Tackling Internal Communications in Geographically Diverse Digital Workplaces

Contents

Executive Summary

The real challenge in modern workplace internal communications is the increased use of technological software and devices. Due to these new trends, communications and employee locations have begun to shift away from standard face-to-face interactions to computer-mediated communications. Vertical interactions between the company and its employees, and horizontal interactions among colleagues themselves have become increasingly digitized. This changing landscape presents communication professionals with a variety of new challenges as they continue striving to increase engagement, motivation, and job satisfaction from employee stakeholders.

Research indicates that there are several areas of the business that are influenced by internal communications. Employee engagement, enablement, motivation, satisfaction, and trust are directly influenced by the organizational communication channels and platforms. Digital coworker relationships are directly related to their perceived proximity to those with which they work. Communication tools, such as enterprise social media, instant messaging, and intranets allow vertical and horizontal employee relationships to flourish.

This paper takes a look at these internal digital communications with a computer-mediated communication lens. There are distinct challenges, such as relationship building, impression formulation, and information sharing, that arise when dealing with virtual communities. However, through literature and observational research, it is concluded that CMC internal communication is not merely a teleworker challenge anymore. An increasing amount of employees are geographically dispersed from coworkers and communication professionals must take these new phenomena into consideration. Their strategies and tactics must play to the strengths of this new and prevalent medium of communications for all involved stakeholders.

Literature Review: Internal Communication in the Workplace

There are many definitions of internal communications; Mazzei describes it as, "a set of interactive processes to generate knowledge and allegiance, definitively abandoning a systemic perspective that refers to organizational boundaries" (2010). Other scholars say that it is, ". . . A process between an organization's strategic managers and its internal stakeholders, designed to promote commitment to the organization, a sense of belonging to it, awareness of its changing environment, and understanding of its evolving aims" (Sharma & Kamalanabhan, 2012). Essentially, both perspectives strive to increase commitment or loyalty to an organization.

Understanding the effects that internal communications have on corporations is critical to establishing strategic and tactical internal communication recommendations. (Karanges, Beatson, Johnston, & Lings, 2014) Ultimately, internal communications are identified as one of many methods for building trust and commitment among employees (Togna, 2014). This confidence and commitment are demonstrated through employee communication actions (Mazzei, 2014). Brand ambassadorship, product sharing, knowledge sharing and open communications, are the basis for company success. Businesses that make internal communications a priority have higher employee engagement, typically increased productivity, and better industry reputations.

There are two ways to approach internal communications; System Models [SM] and Resource Models [RM] (Mazzei, 2010). Organizational boundaries define SM, and the aim is to target messages, disseminate information, foster communication productivity, and educate and motivate employees for objective sharing (Argenti & Forman, 2002). Employees are categorized through the company hierarchy, roles, age, and education. Information is distributed in a push manner, and there is a tenuous link between human resources and communications.

By contrast, RM are defined by intangible attributes including motivation, involvement, trust, loyalty, allegiance, and knowledge (Kalla, 2005), and the aim is to stimulate allegiance and promote active communications (Grunig 1978; Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Employees are categorized through key competencies and psychological factors, and the audience is often extended to external stakeholders in the supply chain. In a resource model, pull strategy and user generated content is as equally important as the integration of human resources. Research indicated that employee understanding of internal communications leans towards a resource based model while literature focuses on system models (Mazzei, 2010). Most companies use a strategy which draws on both System and Resource Models. However, technology is rapidly changing communication protocol in the business world.

Engagement, Enablement, & Trust

Organizational leaders can boost engagement by helping employees feel connected to the larger group, stimulating identification, expressing direct concern about employee well-being, and providing them with the social resources to promote those relationships (Karanges et al., 2014). The relationship between internal communications and employee engagement can be measured through perceived support, job characteristics, and employee connection to the company. Positive perceptions in these areas are directly linked to high productivity, better morale, improved reputation, increased focus, and higher workplace engagement. Management should focus on indirectly building these areas to optimize levels of engagement through creating a sense of belonging and pride.

Internal communications strategies should concentrate on enabling and facilitating effective employee communications. Within a company, enabled employees drive several key areas including knowledge creation and sharing, stakeholder engagement, and reputations

building (Mazzei, 2014). Mutuality and reciprocity are the bases for effective enablement strategies, and if companies value employee commitment, then employees, in turn, will feel secure and confident in the symbiotic relationship. Employee enablement is achieved through a clear communication path that utilizes a full disclosure style so trust between managers and employees can increase (Mazzei, 2014). For this to succeed, managers must clearly communicate to build accountability that increases corporate value by clarifying mutual benefits for all stakeholders. When employees are actively enabled through strategic communications that promote enablement, they are active contributors to the company and the reputation of the company grows.

Employee communication actions are significant and demonstrate employee loyalty (Dick & Basu, 1994). There is a threefold relationship between communications, trust, and commitment. Increase commitment with employees builds honest, direct relationships between management and employees. Generic messages are not always sufficient to create the kind of trust that leads to engagement; emphasizing the need for managers on creating positive communication channels to promote relationship building (Togna, 2014). Research also indicates that there is a link between successful internal communications and successful corporate branding (Sharma & Kamalanabhan, 2012). Communications that support and demonstrate the authentic corporate brand result in the promotion of a sense of loyalty and commitment among employees, in addition to identifying with the corporation. This can be increased through management brand building, providing feedback, as well as a cross-functional relationship between internal communications and human resources. However, current research suggests that non-targeted communication strategies are not effective and not cost-efficient after a certain level of trust, and ultimately commitment has been reached (Togna, 2014). Once a plateau has been

achieved, further communication strategies may be needed to reinforce management goals and integrate human resources management efforts.

Organizational Communications

There are four steps of communication between employee and manager; these include exploration, interpretation, sharing and acting (Mazzei, 2014). However, this is a relationship that requires give and take from both parties. It is important for managers to adhere to open communication's style which promotes non-threatening leadership language when discussing critical issues. Also, it is important for employees to be company brand ambassadors and spread the message about products while sharing their knowledge with coworkers and communicating openly with their supervisors.

Internal communications should help employees link their values to the corporate goals while simultaneously informing employees of their value (Karanges et al., 2014) Internal communications between supervisors and employees have a direct correlation to the perceived support. Supervisors can boost perceived support by valuing the work and well-being of their employees. This can be achieved through discussions with individuals and teams about objectives.

It is important to have a cohesive and customized human resources and internal communication strategy (Togna, 2014). Internal communication is not merely a message-target function. Rather it must focus on encouraging active employee interactions (Mazzei, 2010). Organizational well-being, collaborative environments, company allegiance and organizational change are all influenced by the link between human resource and internal communications (Mazzei, 2014). Mutual support contributes to corporate success.

