

## Get Engaged!

### Using streaming media to reach employees in a Web 2.0 world

"Communication is the circulatory system of an organization."

*Jack Goodman*

*Vice President, Employee Communications*

*Thomson Financial*

Globalization has changed not only how businesses interact with each other, but how companies communicate internally with employees. With the increase in global sourcing, remote working and virtual teams, important messages are increasingly being delivered electronically—competing for attention in already congested inboxes. As the adoption of broadband Internet continues to rise and the associated operation costs fall, the use of streaming media across the enterprise has reached a tipping point. Web-based platforms have introduced new channels that cut through the clutter and reach employees in ways that are more targeted and interactive.

Research has shown that the way employers communicate is key to building trust and loyalty among employees.<sup>1</sup> While in-person meetings remain a preferred practice, more organizations are turning to webcasting (live audio and video streamed online) and on-demand video (an archived presentation, such as a product training or new hire orientation) to complement existing internal outreach strategies.

#### 4 E's of Effective Employee Communication

Streaming media enhances the way an organization delivers its messages, but it doesn't improve the fundamental content being presented. Effective employee communication can do four things: engage an audience, educate or inform, provide a platform to exchange ideas and feedback, and empower/motivate individuals to take action.

#### **Engage**

In a Watson Wyatt survey, companies with highly-engaged employees were found to significantly outperform those with a disengaged workforce<sup>2</sup>. Communication is a critical component of employee engagement and an effective employee communications program comprises multiple touch points using a variety of media, including corporate intranets, email, Town Hall meetings, electronic newsletters, webcasts and others. Successful

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<sup>1</sup> PRSA (2006).

<sup>2</sup> Employee Commitment Remains Unchanged. Watson Wyatt Worldwide (2002).

companies conduct integrated, multimedia campaigns for employees throughout the year—just as they do for customers.

### **Educate**

In this era of increasing corporate transparency, it's imperative that employees be well-informed of key developments, such as organizational changes, business priorities, corporate events, crises, acquisitions and competitive news. Sensitive messages, in particular, need to be candid, accurate and timely to ensure that second-hand information and speculation are managed, and employees have the opportunity to ask questions as needed. A well-known study by Albert Mehrabian has shown that 93% of a message's meaning is nonverbal—derived primarily from gestures, body language and facial expressions.<sup>3</sup> As a complement to press releases and internal email blasts, streaming media provides a visual component that can enhance the credibility of the news delivered to employees.

### **Exchange information**

Especially in stressful or sensitive situations, employees need to trust that their concerns and ideas are being heard and acted upon in a timely manner. The concept of the suggestion box hasn't gone away; rather, it is increasingly becoming virtual. Companies can develop trust across the enterprise by leveraging, among other channels, online platforms that enable employees to give feedback, request information and receive responses quickly.

### **Empower**

A survey by the Gallup Management Journal showed organizations that encourage employees to participate in developing business solutions experience less attrition and have a more satisfied and productive workforce.<sup>4</sup> The same study found that, in the United States, the lost productivity from 23 million disengaged workers costs the U.S. economy \$370 billion each year.<sup>5</sup> Incorporating streaming media into an organization's communications program can help engage and empower employees who are distributed across a global enterprise.

### **An Integrated Approach to Engaging Employees**

High-tech and high-touch are not mutually exclusive. In fact, an integrated communications strategy can deliver frequent touch points to employees using both on-

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<sup>3</sup> Mehrabian, Albert. "Silent messages." Wadsworth, Belmont, California (1971).

<sup>4</sup> Towers Perrin (2005).

<sup>5</sup> "Why Dilbert is Right," Gallup Management Journal (3/7/2006).

and off-line activities. Company outings, internal road shows and “lunch and learn” workshops continue to be effective, and are being complemented with Web-based communication platforms such as webcasting, which are increasingly a solution of choice for companies that need to communicate globally while maintaining the personal touch of face-to-face meetings.

### **Town Hall meetings**

When planning a Town Hall-type meeting, it may be necessary to engage audiences in multiple locations. A live, video webcast allows a CEO and senior management team to be front and center on the desktops of those who cannot attend the event in person. Many interactive webcast platforms enable offsite users to participate in Q&A sessions, and maintaining an on-demand archive of events on the corporate intranet lets employees (especially those in other time zones) access the presentation at their convenience. In addition, an increasing number of organizations complement their Town Halls with quarterly earnings updates that highlight company performance and key employee contributions across the company; these can be effectively delivered via webcast as well.

### **Team meetings**

More than ever, cross-functional teams within organizations are collaborating virtually and, while technology has made this process more efficient, companies need to sustain the personal interaction that marks the traditional office environment. Marketing research firm International Data Corp. (IDC) estimates that, by 2009, nearly 70% of the workforce in the United States will be working in the field with laptops or mobile devices, for at least part of their workday.<sup>6</sup> Managers can leverage cost-effective applications such as video conferencing to interface with remote teams, deliver strategic updates and reinforce goals and priorities.

### **New employee training and orientation**

Training workers is important but requires an investment of valuable company resources, including the direct involvement of the organization’s most skilled managers. Hosting Web-based training on a corporate intranet alleviates some of the time required to onboard employees. An increasing number of companies are using on-demand video webcasts to introduce new hires to senior management, review company policies and explain work processes.

### **M&A communications**

For employees, a merger or acquisition can be filled with uncertainty and the potential for miscommunication. Companies need a way to deliver information consistently, accurately

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<sup>6</sup> International Data Corp (2005).

and in a timely manner, while allowing employees to get answers to their questions. Maintaining open channels of communication is important to reducing misinformation and sustaining productivity. Following the close of a deal, many companies hold live webcasts, with Q&A, to address concerns from employees, investors and the media. According to Lee Ahlstrom, Vice President of Investor Relations and Planning at Noble Corporation, "Using webcasts to communicate with employees can mitigate the stressful conditions of an M&A, while building a sense of community and understanding among the parties involved."

### **Building a Platform for Productivity**

As Web technology flattens the business world and helps employees be more efficient and effective across the enterprise, corporate communicators must guard against the breakdown of relationships—the building blocks of business.

Developing a high-performance corporate culture with an engaged workforce requires consistent "audience-focused" communications, organizational systems that are aligned and a shared set of values and expectations. How employees approach their work, relate to each other and interact with customers can be tied directly to the model that is communicated by management. And without reinforcement of messages and interaction with colleagues, remote offices can develop distinct cultures of their own, impeding the development of a single, unified corporate identity. In the absence of clear, well-defined channels of internal communication, a company's ability to be nimble in an ever-changing business landscape is at risk.

Successful organizations have communications strategies that promote engagement, education, exchange and empowerment to maximize the performance of their workforce. By leveraging the cost-effectiveness and global reach of streaming media such as webcasting, webinars and on-demand video, companies can deliver important messages that are consistent, credible and effective—the first steps in bringing employee communications to the world of Web 2.0.

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