the needs of their employees, the employer was able to create communications that easily reached and appealed to their employees.

To learn more about the Alere's comprehensive health coaching and chronic condition management services, contact Alere at (800) 456-4060.



CITATIONS

[2] Alere Health Data

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