Literature Review: Communications in an Evolving Technology Landscape

Telecommuters, employees who perform at least part of their work outside their traditional corporate offices, have become increasingly popular as communication technologies emerge (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Thatcher & Zhu, 2006). More than 24 million individuals work remotely, at least, one day a week (WorldatWork, 2009). Technology has allowed people to express closeness, endorse a sense of shared context, and enhance working relationships (O'Leary, Wilson, & Metiu, 2014)*.* Telecommuters often experience higher levels of job autonomy and satisfaction while also having lower family-work conflict, job stress, and turnover intentions (Fay & Kline, 2011). However, high-intensity telecommuters, those who work from home 2.5 days or more, often experience negative co-worker relationships. The degree to which an employee telecommutes has a direct correlation to their organizational identity, commitment, and satisfaction (Bartel, Wrzesniewski, & Wiesenfeld, 2007; Golden, 2006; Golden et al., 2008). Manager's attitudes and understanding of telecommuting challenges play a significant part in the success of individual employees.

Informal communication channels such as instant messaging, video-media, social networking, chat rooms and other technologies seem to have an effect on teleworker isolation (Fay & Kline, 2011). Organizations that utilize surveillance methods for teleworkers limit employee ability to build relationships, share knowledge, or cultivate trust and are therefore less successful in fostering employee satisfaction. Companies can limit employee's fear of retribution by creating environments, policies, and practices that encourage expressing concerns or frustrations which ultimately facilitates commitment.

Digital Coworker Relationships

High-intensity telecommuters often report feeling socially isolated and often struggle with their social identities and work relationships (Fay & Kline, 2011; McDonald, Bradley, &

Brown, 2008; Tietze & Musson, 2010). However, the relationship can be just as personal with geographically dispersed employees as they are in face-to-face relationships (O'Leary et al., 2014). This is partially because technology allows people, not just telecommuters but all employees, to be "always on," active, and connected to their coworkers.

Informal communications and relationships between colleagues are especially important for telecommuters since they lack the face-to-face interactions that bond them with others (Fay & Kline, 2011). Employee satisfaction is directly linked to the level of coworker engagement in socializing talk, as well as the degree of 'coworker liking', and the overall organizational commitment. 'Coworker liking' is positively related to organizational commitment and job satisfaction of employees. However, complaining talk is negatively related. Complaints can function as a buffering effect on negative feelings since employees are unified in their dissatisfaction. Managers should take advantage of the benefits that arise from allowing co-worker relationships to buffer negatively in order to improve strategy for positive communications and productivity.

Perceived Proximity

Perceived proximity and not physical proximity was the biggest factor affecting the connection between communication, identification, and relationship quality among geographically dispersed colleagues (O'Leary et al., 2014). Dispersed and collocated colleagues had similar insights about proximity, communication frequency, and identification. Regardless of distance, colleagues identified with each other based on shared personal values and commitment to work. While virtual teams function differently than collocated teams, new workplace contexts are constantly forming and evolving as rapidly as technology (O'Leary et al., 2014). Dispersed employees often work harder to stay connected as frequency, not distance plays a significant role

in the development of perceived proximity. However, even collocated colleagues regularly use technology-mediated communications, creating distance even for those working in the same offices.

Enterprise Social Media

Enterprise social media [ESM] is defined as any web-based platform where employees can communicate messages across the company, and incorporates a social element and thought or file sharing platform (Leonardi, Huysman, & Steinfield, 2013). Others in the organization can encourage fluid communications, making ESM a two-way platform instead of a direct channel, allowing interactions to happen from anyone, at any time, from any place, or any device. Enterprise social media platforms often have the look and feel of external social channels but include additional tools such as blogs, wikis, social tagging, and document sharing. There are three main ways to implement a social media platform for companies; this includes using public facing sites like Facebook, Google+ and/or Twitter, utilizing a private open source or proprietary software either hosted on local servers or the cloud, or in-house proprietary software developed by the company.

ESM affects inter-employee communications, knowledge sharing, management, employee relationship building, and social capital (Leonardi et al., 2013). Open communications accessible by many individuals can foster conversation and lead to innovative ideas for the company. There are benefits to personalization, and ESM can function as a social segue through informal communications. However, it can also limit coworker confidentiality and trust by causing conflict or reduce coworker cooperation. Clearly both positive and negative outcomes can come from the use of social media in companies. It must be noted that there has been limited research done in this area.

Literature Review: Computer-Mediated Communications in Modern Business

Computer-Mediated Communications [CMC], those interactions that occur in virtual environments where information and tasks are completed with the use of technology, have become more prevalent in business (Olaniran, 2008). CMC added a level of difficulty to communications that do not exist in face-to-face interactions (Altschuller & Benbunan-Fich, 2010). These two methods of communication primarily differ because of the lack of ability to read nonverbal clues, the focus on more task-oriented conversation, the perception of self, and challenges to interpersonal relationships. Determining which technology, channels, or media is most effective in these virtual team environments will help alleviate the stress and uncertainty that can arise with distance. CMC can be more effective than face-to-face interactions because it encourages team communication, information sharing, and encourages collaborative decision-making to achieve high-quality results (Berry, 2006). Computer-Mediated Communications enables coworkers to be equals since power dynamics, and social cues are less frequent in digital interactions.

Teams & Trust in Virtual Environments

CMC interactions can occur in collocated groups, but also in global virtual teams in which colleagues are geographically dispersed (Olaniran, 2008). Due to the proliferation of communication technologies, these dispersed teams face additional challenges including time zone and cultural differences, culture building, and social interactions. Individuals are now able to work in with colleagues both nationally and internationally where different cultural identities allow for more diverse ideas and teamwork.

Obstacles for virtual teams also include the temporary nature and lack of history or relationships among colleagues (Olaniran, 2008). Because of the distance and virtual

environment, social cues and context are often minimal, while task oriented "impersonal" communications are prevalent. Individual culture is increasingly overlooked as globalization becomes the norm. Underuse of personal culture can lead to employee uncertainty. Solutions to CMC challenges include establishing a robust mix of communication channels, defining clear team leadership that understands and fosters communication which allows sufficient time and attention for cultural education and appreciation.

Two areas that affect trust and performance in computer-mediated environments are self-disclosure and impression formulation (Altschuller & Benbunan-Fich, 2010). These interpersonal perceptions, which can be achieved through self-awareness and virtual co-presence, are defined as the way people view themselves and their coworkers in virtual interactions. Trust, resulting from people's values, attitudes, moods, and emotions, is the principal mediator of virtual co-presence and the decision-making process (Altschuller & Benbunan-Fich, 2010). It also works as a form of bonding among co-workers, creating a corporative environment. Virtual teams which bond, feel unified and more empowered to rely on coworker decisions to achieve excellence.

There are CMC tools that convey social cues more effectively than others. Video conferencing, due to its ability for immediate feedback, is considered the second best form of communication after face-to-face interactions (Hiltz, Johnson, & Turoff, 1986; Conolly, Jessup, & Valacich, 1990). Also, video allows for non-verbal cues, personal self-expression and clarity of language and ideas. When determining effectiveness for virtual interactions, both technology, and social factors should be considered (Olaniran, 1995, 2004; Yoo & Alavi, 2001).

