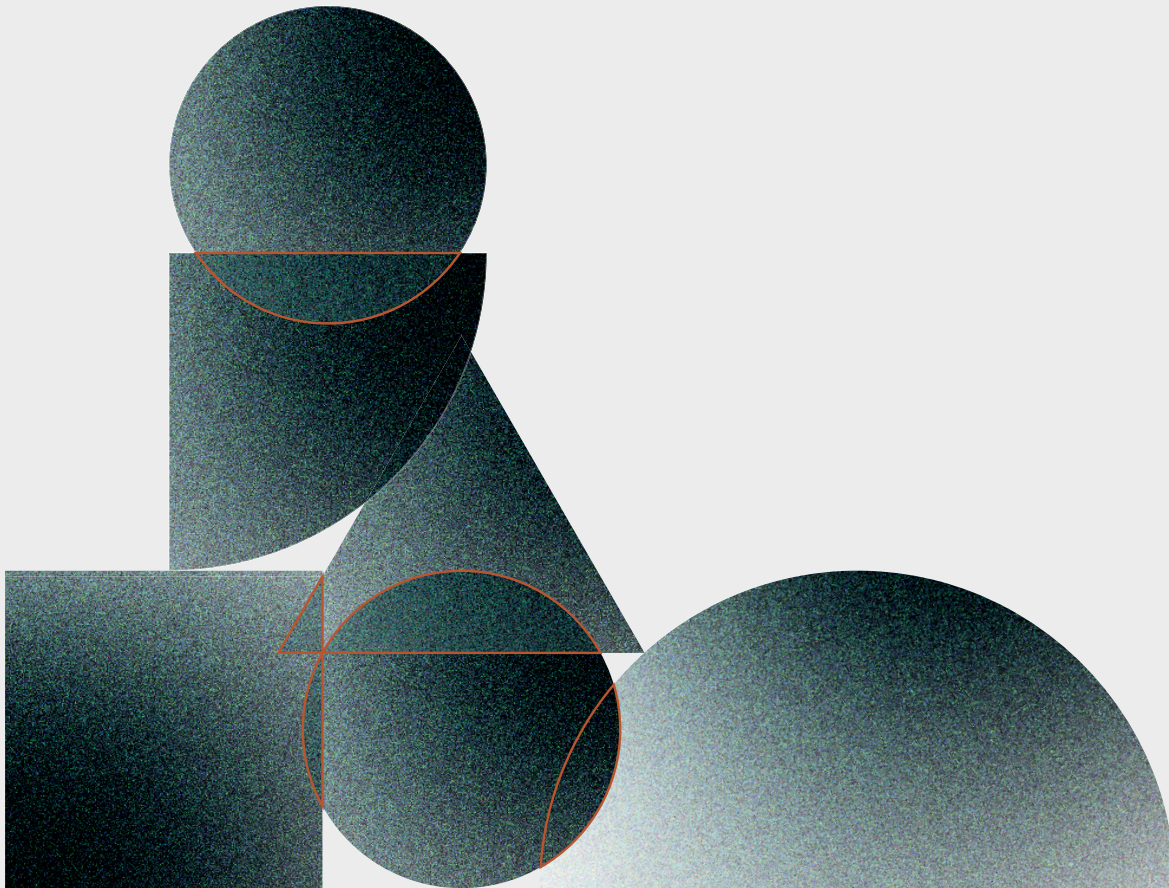


# Effective Internal Communications

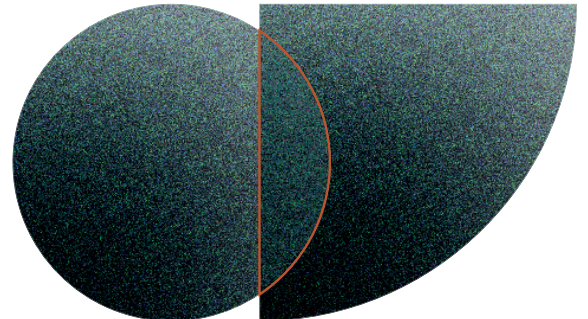


Effective communication is one of the vital cornerstones of any business. An essential but often neglected area of this is internal communications. In order to create a strong organisation, with a unified workforce engaged in a common purpose, you must establish a quality, two-way internal communications plan.

