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COMMUNICATING ACROSS BORDERS

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A basic guide to help companies deliver effective communications to all employees, no matter where they're based.

WHAT'S THE CHALLENGE?

Why don't traditional communications techniques work?

Global companies, as a rule, tend to adopt one business language to help the company run on a day-to-day basis. This language is used for cross-border collaboration, corporate communications, global intranet, and internet sites. In the majority of large companies, this dominant language is English.

However, simply having one language doesn't address the massive issues faced by corporate communicators when trying to overcome spatial, geographical, temporal, and cultural borders.

01 UNDERSTANDING

How can you be sure that messages are being understood by your whole workforce? While your day-to-day contacts may be proficient in English - what about the people who report to them? And the people who report to them?

02 INCLUSIVITY

Is your communication creating a divide in your company? Is knowledge split between the "haves" and "have-nots"? What about those employees without access to computers or phones? How do they find out about the company news?

03 ENGAGEMENT

Are language or cultural differences leading to a decrease in engagement and collaboration? How can you ensure feedback mechanisms that account for the different ways of working in your company?

SOLVING THE PROBLEM

5 simple steps to effectively communicate across borders

WATCH YOUR LANGUAGE

Does that sentence really work outside your office?



HAVE A GLOBAL PLAN

Getting your own house in order first



TRAINING & TOOLS

Has your team got everything they need to deliver?



WORK WITH LOCAL TEAMS

Use the right resources to get the right results



TARGET YOUR CHANNELS

What works in one country may not in another



1. HAVE A GLOBAL PLAN

Getting your own house in order first

01

ONE CLEAR ROUTE

Having a global corporate communications plan that is shared and agreed on by your global communications team will make it clear to everyone what their priorities should be. The team will then be aligned on what and how is to be done through the year.

02

ALIGNED MISSION AND VALUES

Your communications team should all know what the company's mission and values are. After all, if they are to communicate this vision to the wider company, they need to understand it themselves. Clear mission and vision statements that are easily accessible will keep everyone on track and working towards the same goal.

03

REGULAR EVALUATION

Plans aren't written to sit in a drawer somewhere. You and your team should regularly evaluate your communications plan and amend it where required.

2. WORK WITH LOCAL TEAMS

Use the right resources to get the right results

01

FINDING AMBASSADORS

Employees in global affiliates can feel a little removed from the corporate headquarters. This may not be helped by different time zones or languages. Find an ambassador to act as your communications conduit between local employees and the global headquarters

02

USING LOCAL EXPERTISE

No matter your communications experience, you can't be expected to know everything about everywhere. Use the local expertise available to you to find out how different teams process and receive information. Do they like a lot of detail? Are they just interested in the highlights? Are they high context or low context cultures?

03

SHARING IDEAS

Crowd-sourcing ideas and sharing best (and worst) practices is one of the joys of working in a team. Those communicators working as one-man-bands don't have peers to learn and share with - help them become part of a community. Working internationally means you have a diverse pool of knowledge available - take advantage of it!

3. TARGET YOUR CHANNELS

What works in one country may not in another

01

WHAT'S AVAILABLE?

If you haven't already carried out a communications audit within your team (and extended teams), it's time to get cracking. You can't properly use your channels if you don't know what's available to you. What else is there besides the usual suspects?

02

WHAT WORKS?

Once you know what channels are available to you, it's time to find out which ones work best for your various audiences. Use your ambassadors to give you insight on effective ways to communicate in their office. Is it reliant on technology? Do the teams prefer face to face? Are they more traditional? Formal? Informal?

03

WHAT ABOUT EVERYONE ELSE?

Unwired employees are often forgotten or deliberately left out of corporate communications. They're hard to reach and it can be difficult to influence them. But they're important. Think about how other information (such as pay or safety information) reaches these employees - what new channels can you take advantage of?

4. TRAINING & TOOLS

Has your team got everything they need to deliver?

01

DEVELOPING SKILLS

Develop your partners in the skills you may take for granted. Don't assume from someone's job title that they've been trained in communications best practice and techniques. These skills need to be learnt, honed, and added to on a regular basis.

02

PROVIDING TOOLS

Loose guidelines - not rules - and customisable templates will help your communicators and ambassadors create and deliver your messages with minimal guidance. Give a little more flexibility and autonomy to your teams and you'll be surprised at how much more enthusiastic they are about communicating your messages.

03

MAKING COMMUNICATIONS EASIER

One of the largest comms challenges global companies face is that they are burdened by process. Rounds of amendments, approvals from six people, confirmation from head office. Have a look at the route a message takes from start to finish - how can this be streamlined?

5. WATCH YOUR LANGUAGE

Does that sentence really work outside your office?

01

JARGON

Never assume knowledge. If you work in corporate headquarters, chances are, you've been privy to certain information for a while. You may even have an acronym already memorised. When communicating globally, keep it simple, and explain any jargony words or phrases.

02

SLANG & COLLOQUIALISMS

Every culture has their own slang and colloquialisms. The problem is, they rarely translate across borders. Think twice about referring to the new benefits package as "the cat's pajamas" or the new accounts programme as "easy peasy". One, your tone may be wrong and two, people may not understand what you're talking about!

03

HUMOUR

It's great to be able to use humour as part of your corporate communications but it doesn't always work. Anecdotes, metaphors, and word play can all be mistranslated and may cause offense. However, use humour with skill and it may well help you achieve your objectives.

THREE THINGS TO REMEMBER

If you take away anything from this presentation...



KNOW WHERE YOU'RE GOING

If you and your team don't know what you're communicating, you can't expect anyone else in the organisation to know either. Have a plan.



KNOW WHAT TOOLS YOU HAVE AT YOUR DISPOSAL

Make sure you're clear on what tools, channels (formal and informal), and resource you have to help you deliver on your communications objectives.



DON'T DO IT ON YOUR OWN

Whether it's what you're saying, who you're saying it to, or how you're saying it - don't assume you have all the answers. Make the most of your team's experiences and use them to inform your communications.

DON'T BE A STRANGER

Get in touch!



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