Traditionally, fundamental communication competencies and skills required for professionals from an employer perspective included basic writing mechanics and effective documentation (Jones, 2011). Research indicates that additional CMC competencies are an increasingly important component of skill development, with effective use of email being the most essential. There is a current lack of importance placed on other computer-mediated skills in most professional training. Real-time text-based communications were found to be of less concern for employers when hiring. However, an increasing number of professional positions require more virtual forms of communication among employees.

The proliferation of communication technologies has expanded the workplace outside the traditional boundaries of corporate offices and created an entirely new set of challenges when it comes to internal communications. Much business is now conducted over email, intranet, video chat or other technologies as they arise. Corporations must continue to adapt their digital communication strategies and tactics to foster successful business environments that build commitment, trust, and motivation among employees. As such, it is of vital importance that we continue to develop virtual working environments, channels, and platforms for employees, employers, and company at large to be more efficient and effective in our continuing evolving digital world.

Observational Research: Collection & Analysis

Real-world observational research can provide the practical knowledge necessary to develop the most efficient and optimal internal communication strategies for geographically dispersed employees. Therefore, a complex observational research program was enacted during the a period of 30 days to gain further insights into the four broad areas affecting internal

communication among geographically dispersed employees. The research area included the following questions:

- *Research Area A:* On what channels or platforms are geographically dispersed employees currently receiving information, both vertically and horizontally?

- *Research Area B:* What forms of communications are successful in encouraging engagement from employees?

- *Research Area C:* Are communication channels and platforms influencing the motivation of geographically dispersed employees?

- *Research Area D:* Do various informal or formal communications have an effect on the personal satisfaction that geographically dispersed employees feel towards the company?

The following research was conducted with the purpose of presenting final recommendations within the various areas. An assessment was done of the communication channels currently being used by a national B2B firm with 12 offices and dozens of telecommuters. Analytics, such as open & click through rates for emails communications were pulled from the corporate email distribution platform. For the past month, the B2B employee's engagement with corporate run internal communications and the interaction with the informal communications channels was also observed.

Additionally, an approximately one-hour virtual assessment was conducted of four individuals who regularly work from home anywhere from 1-5 days a week. During these observations, participants demonstrated their use of their two-way vertical and horizontal platforms such as intranet and chat systems—when available. During these observations, participants partook in informal discussions about their frequency and reaction habits and feelings towards motivation, engagement, and coworker relationships.

Findings

Collectively, the results of this observational and informal investigation informed each area of research areas outlined above. The results were as follows:

- Research Area A:
  - The most popular channels currently in use for employee engagement include Email, Instant Messaging, Text Messaging, Intranet Communications (Bulletins, Forums, File Sharing), Telephone Conversations, and Video Conferencing.
  - The average open rate of corporate emails was 59.51%, which means on average approximately 40% of the company is not receiving the information intended for them. *(Appendices 2.1)*
  - Only 50% of the B2B Company had accounts on the Corporate Internet. Observations demonstrated that approximately 50% of those people with accounts use the intranet. Those that use it utilize it as a document sharing software only.
  - A locally hosted drive functions as the main file sharing system for the main office. However, this is not readily accessible to those who are geographically dispersed, and therefore, communications and file sharing can be challenging and most often occur through email.
  - The B2B Company uses an IM system, Google Hangouts, for informal chatting. While they have a paid account, there is no requirement for use from employees. There has been no education about how to use or connect with colleagues, and the adoption is relatively love. Approximately 40% of employees are available in the chat system at this time.
- Research Area B:

- o Teleworker participants responded that formal communications from a corporate entity caused action approximately 10-20% of the time. Engagement depended on how applicable the request was in relation to their individual needs.

- o Employee content filtering was deployed by the majority of teleworker participants. They most often would review a subject line and skim the email to decide if it was relevant or required further attention.

- o From observations, this was also true with the internal emails sent in the B2B Company. For those emails calling for action, the click-through rate was 20.9%, which was consistent with the observational findings. *(Appendices 2.1)*

- Research Area C:

  - o Approximately, 75% of the observational subjects said that vertical communications do motivate them in their work. The 25% that said vertical communications do not motivate them claimed that they distracted them from daily work and created more stress and anxiety.

  - o The 25% that were not motivated by vertical communications were a high-intensity telecommuter who did not have a large corporate entity driving a robust communication plan.

  - o Approximately, 75% of observational subjects cited that horizontal communications also motivate them to complete work. This was mainly due to the ability to relieve stress, to complain, or laugh during the workday. The 25% of participants that said horizontal communications with colleagues did not motivate them claimed that it was because they were a distraction and unnecessary for daily tasks.

- The 25% that were not motivated by horizontal communications were also full-time telecommuters. This could indicate that high-intensity teleworkers are more likely not to engage in horizontal or informal workplace communications, especially if the tools are not in place to encourage said communications.

- Research Area D:

  - Approximately, 75% of the people observed said they were satisfied with their company's communication channels and platforms. These participants had successful email, instant messaging, Intranets and other formal communication channels in place.

  - It is worth noting that these highly satisfied individuals also had means to express dissatisfaction with the company through formal channels. Some companies deployed a person dedicated to listening to employee complaints or problems anonymously while other had more traditional structures of HR complaint systems.

  - The most dissatisfied employees lacked a robust formal method of communicating with colleagues and/or a way to share complaints with the company.

Implications

Data demonstrated that a large number of employees did not regularly open email communications. Therefore, information that the business desired employees to have was not being consumed by the target audience. This low consumption rate could be due to feelings of being overwhelmed by the amounts of communications being distributed from a corporate entity

or to a lack of quality communications. Employees appreciate feeling informed; however, they also like to have control over their information consumption.

Motivation was affected through both vertical and horizontal communications for those telecommuting, although it varied based on the size of the company. Larger companies, with more intricate communication channels, were more efficient at promoting motivation through formal communications; while smaller companies were more efficient at motivating employees through informal communications. Horizontal communications were the biggest influence on individual motivation. Participants expressed a great desire to relieve stress and take breaks from daily work through informal discussions with colleagues. Companies that had good instant messaging software had the highest success rates in this area.

Communications most often motivated employees to engagement when they felt a personal or professional connection to the information. Departmental communications were more successful in grabbing the attention of individuals as they were more likely to feel like it would apply to them. Informal communication tools, such as IM software, connected colleagues successfully by creating valuable interactions that allowed venting, bonding, and humor. Any platform that facilitated actionable dialogue between employees consequently made their job more fulfilling, easier and more pleasant while meanwhile increasing their job satisfaction and motivation.

Job dissatisfaction was observed to be high within companies that did not have two-way communication channels or complaint capabilities; while job satisfaction appeared greater when those things were present. The maximum amount of job satisfaction was demonstrated by employees who had several resources for two-way communications. The teleworking participant who expressed the greatest satisfaction with their job worked for a company that went so far as

to have other employees dedicated to listening to complaints anonymously. The existence of

these complaint tools is enough to give employees peace of mind that the company respected

their opinions as individuals.