A comprehensive and effective internal communications plan has many benefits, for both employees and for the organisation as a whole. Team members are more likely to be enthused and proactive if they can see and understand how their work fits within the wider aims and mission of the organisation. When people feel that their contribution is valued and they are part of a genuine dialogue within the organisation they are likely to be more engaged. This understanding and sense of value and purpose contributes to feelings of well-being and happiness, which in turn can drive greater productivity, ultimately having a positive impact on your business bottom line. In this guide, we will explore how to create and establish an effective internal communications plan, including:

1. **The importance of research**
2. **Identifying objectives and stakeholders**
3. **Understanding which tools are available**
4. **Creating consistency**
5. **Making communications inclusive**

## 6. **Creating alignment between external and internal communications**





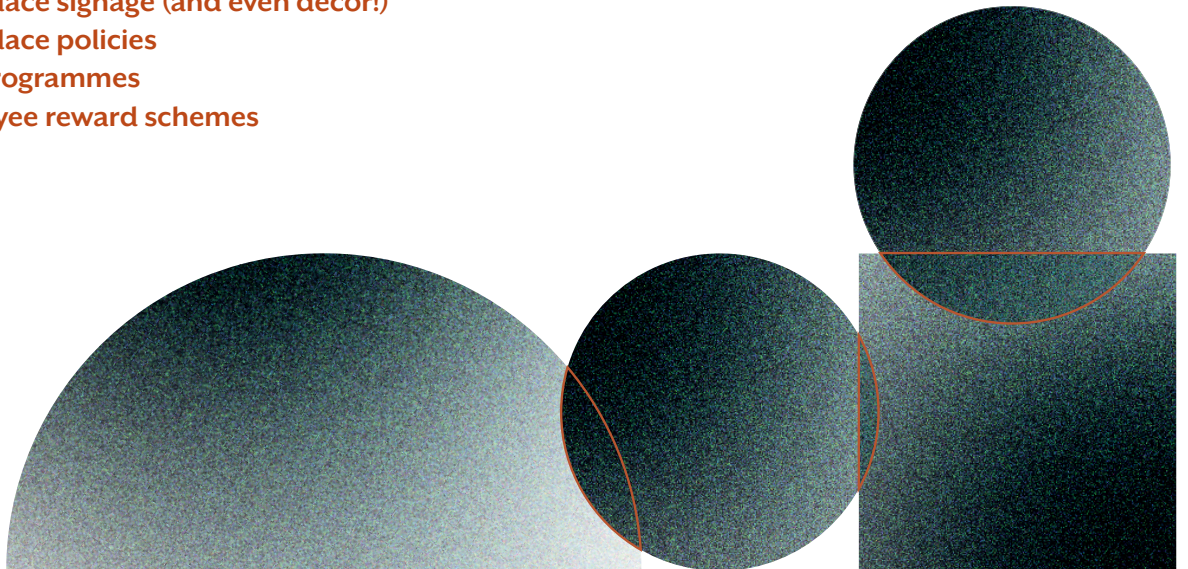
## What is meant by ‘internal communications’?

It's easy to assume that internal communications is simply about sending an email every now and again to provide employees with need-to-know information. However, internal communications is much broader than this and it's important to make use of its different forms to create a rounded and effective internal communications strategy.

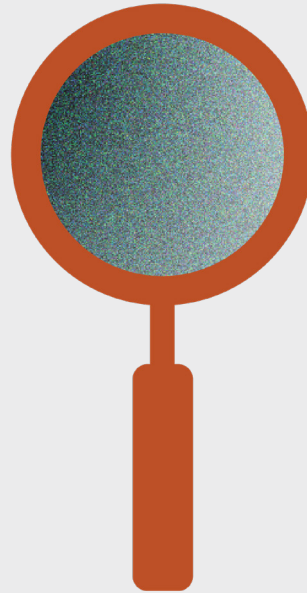
Internal communications is not just about the relaying of information on a one-to-one, team or company wide basis. Everything you do and say (or don't do and say!) sends a message to your employees. Internal communications, therefore, is not something that's 'nice to have', it's an essential building block in the foundation of any successful business. Whether you're sharing an update to a company policy or deciding what colour to repaint the staff breakout space, facilitating a two-way dialogue, creating opportunities for involvement and ownership, and listening to what your workforce want and need is essential.

## Some of the many faces of internal communications:

- Meetings & conferences
- Emails & newsletters
- Intranet & employee forums
- Team building activities
- Workplace signage (and even decor!)
- Workplace policies
- CPD programmes
- Employee reward schemes







## Researching your internal communications plan

Before you can create a plan of action for developing your internal communications, you first need to understand where your organisation is now. Creating this understanding requires honesty and a willingness to acknowledge what's not working. It's also vital to listen to what your employees have to say.

