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# Great Program Communications Inspire Employees, Drive Results

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Companies benefit fully from their employee reward programs do so by putting thoughtful consideration into all supporting elements, not the least of which is communications. One best practice that highly successful planners will suggest is this: When it comes to setting a communications pattern, it is always better to error on the side of too much versus too little. The lesson to be learned here is simple: Incentive and employee recognition managers who fail to get the word out create uncertainty, which in turn hurts results.

Under communicated programs *under*perform on all levels. They suffer from low user adoption, inconsistent utilization, incomplete data collection, and along the way, diminished executive standing. So here is the basic rule of thumb to follow when staging the program's communications sequence—before you can *inspire* you must first inform.

During the initial stages of the program's introduction your communications must set the stage for success. Whether it's a new program being introduced for the first time or an enhancement to an existing one, you must carve out a high level of awareness across the targeted employee or sales audience. Good communications do this by explaining the rationale for the program, introducing the supporting tool(s) and summarizing how the process of earning, giving, and receiving rewards will work.

Keep in mind that the tone of your content—and the tactics you deploy—should most likely vary across the spectrum of stakeholders. Messages for eligible employees, managers with budgets, managers with approval and access rights, and, of course, senior sponsors will all vary. To gain their attention and participation, you must prepare a sequence that will serve each audience best. And while content that introduces the reasoning and resources behind the program is essential during the early stages of its launch, you should also be prepared to revise and revive messages that can be directed at any individuals who may be slow to adopt or are underutilizing the platform.

Any marketer worth their salt knows that "constituent-defined content" is significantly more impactful than messages broadcast without customization. The same holds true when the intended listeners reside within an employee base or channel population.

Tailored messages that take into account the roles and responsibilities of each participant—not simply where they work and what they do—but how well they have performed in the past and what they need to do to get closer to peak performance—have greater *attention-grabbing* power.

There is also the more practical issue of execution to consider: What communication components represent

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the most efficient distribution mix?

When it comes to choosing the ideal combination, seasoned planners know that efficiency is a product of two variables: Absolute costs and the impact of every dollar spent. The analysis begins with the comparison between traditional communication components (like print and dimensional items) versus digitally-delivered alternatives. Both options elevate awareness, but each has a different price structure. Traditional print pieces cost money to design, produce and distribute, while web-driven components have only the creative considerations. Depending on the audience size, digital pieces can have a significantly lower cost-per-unit calculation. And in terms of impact, they can set the stage for a more enduring emotional relationship as the content can be increasingly customized over time. That's one reason why the use of inter/intranet communications is outpacing paper-based components (like posters, flyers, and printed catalogues) by a margin of two to one.

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Digital communications across information-centric employee bases that are tied to technology are of course a no-brainer. Employees who use web-based tools throughout the day; who interact via instant messaging and email and are computer-dependent in their jobs are prime candidates for digital components. But what about workers who toil on factory floors or have limited access to the web during the day? Don't eliminate them from web-based options so quickly.  With over 94% of the American population having access to broadband, many via smartphones, the ubiquitous nature of internet and mobile communications (both at work and in our personal lives) has made _all_ employees legitimate candidates for web-based communications.

Of course, you may want to mix and match communication components differently across various audiences, and you will need to rely on print early in the process to build awareness within traditional labor forces more than with knowledge-driven groups. It's time to rethink the notion that web-driven communications cannot be leveraged in one way or another for _all_ employees.

Whatever form your communications take, above all remember that consistency and frequency are essential to any program's successful communications campaign. Informed participants are inspired participants, and inspired participants drive results that are sure to boost your bottom line. ■

The Performance Improvement Council (PIC), a professional organization of performance marketing executives is a special industry group of the Incentive Marketing Association (www.incentivemarketing.org), is collectively focused on helping companies optimize their investment in human capital through proven and innovative reward and recognition solutions. To learn more about the Performance Improvement Council, please visit http://www.thepicnow.org