<p align="center">**Applications, Recommendations, and Conclusions**</p>

At times, communication professionals must act as a psychologist to determine the best

strategies for all participants. They must navigate the complex vertical (employee to the

manager) and horizontal (employee to employee) relationships to meet the needs of not only the

company but also the individuals. A successful communications strategy should be comprised of

elements that encourage engagement and motivation for the purpose of increasing job

satisfaction for everyone.

Engagement

SMART Recommendation: Understand employee communication needs during a development

and research stage to deploy platforms that engage them in two-way communications with clear paths to

documentation, as well as provide them channels to voice complaints. Annual reviews of complaints and

adoption by employees will help measure the success of the program.

The best way to increase engagement is to have a strategy that takes into consideration

the needs of workers and not just the needs of the company and to understand those needs,

surveys, and internal research are helpful tools. It is important to put platforms in place that

allow employees to communicate with each other, such as mobile apps, instant messaging,

forums, or intranets. Ultimately, platforms that encourage two-way communication, provide

clear paths human resources and business documentation, and provide a clear channel for voicing

dissatisfaction promote engagement both vertically and horizontally.

Providing them a space to be engaged is the first step in a successful program. It is

critical that employees be given clear access to all the human resources, business, and other

information that they need to be successful. As research demonstrated, cohesive human resource and internal communications drive success (Tonga, 2014). Therefore, employees must have a clear path to information to be able to engage with the material. This engagement is best achieved when they are guided and not forced toward the information. Providing employees with digestible information, internal/external links, catchy subject lines, images, and video are some examples of the best practices that should be deployed when developing content. Successful strategies will present information in a way that allows employees to engage and continue engaging as much as they desire.

Motivation

SMART Recommendation: With the use of a comprehensive communication strategy, companies should deploy an instant messaging platform and a social media inspired network for employees that utilizes a gamification rewards system to increase motivation. Employee attitudes and output should be monitored through regular surveys of individual and teams.

Employee motivation can be influenced through strategic communications. First, it is important to provide employees with an instant messaging platform that allows them to have both vertical and horizontal communications that are formal or informal in nature. Instant messaging allows geographically dispersed individuals to form the connections with colleagues that are crucial in coworker relationship building. Instant messaging also allows individuals to release stress, increase knowledge sharing and productivity, and injecting humor into the workplace. All of these elements play a role in the motivation an employee feels on a daily basis. When communications increase motivation a pattern emerges; without stress or confusion, employees are more motivated to be productive, and when employees are more productive, they feel more motivated by their work.

Social media has become increasingly popular, and companies can leverage that existing knowledge and familiarity to increase internal corporate motivation. Enterprise social media is the perfect platform to provide them with the tools they need, such as personal profiles, forums, recognition, and file sharing, to connect with colleagues regardless of distance. This platform also allows for the successful integration of gamification, which uses techniques borrowed from games such as levels, prizes, quizzes, and badges to encourage and motivate employees (Moise, 2013). Allowing individuals to receive praise from management, engage with content, receive prizes or recognition, or demonstrate knowledge will help drive individual motivation to engage with the corporate material.

Job Satisfaction

SMART Recommendation for Satisfaction: Strategically deliver messages through personal channels and enacting a program that allows employees to feel valued and trusted. Follow-up research can measure satisfaction through increased employee attitude and retention rates.

Employee job satisfaction is affected by various elements within the communication strategy. Companies should focus on incorporating individual needs into the strategy to reach the optimal level of satisfaction with employees. Only by appropriately addressing those needs can companies let individuals know that they are both trusted and valued. Effective employee commitment can be achieved if a person feels secure and confident in their position and trusts that they are both valued and trusted (Mazzei, 2014). Once an employee feels valued and trusted by a company they will have increased job satisfaction.

Another method of building job satisfaction is establishing a personal connection between employees and the company. Communications that focus on building personal relationships help establish a connection not only with employees but with the business as a whole. These connections are especially important for telecommuters who face greater

challenges being physically removed from face-to-face interactions (Fay & Kline, 2011). When

deemed applicable, information disseminated to employees should be delivered by tangible

stakeholders, not a faceless corporate entity. Delivering messages through personal channels,

such as a department head, which employees are more likely to have formed a connection with,

employees will be more likely to engage during content filtering. Increasing information

consumption and adoption of communications will ultimately build the connection employees

have to the company on a personal level and, therefore, make them feel more connected to the

larger organizational mission.

Conclusion

In the changing technological landscape, the computer-mediated communication

challenges that faced geographically dispersed employees have expanded to include all

stakeholders within a company. Employees who work in physical offices have the personal

relationships, but often interact with geographically dispersed colleagues on a daily basis through

technology. Teleworker face more challenges in forming personal connections with others, yet

they have other areas, such as work-life balance, that counteract the negativity that can arise

from long-distance working relationships.

It is no longer just teleworkers who must be addressed on CMC channels but all

employees, regardless of location. Driving engagement, motivation, job satisfaction among

geographically dispersed employees requires the same attention to detail that would be required

if there were one central location because of the integrated use of technology into businesses.

Every audience has their challenges, but communication professionals must act as a psychologist

and discover the needs of each segment within their own company to provide them with the tools

required to have successful internal communications.

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Appendices

Appendices 1: Newsletter Artifact

Your monthly guide to the in and out of BBI's candy and snack business!

BBI
BURDETTE BECKMANN INC.

Wrapper Report | Monthly News & Updates

The quarter is coming to a close and the holidays are here! BBI had a successful 2015! We've experienced client consolidation, RFP wins and losses, business purchases and expansions. Mid-year might have proved challenging, but are closing out with a significant win within the vending channel. Read the press release here.

BBI has also been instrumental in the success with all our charity partnerships and fundraisers. We've broken our records for each internally run initiatives and provided the communities in which we live and work some of the blessings that BBI has experienced.

In this month's Wrapper we've got some great new team members joining the family, as well as some new clients, and products to add to our portfolio. There are some upcoming business, development and charity events which we are excited to share with you—and don't forget to fill out your monthly survey for a chance to win!

As always, we want to remind and encourage you to like, share and post work photos to our social media sites. We're excited to see what you all are up too!

Happy Holidays!

-Robert, Jack & Pat

[Visit our Intranet]

This area allows the team to share or direct people to key areas of the newsletter. The Social Media and Intranet are linked for ease.

UPCOMING EVENTS

December Events Include:

12.08 | Hudson Show, Las Vegas, NV
12.12 | Hollywood's Annual Christmas Party
12.13 | North Carolina's Annual Christmas Party
12.16 | ECRM Candy Planning Show, Miami, FL
12.24 | Christmas Eve | All Offices Closed
12.25 | Christmas Day| All Offices Closed
12.31 | New Year's Eve | All Offices Closed

Click here to see future events

Employees are given the most time sensitives dates. They are then able to access more information on the Intranet Calendar

BUSINESS UPDATES

November was a busy month at BBI!