## Some questions you will need to consider might include:

1. Is purposeful internal communication happening at all? If so, how effective is it?
2. How do employees feel about current internal communications?
3. How would employees like internal communications to work?
4. What information do employees need?
5. What would they like?

For any new internal communications plan to be effectively

implemented and received with commitment, employees must be given the opportunity to provide frank feedback. An anonymous survey will help you to gather as broad and accurate a picture as possible. You can run this through a free digital platform, such as Google Forms, or take a more traditional approach using paper surveys handed out with payslips. You could also consider running focus groups to further investigate specific challenges or concerns or, if you already have internal communications tools set up, have a look at any available analytics.

It's vital not to skip this research step as it will be very difficult - if not impossible - to create an effective internal communications plan if you don't know what problems you need it to address.



## Creating clear objectives to inform planning

Once you've completed your research, you'll need to take the data you've collected and use it to inform a plan that will help you achieve your internal communications aims.

**Your overall plan will include details such as timelines and responsibilities, but you also need to define - in clear measurable objectives - what your plan will achieve. You might be hoping to:**

- **Improve employee satisfaction with internal communications**
- **Reduce frequency of internal errors**
- **Improve consistency of organisational messaging**
- **Increase employees' sense of ownership and value**
- **Improve staff retention and attract new talent**
- **Increase productivity and set achievable business goals**

Your objectives should aim to address any specific problems or challenges that you identified during the research phase. Using the **SMART framework** can help to ensure your objectives are clear and useful.

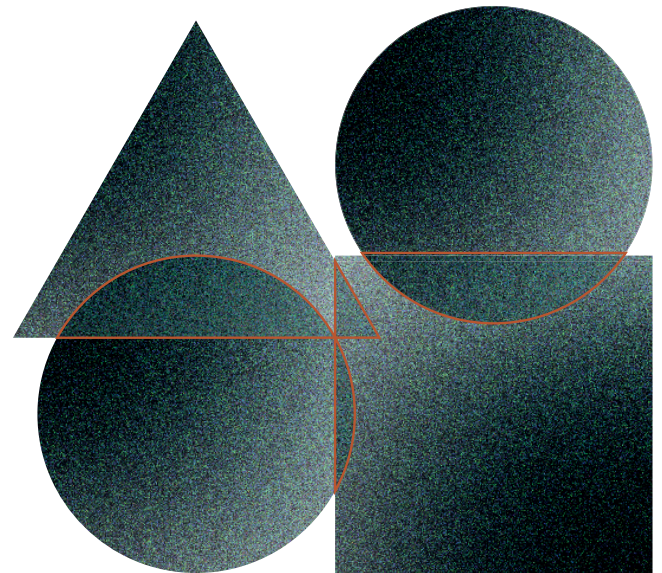
Be aware that, in order to get buy-in from people at all levels of the organisation - including financial backing from senior executives and proactive engagement from all staff - you need to ensure you are clear about why an internal communications plan is being put in place. Inevitably, employees will want to understand what they stand to gain from it, especially if it might mean changing the ways they have become used to working.

They need to understand what problems you are trying to solve, and why the internal communications plan is important. Likewise, investors and financial directors will likely want to understand what the business benefit is before allocating funding to support an internal communications initiative. Ensure you are clear in your own mind what the potential benefits are for different stakeholders - what's the business case? The benefits could range from financial aspects - for example, an internal comms plan will improve how employees find information, therefore saving time and increasing productivity - to 'softer' gains, such as improved morale.



A comprehensive internal communications strategy can also be used to convey the reasons why something has or has not happened. Keeping employees informed and engaging them in problem solving in this way can help foster feelings of empowerment and ownership amongst your internal teams, preventing them from feeling disenfranchised within your business operations and contributing to a more positive organisational culture.

You might consider coming up with examples of departmental objectives that an effective internal communications plan could support.









