

Using Internal Communication to Move the Business Needle:

A Strategic Planning Best Practice

The power of employee communication is especially evident during strategic planning “season” inside organizations. It’s a time when communication goes far beyond “feel good” and gets to the core: driving performance.

Employee communications at its finest is about helping employees make critical connections between what they do and the business strategy so they can do their jobs even better. Business leaders want performance and productivity out of their strategies and people. Through effective employee communication about business strategy, communicators can help move the needle on both.

The facts:

- Keeping employees engaged during times of change correlates to on average a 26% higher productivity rate.
- Employee engagement is linked to sales growth and customer engagement, lower absenteeism and increased performance. In fact, highly engaged employees are three times as likely as their less-engaged peers to exceed performance expectations.
- Employee engagement rises when people experience a combination of effective and caring leadership, appealing development opportunities, interesting work, and fulfilling tangible and intangible rewards.



For more facts
and figures, download
*Fact Sheet: Your Business Case
for Internal Communications.*

CASE STUDY:

These facts and figures came to life recently for one company and reinforce best practices in internal communication to drive key business outcomes.

When leaders of the iconic Motel 6 brand (part of Accor North America) needed to evolve its strategic direction and how employees delivered its Brand promise, it was no small task: leadership wasn't aligned around the strategy and employee skepticism in leadership ran high from a less-than-stellar track record of communicating about strategy and changes in the past. ▼

We worked a process for strategic planning and communication that changed how leaders communicated with employees and how employees perceived two-way communication and trust in leadership. The result: Motel 6 experienced some of the best business results in its history and employee engagement scores jumped in just one year.

We focused on two key communication strategies:

- 1) Improve how leadership communicates its new strategic direction with employees, with emphasis on improving employee perceptions of two-way communication and trust in leadership; and
- 2) Introduce new standard operating procedures for more efficient, sustainable and audience-focused communications that could be used in the future.

To get there, we put several key ingredients to work, including:

- Establishing specific and measurable communication objectives upfront that tied to the business objectives
- Building total leadership alignment and commitment around the new strategic direction
- Improving communication capabilities of the executive team and the company's top leaders through message development, training and tools
- Increasing the communication capability of key "support" functions, such as HR, to reinforce key behaviors in their communications with leaders and employees
- Developing a system for employee listening and to engage employees across locations, levels and roles to shape the strategy communications and develop a unifying rally cry
- Developing a well-orchestrated "surround sound" communications campaign to reach leaders and employees in their respective languages
- Establishing a new repeatable, internal communication system with appropriate staffing, processes, funding, integrated messaging, standard operating procedures and vehicles geared to employees' needs and preferences

Results exceeded the communication objectives and showed that effective internal communication can boost business and improve an organization's culture, perceptions and behaviors:

- Accor's U.S. Economy Hotels segment increased in 2011 by nearly 6% both in Q2 and Q3 (the 6-month period following the strategy roll out) and Motel 6 expanded its network of hotels by 65. Accor credited Motel 6's gain as "due to the transformation of its business model."
- During the summer of 2011 Motel 6 beat its peers – achieving the brand's best performance ever – and improved guest satisfaction, surpassed its goals for reducing guest complaints, and achieved the best quality performance in 20+ years.
- In just one year, employee engagement scores increased by double-digit percentage points in the areas of leadership effectiveness, understanding reasons behind business changes, leadership communications and recognition.

Motel 6 is keeping its lights on – and making them shine even brighter – thanks to engaging and connecting leaders and employees to its strategy.

How are you building your case to have a seat at the strategic planning table, and how can you use employee communication to achieve your organization's business outcomes?

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