Check out the New Employee Profiles on the Corporate Intranet:

- Michael Kelley, Senior Account Executive
- Susan Westwood, Data Analysis
- Alice Roseburg, Customer Service Rep

Check out the New Clients Profiles on the Corporate Intranet:

- Brown & Haley
- Better'N Peanut Butter
- Lovely Candies

New Employees, Clients and Products need to be shared with Employees, but this format allows them to quickly digest the information and then complete more research on their own for those that are more applicable to their job.

BROWN & HALEY
100 YEARS

Lovely CANDY CO.   Better'n Peanut Butter

TWININGS MANGO & STRAWBERRY   Welch's Fruit Snacks   5-HOUR ENERGY DECAF

Teaser Images, visuals are an important part of engagement. Whenever possible, you will see corporate photos being used throughout the newsletter. These should be refreshed every month.

Check out the New Products BBI is offering:

- Twinning Mango Strawberry Ice Tea
- PIM Tropical Smoothie Fruit Snacks
- 5 Hour Energy Decaf
- Lindt Truffle Sample Pack for Valentines

Appendices 1: Newsletter Artifact Cont'd

KEY WIN

CLUB DRUG MASS |

- Alex Previdi was joined by VP of Sales for *G.G. Farms*, Dan Camichal for a cooking demonstration for the Costco executive team in Vancouver. The pair made a variety of items using the Roasted Red Pepper sauce. They managed to secure 3 new items for Costco-Canada, to be launched in 2016.

SPECIAL MARKETS |

- Thanks to Alan Hitchcock hard work, SkinnyPop has been secured for a 2016 launch in *Michaels, Office Max,* and *Dick Sports*.
- BBI Value team members, Glen Ranftle and Laurie Gauthier, helped secure thousands of distribution points at *Dollar Tree* for *Mondalez* and helped create incremental points of interruption in a section of their stores.

EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT

Nick Hudson is new to the Special Markets team. In two short months on the team he has opened multiple new accounts and established strong relationships with clients. "Nick has been a super star!" said his manager, Vinnie DiBetta. "We've been lucky to have him on our team. I'm constantly looking forward to the new ideas he brings to the table."

To nominate a team member submit their name, title, and reason to bbimedia@bbiteam.com.

DEPARTMENT SPOTLIGHT

Congratulations to our Customer Response Team for being recognized as department of the month. This team is located in Twinsburg, OH and is responsible for responding to client and customer crisis. A recent incident prompted 5 Hour Energy Director of Sales to say "The women in your CR Team were amazing during the recent order mishap. Thank them for their prompt and through response." Thank you Shawna Phillips, Megan Laboise, Alicia Trent, and Melinda Allen!

> "It's not how much we give but how much love we put into giving." — Mother Teresa

CHARITY UPDATES

Get Involved in Upcoming Volunteer Or Charity Events!

12.24 | Kent Soup Kitchen, Kent, WA
01.01 | New Year Health Run, Richmond, VA
01.09 | Flipany 5K Run, Miami, FL
01.19 | Martin Luther King 5K, Miami, FL
02.13 | Habitat Build, Charlotte, NC
02.13 | Run 4 Sweeties Corporate Run/Walk, Yorba, Linda, CA
03.29 | Habitat Build, Miami, FL

REMEMBER: BBI will reimburse you the fee for registering for these events. If you wish to submit an event please contact, Tania Rivera.

BBI Christmas Box Challenge

December 1st marked the end of BBI's Annual Christmas Box Challenge. We are proud to announce that this year we collected

1,572 TOYS

Congratulations to **Orlando** for collecting the most with 470 toys and all the individual winners of the Employee Social Media Challenge: **Nick Hudson, Sharon Rivera, Mariana Simonelli, and Jeff Greenwald**. You're participation on social media helped increase our followers by over 13%!

Donations will go/have gone to the following charities:

Hollywood, FL | Sheridan House
Orlando, FL | Baby DJ, Inc.
Indian Trail, NC | Turning Point Inc
Kent, WA | St. Jude Hospital
Appleton, WI | Toys for Tots
Richmond & Chesapeake, VA | Cares Shelter
Yorba Linda, CA | Crittenton Services
Twinsburg, OH | Toys for Tots
Richfield, MN | VEAP

Register Now

Appendices 1: Newsletter Artifact Cont'd

DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

This month we're offering several informational and developmental opportunities. Use the sign up button below to register:

- 12.08 | Webinar. Healthy Holidays: How to Stay Balanced during the Holidays
- 12.10 | 401K Infomation Review and 2016 Registration
- 12.17 | Webinar. "How to Reason with Unreasonable": Tacking Customer Service Challenges

Sign Up

Please take a moment to take our monthly employee survey. This month we would like to reflect on the internal initiatives of 2015. Remember that completing the survey earns your name into a drawing for a monthly $10 Starbucks gift card and into the yearly Grand Prize.

Need to find an HR Resource? Look no further.

- Health Benefit Information
- Financial Benefit Information
- Anonymous Complaint/Recommendation
- Ticket at Work Resource

INDUSTRY NEWS

Check out the biggest news in the industry from the past month. Come across a good article? Submit it to bbimedia@bbiteam.com to be featured in next months Wrapper Report.

Kellogg taps on-the-go breakfast and sweet & savory trends with 40 US lines

With shelf ready packaging on the rise, the ability to mark-up secondary packaging offline meets a growing need in today's grocery market

Mike and Ike and Hot Tamales support Warcraft movie with promotional candies

Ferrara Candy CEO: Black Forest gummies to seize on US organic candy surge

Burdette Beckmann Inc.| bbimedia@bbiteam.com| | www.bbiteam.com

STAY CONNECTED

Appendices 2.1: Data from Corporate Emails

TYPE/PURPOSE	Email	Sent	Opened	Open %	No Open	No Open %	Clicks	Clicks %	Requested Action?
HOLIDAY	Veterans Day	213	117	57.40%	87	42.60%	5	4.30%	NO
ANNOUNCEMENT	Bryan Shade Announcement	204	134	68.40%	62	31.60%	5	3.70%	NO
ANNOUNCEMENT	HR Internal Anncounment	201	120	62.2%	73	37.8%	4	3.3%	NO
ENGAGEMENT	Motivational Monday	211	118	58.1%	93	41.9%	0	0.0%	NO
HOLIDAY	Thanksgiving Message	201	114	58.5%	87	41.5%	4	3.5%	NO
NEWS	Newsletter: August	202	133	68.6%	69	31.4%	5	3.8%	NO
NEWS	Newsletter: September	202	135	69.6%	59	30.4%	15	11.1%	NO
NEWS	Newsletter: October	202	133	68.6%	69	31.4%	5	3.8%	NO
NEWS	Newsletter: November	203	130	68.6%	65	31.4%	12	9.2%	NO
ENGAGEMENT	Motivational Monday 11/9	213	119	58.3%	94	41.7%	0	0.0%	NO
ENGAGEMENT	Motivational Monday 11/2	214	124	60.5%	90	39.5%	0	0.0%	NO
ANNOUNCEMENT	Jack Anderson Anniversary Email	203	139	70.9%	64	29.1%	4	2.9%	NO
CHARITY	HOK Video Announcement	231	123	55.70%	98	44.30%	29	23.60%	YES
HOLIDAY	Breast Cancer Logo	203	119	61%	76	39.00%	58	48.70%	YES
CHARITY	Goliath Gauntlet	202	129	66.50%	65	33.50%	29	22.50%	YES
CHARITY	Christmas Box Challenge	204	115	58.7%	81	41.3%	15	13.0%	YES
CHARITY	Reminder: Christmas Box Challenge	201	93	47.7%	108	52.3%	3	3.2%	YES
CHARITY	Winner: Christmas Box Challenge	203	118	58.1%	85	41.9%	11	8.5%	YES
ENGAGEMENT	Brand Ambassador (Social Media)	202	142	72.8%	60	27.2%	38	26.8%	YES