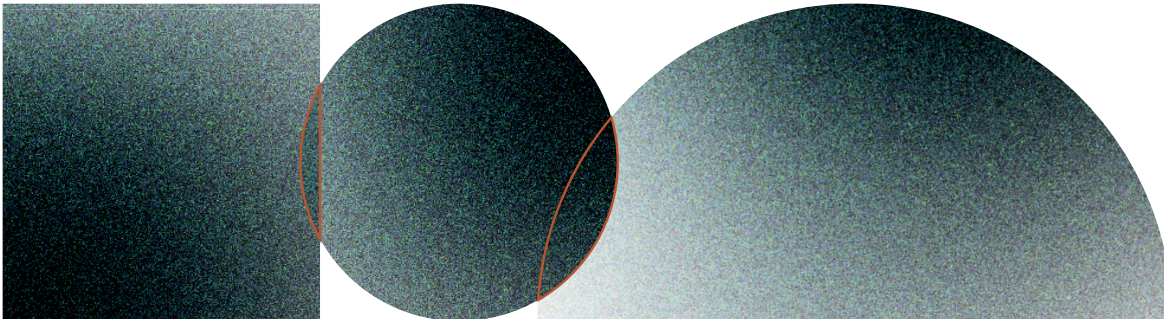
## Identifying key stakeholders and champions

For your Internal communications plan to be taken seriously and actually deliver results, it has to be backed and followed by those at the highest levels of your organisation. It's also best practice to have an identified individual responsible for managing and driving the plan forward. This could be a central, senior figure, a middle manager or even a 'grass-roots' employee who has shown enthusiasm and commitment.

**Think carefully about who is best positioned to take up this role and consider the benefits and drawbacks of who it comes from. Some obvious driving forces to weigh up might include:**

 <p>Marketing executive</p>	 <p>HR personnel</p>	 <p>Senior Executive</p>	 <p>Engaged, grass-roots employee</p>
Experienced in delivering effective communications	Useful insight into internal challenges and opportunities	Lends gravitas to the strategy generating buy-in from employees	Invested in effective internal comms & relates to other employees 'on the ground'
Externally facing - may not have a full understanding of internal issues	May be better used in a supporting role rather than actually driving delivery	May not be dependably available for regular day-to-day internal comms	May be perceived as lacking authority & struggle to get buy-in

Whoever takes on this role, make sure they are fully supported to carry it out! Without support, the role - and therefore the plan - will not be taken seriously and will fail to have the impact you want. You may want to consider having a working group made up of individuals from different levels/stakeholder positions to help offer support to the individual driving the plan and facilitate two-way feedback as the strategy unfolds. Ultimately, effective internal communications is a team sport!







## Identifying and understanding the available tools

Once you've established your current internal communications position, clear objectives for moving forward and your driving force, you need to identify the tools that could help you with the logistics of delivering your strategy. Think about which tools you have available and what you need them to actually do.

Consider:

1. How will you engage stakeholders and gauge opinions?
2. How will you disseminate your plan and ensure everyone is on board?
3. How will you facilitate meaningful, two-way communication?
4. How will employees find and respond to internal content and information?
5. How will employees access senior members of the organisation and other key individuals?
6. How will employees make their voices heard, give feedback or raise concerns?
7. How will you facilitate different types of internal communications such as top-down announcements or peer-to-peer recognition?

Different tools will be better suited to different forms of communication and for different aspects of your internal communications strategy. Consider what platforms are already active in your digital workplace, how they are currently used and any opportunities for using them more effectively. Also identify whether there are any gaps. Do you need to explore additional tools?

Try categorising your existing tools in order to identify gaps and opportunities to address within your plan.

Digital Workplace Landscape	
File storage & document management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- OneDrive</li> <li>- Google Drive</li> </ul>
Productivity & task management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Asana</li> <li>- Notion</li> </ul>
Private, small group & company wide communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Zoom</li> <li>- Slack</li> <li>- Outlook</li> </ul>
Collaborative working	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Slack</li> <li>- G Suite</li> </ul>