Appendices 2.2: Intranet Screen Shot from Individual who Expressed High Levels of Job Satisfaction
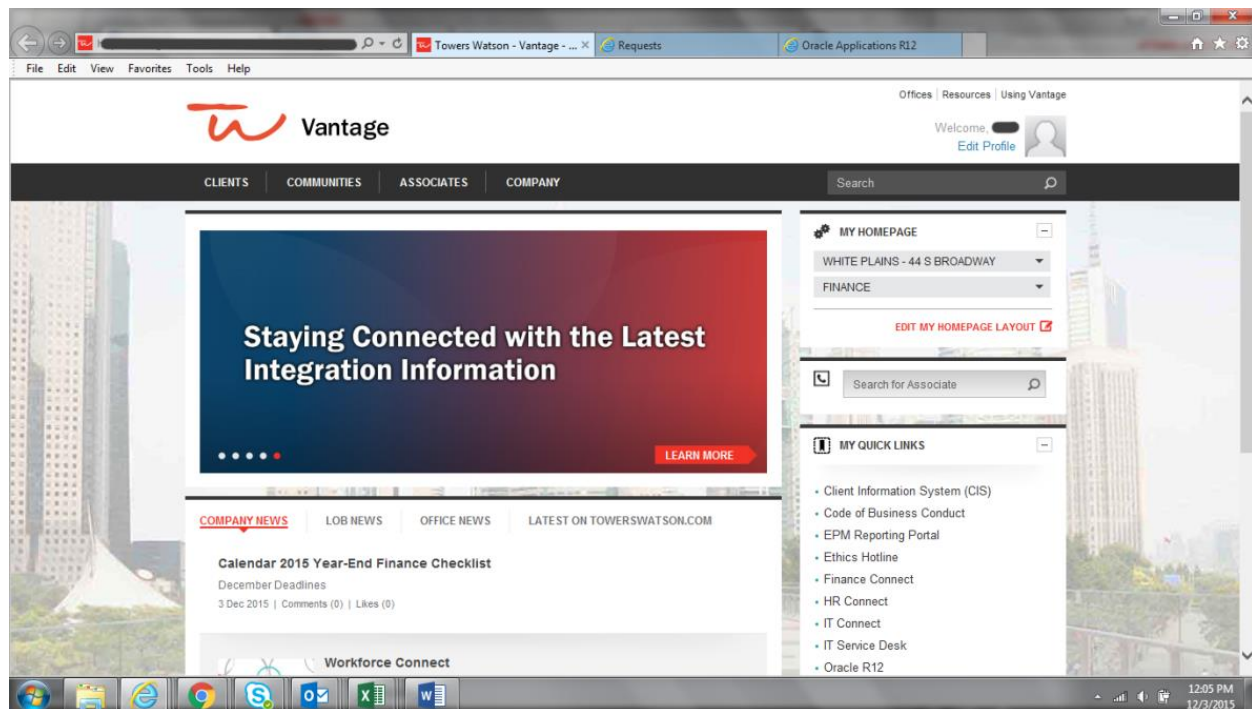
Appendices 2.3: HR notice about PTO at year end from Individual who Expressed High Levels of Job Satisfaction
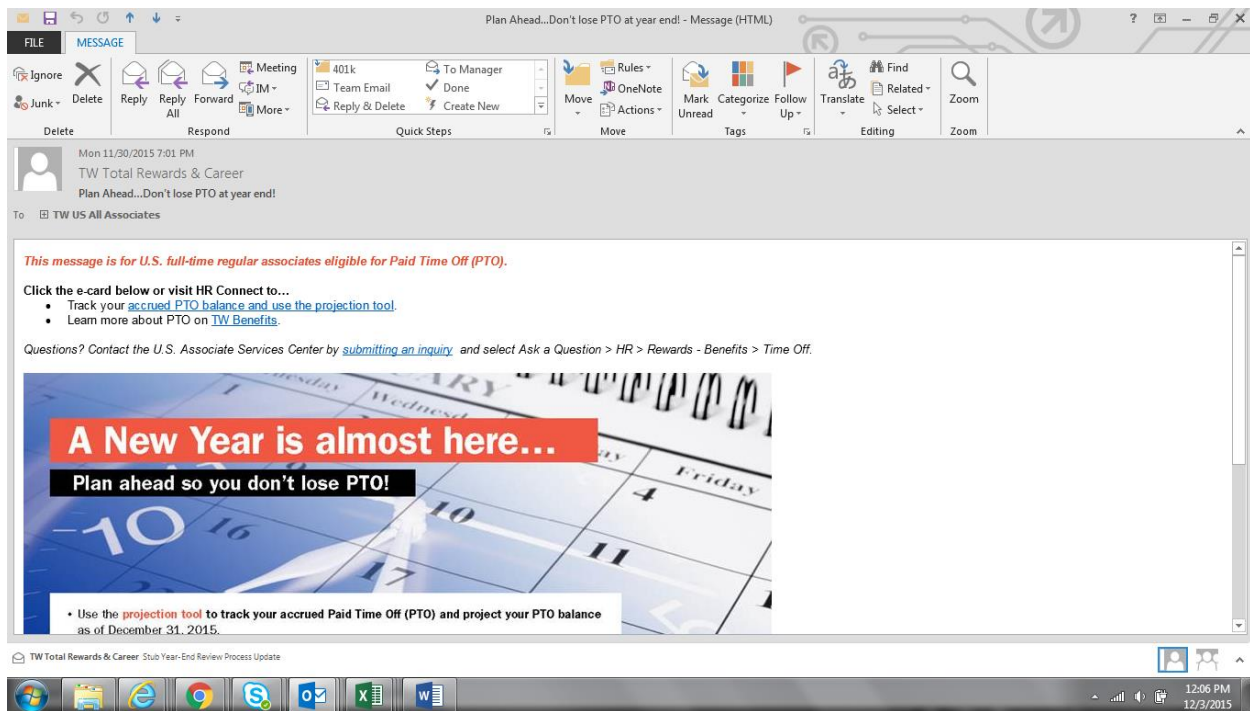
Appendices 3: Annotated Bibliography

Phenomena: Technology and Communication in a Geographically Diverse Workplace

Fay, M. J., & Kline, S. L. (2011). Coworker relationships and informal communication in high-intensity telecommuting. Journal of Applied Communication Research, 39(2), 144-163. doi:10.1080/00909882.2011.556136

> This article investigates the influence that informal communication practices have on high-intensity telecommuters' job satisfaction and organizational commitment. The relationship between coworkers was explored through an analysis of informal communication with peers in both positive and negative contexts. Complaining was looked at as an influencing factor of satisfaction and commitment. The effect of coworker liking on these areas as a means of understanding how each area influences the others. Recommendations for managers are made, including the use of colleague relationship to buffer negativity.

> Original research was conducted including completed surveys from 112 high-intensity telecommuters. Published in the Journal of Applied Communication Research, by two professors of Communications, authenticates this paper as credible. This paper will be useful in understanding how informal communications occur most effectively among high-intensity telecommuters and how it influences satisfaction. It establishes an understanding of what strategies may be enacted or recommended to optimize these informal communications to the benefit of a company.

Leonardi, P. M., Huysman, M., & Steinfield, C. (2013). Enterprise social media: definition, history, and prospects for the study of social technologies in organizations. Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 19(1), 1-19. doi:10.1111/jcc4.12029

The purpose of this article is to analyze communication effects and activities of enterprise social media. For the purpose of this article, Enterprise Social Media is defined as any web-based platforms where employees can communicate messages across the company, which incorporates a social element and thought or file sharing platforms. Identifying that internal communications interactions on social media have received little research, the paper seeks to understand the relationship between a company and its employees in this medium. This paper concludes that there can be both positive and adverse effects of enterprise social media. This tool affects the company's efforts with inter-employee communications, knowledge sharing, and management; in addition to employee relationship building and social capital.

This paper was published in a peer-reviewed journal, the Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, and, therefore, is considered a credible source. The authors are professors working in the fields of Communication, Organizational Management, and Information Technology. Intensive secondary research, analysis, and idea categorization were pursued to develop the paper. The paper's audience is scholars who are studying the Enterprise Social Media for insights into the effective organizational process. This document discusses an important and under-researched aspect of internal communications and establishes another tool for analyzing the effectiveness and influencing factors of technological in the workplace. It will be useful in understanding technology shifts in the workplace, what kind of impact social media has on corporations and helping build strategic recommendations about how to handle these changes.

Olaniran, B. (2008). Culture, Communication Challenges, and Social Impacts in Virtual Workspaces. Conference Papers -- International Communication Association, 1-25.

This document examines the corporate culture, communication challenges and social impacts created in virtual workspaces, specifically in global virtual teams. Identifying that not much research has been conducted on this topic, this paper identifies the social and cross-cultural challenges that global teams face and present suggested solutions and areas for further studies. The focus of the research is less on how to use global technologies and more about the process and adoption of effectively working and communicating using these technologies. The paper revolves closely around the Hofstede dimension of culture variability, specifically the ideas of individualistic collectivism and power distance.

No Primary research was conducted for this document; however an in-depth secondary research review was included. This article was published as a Conference paper by the International Communication Association, which main mission to advance the study of human communication and is dedicated to promoting academic research. While this document has not been published in a journal, it has been approved by an international

association dedicated to high-quality scholarly publications and thus considered a reliable source. This paper's audience is the Conference participants who are Communication Professionals, and its purpose is to provide them with insights into the under-researched field of digital workspaces. This paper is useful in understanding how communication and culture are affected by virtual workspaces, technology, and computer-mediated communications. It helps identify the challenges and areas to focus on during strategic planning.

O'Leary, M. B., Wilson, J. M., & Metiu, A. (2014). Beyond Being There: The Symbolic Role of Communication and Identification in the Emergence of Perceived Proximity in Geographically Dispersed Work. MIS Quarterly, 38(4), 1219-1243.

This article develops, compares, and validates a new concept called perceived proximity. The relationship quality of geographically dispersed colleagues was analyzed using qualitative data and an international quantitative survey. They found that perceived and not physical proximity was the biggest factor affecting relationship quality. The research indicated that effective communications were facilitated by people's perception of proximity, and strong bonds could be formed despite the distance. This paper concludes that communication and identification in the workplace is a function of perceived proximity. Technology has allowed for people to express symbolic closeness, endorse a sense of shared context and enhance working relationships

The authors are all business professors who study or earned degrees at prestigious universities such as Georgetown, Warton, MIT, and Carnegie Mellon. This article was published in a peer-reviewed journal, MIS Quarterly and includes extensive appendices demonstrating their scientific research methods. The purpose of this article is to deepen the idea of perceived proximity and to analyze its symbolic nature. The audiences are Marketing Communication academics and professionals who are seeking to understand the symbolic function of communications. Due to the recent publication date of the article, it will be useful in analyzing and understanding what role technology is currently playing in business communication among employees that are geographically dispersed. It helps identify challenges that companies will face in these situations.

Marketing Communication Concept: Internal Communications
Karanges, E., Beatson, A., Johnston, K., & Lings, I. (2014). Optimizing employee engagement with internal communication: A social exchange perspective. Journal of Business Market Management, 7(2), 329-353.

This article seeks to understand the way in which internal communications and corporate engagement have been influenced by social factors, specifically perceived support and identification. Self-administered surveys of non-executive employees were used to determine that the management should focus on building these two areas to optimize levels of engagement. With the purpose of building a sense of belonging and pride, organizational leaders can boost engagement by helping employees feel connected to the larger group. Internal communications should also help employees feel connected to and link their values to the corporate values and goals. Additionally, supervisors should boost

perceived support by demonstrating to employees that they value their work and well-being.

This article was published in the peer-reviewed, Journal of Business Market Management. Documentation in the appendices demonstrating the linear and mediated regression analysis conducted on survey results help the validity of this article. The audiences for this paper are academics who are seeking to understate internal communications engagement and professionals who are looking for practical implications. The purpose of this article is tp understand if social factors play a role in the relationship between internal communications and engagement. The information contained within this article will assist in building an understanding of the effects internal communications has on corporations. Additionally, it will provide ideas and inspiration for strategic and tactical internal communication recommendations.

Mazzei, A. (2014). Internal communication for employee enablement. Corporate
      Communications: An International Journal, 19(1), 82-95. doi:10.1108/ccij-08-2012-0060

This purpose of this article is to determine if, and how, strategic employee communications can promote or enhance the company's reputation. Research for this article was conducted through interviews and focus groups with internal communication managers in America and Italy. Categorized into four stages: exploration, interpretation, sharing and acting; this article provides empirical evidence that internal communications are a strategic factor for corporations. Results indicate that internal communications strategies should focus on enabling and facilitating effective employee communications. It discusses the link between and the need for cohesiveness between internal communication and human resources systems.

The author is a Professor of Corporate Communications and has published numerous articles dealing with similar subject matters. Published in the peer-reviewed, Corporate Communications: An International Journal; this article is both reliable and essential to understanding internal communications. Audiences for this article include professionals who are seeking to create effective strategies and researchers who are looking to expand upon these ideas. The research will help build an understanding of the role that internal communication plays in corporations and what ultimate effect it has on corporate success. Additionally, it will guide the development and understanding of important elements to include in an employee communications strategy.

Mazzei, A. (2010). Promoting active communication behaviors through internal communication.
      Corporate Communications: An International, 15(3), 221-234.
      doi:10.1108/13563281011068096

This paper combines the theory of resources based companies, the theory of constructive communications, and the theory of publics to build a resource model for effective internal communications. This model is aimed at organizing resources to build knowledge and allegiance among employees. By deploying a qualitative interview process with internal communication managers, this paper's purpose is to validate the idea that intangible

resources, namely employee knowledge and attitude, contribute to the ultimate success or failure of a corporation.

The author of this article is well-known in the communications field and has published several articles. This particular article was published in the peer-reviewed, Corporate Communications: An International Journal. The findings will help define what internal communications means to a company, validate the need for a strategic approach and provide an argument that the modern function is to promote active communication behaviors throughout an organization. The audiences are academics seeking to understand the topic further and also corporation looking to build strategic internal communications since it does provide managerial suggestions. This article will help build an understanding of how knowledge and employee attitudes are affected by internal communication and the ways in which they ultimately contribute to brand loyalty and company success.

Sharma, N., & Kamalanabhan, T. (2012). Internal corporate communication and its impact on internal branding. Corporate Communications: An International Journal, 17(3), 300-322. doi:10.1108/13563281211253548

This paper's purpose is an exploratory review of internal corporate communications and branding literature, in addition to an analysis of interviews, to better understand the employee perceptions of internal brand communications practices. The researcher established a relationship between internal communications and corporate branding, which ultimately helped promote a sense of loyalty and commitment among employees, in addition to identification with the corporation. The research conducted highlighted several areas of necessary improvement including an increase in management's contribution to brand building, an increase in feedback ability, and an increased need for a cross-functional relationship between internal communications and human resources.

One of the authors has a Ph.D. in Organizational Psychology, and the other is in the process of completing a Ph.D. in Corporate Communications. Combined the duo have varied experience in both the academic and professional world. The article was published in peer-reviewed journal, Corporate Communications: An International Journal. The audience for this paper is international corporations seeking to improve their model for internal communications and academics seeking to understand the topic. This paper will support an understanding of how branding affects and is affected by internal communications and will help support the development of strategical recommendations.

Togna, G. (2014). Does internal communication to generate trust always increase commitment? Corporate Communications: An International Journal, 19(1), 64-81. doi:10.1108/ccij-07-2012-0046

This purpose of this article it to explain why increasing employee trust and commitment is essential to attaining optimal organizational value. Identifying internal communications as a method for building trust among employees, the paper seeks to understand that various effectiveness of internal communications at different levels in the

organization. It highlights the importance of a cohesive and customized human resources and internal communication strategy within companies. Furthermore, it focuses on the importance of increasing commitment to building honest, direct relationships between management and employees. The paper concludes that the most important determination is the ways in which to best invest in internal communications that build trust, which transforms into commitment and ultimately actions.

This article was deemed reliable enough to be published in the peer-reviewed Corporate Communications: An International Journal. The author is a Communications Specialist at the company where the case study was conducted and has been a guest lecturer at numerous academic institutions, in addition to having several additional published research articles. The research carried out for this article consisted of a survey at a technology company in Italy, where 1,580 employees (56.46% response rate) were asked to participate in a quantitative study. The audiences are internal communication management teams since it provides solutions for them, in addition to scholars. This paper will go a long way towards understanding how to best build employee brand loyalty through a strategic internal communications plan at various levels of the organization.

Academic Theory: Computer Mediated Communications Theory
Altschuller, S., & Benbunan-Fich, R. (2010). Trust, Performance, and the Communication Process in Ad Hoc Decision-Making Virtual Teams. Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 16(1), 27-47. doi:10.1111/j.1083-6101.2010.01529.x

This paper examines the communication variables that inform trust and performance quality in a virtual team decision-making process to determine which media is most effective in these environments. Virtual co-presence was determined to be a significant influence to the intra-team trust among colleagues and the overall performance quality. Research indicates that virtual teams must feel unified and to achieve excellence. Trust was determined to be the main mediator between virtual co-presence and the decision-making process. This understanding informs the design and adoption of communication channels for virtual decision-making teams with the goals of promoting trust and quality.

Both group and survey data were analyzed for this paper that was published in a respected academic journal by two professors of Business. These facts establish this paper as a credible source. For geographically diverse employees working in a virtual environment, it is important to understand what is needed to have effective internal communications. Computer-Mediated Communications add a level of difficulty to communications that do not exist in face-to-face interactions. However, the knowledge that trust plays such a big role in successful decision making will help inform the construction of channels and strategies to combat these challenges effectively.

Berry, G. (2006). Can computer-mediated, asynchronous communication improve, team processes and decision making?. Journal of Business Communication, 43(4), 344-366. doi:10.1177/0021943606292352

This paper seeks to explain why Computer-Mediated Asynchronous Communications [CMAC] can be more effective than face to face interactions. This article's purpose is to understand how time can affect communications and decision making. It also explains the shifted understanding of how we communicate in a digital landscape and its benefits. It claims that CMAC enables more equality and interactions among team members, increases time and distance flexibility in the workplace, and encourages more thought-provoking reflection by employees. Ultimately, these factors work towards enhancing the organizational communications, team collaboration and effective decision making of a corporation.

This paper uses a score of business communications and management literature to analyze this computer-mediated phenomenon and make ultimate determinations as to future research and recommendations. This article was written for the academics seeking to understand the topic further. This article was published in the peer-reviewed Journal of Business Communications by a professor who has also received his Ph.D. and focuses on environmental management. This paper will be useful in analyzing the Computer-Mediated Communications theory and its application in internal communication channels as well as informing strategic and tactical recommendations for effective computer-mediated communications.

Jones, C. G. (2011). Written and Computer-Mediated Accounting Communication Skills: An Employer Perspective. Business Communication Quarterly, 74(3), 247-271. doi:10.1177/1080569911413808

Using survey research and literature reviews, this article's purpose is to take a look at the fundamental competencies and skills required for professional accountants from an employer perspective. Communication skills, including basic writing mechanics and effective documentation, were established as the most important skill requirements. However, computer-mediated communication competencies were deemed an increasingly important component of skill development, with effective use of email being the most essential. The researcher was surprised to find the lack of importance placed on other computer-mediated skills.

The author is a professor of accounting and information system and focuses on professional communications. Additionally, the article was published in the peer-reviewed Business Communication Quarterly, establishing it as a credible source. Establishing effective communication strategies across geographically disperse employees is only useful if said employees are either selecting with or trained to have the necessary skills to utilize the tools. The audiences for this article are professionals, academics, and students seeking to understand what skills are required for success in the field of accounting. This article will help establish the skills employees need to have to deploy an efficient computer-mediated communications program. It will help drive the development of strategic goals for companies seeking to deliver the most efficient communications to build employee loyalty.