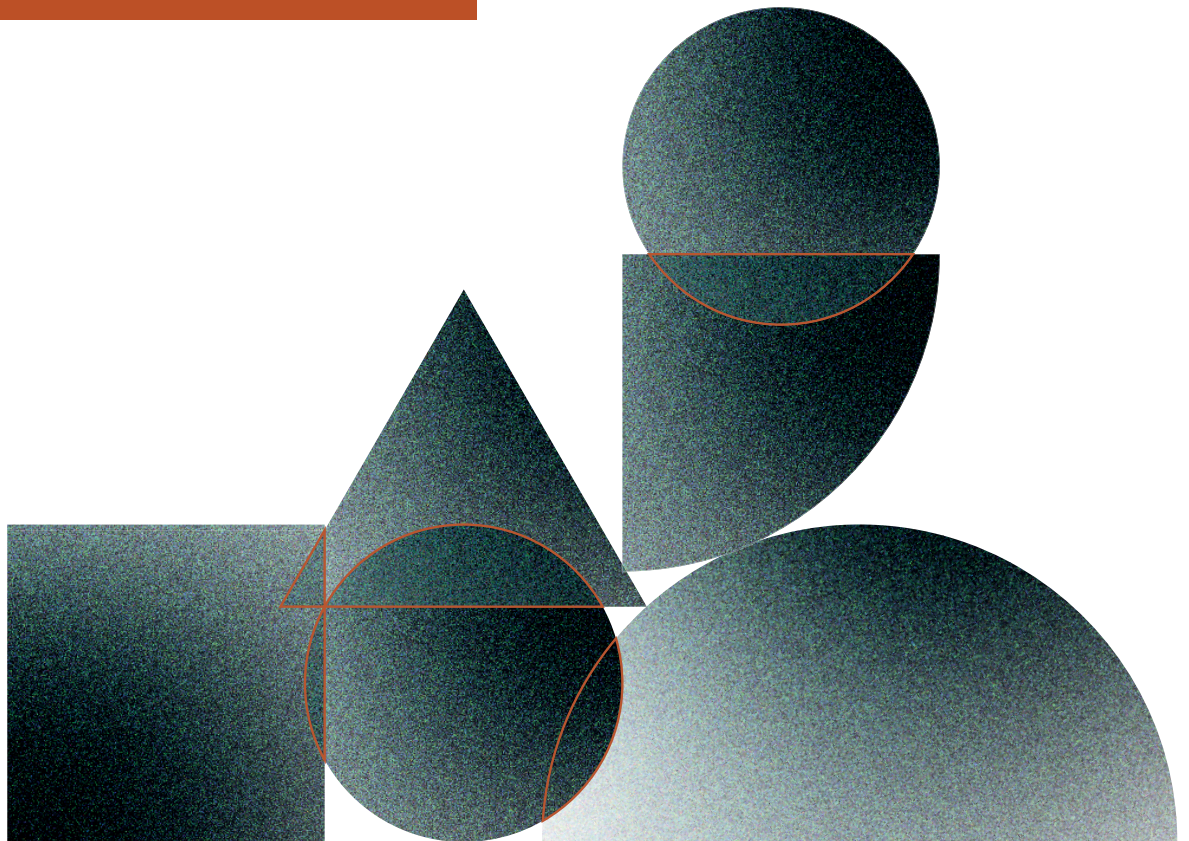
The above are just a few examples of the tools available, based on our own digital landscape. There are many more you may already use or consider using.

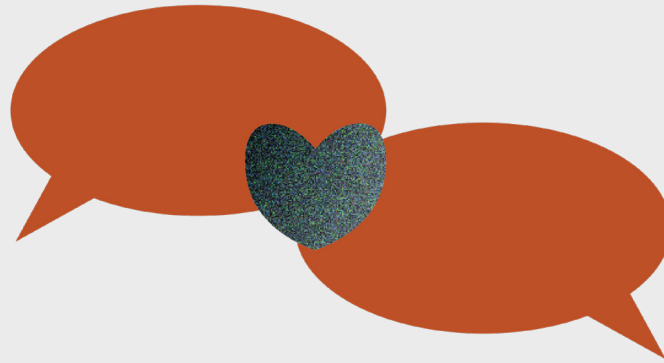
Once you've taken inventory of the tools you already use, consider which platforms will be helpful for what. If you were working with the tools identified in the illustrative example above, you may decide that Asana will be useful for the planning stages of your internal comms strategy and use it to set tasks and establish a timeline. You may decide that email is the most appropriate platform for communicating vital policy information and agree to distribute any operational information through Outlook but that a more informal platform, such as Slack, would be better for employee recognition initiatives, staff polls etc. Which tool you choose to use for what will entirely depend on the needs and preferences of your employees, which you should have been able to establish through your initial research.

Although there is often a desire to identify 'one tool to rule them all', you're unlikely to find it! You are also more likely to engage and interest employees with a range of channels, simply because not everyone works or communicates in the same way. Identify the best ways of communicating different types of information with different groups by actively talking to those stakeholders about what works for them. There won't be a solution that completely satisfies everybody but it's important to make the effort to find a 'best fit' option. You may also find that the apps you use can work together, which helps to streamline processes, so look out for integration options.



The key when using multiple channels for communication is making sure everyone is clear on which platforms should be used for which types of communication. Provide clear guidance and explain the reasonings behind it. If you find certain channels are being used for the 'wrong' types of communication, investigate why this is happening and either provide a gentle reminder to use the designated channels or review whether you need to make changes to your policy.





## Facilitating inclusive communications

**If your internal communications plan is to be truly effective it must include and reach everyone within your organisation, regardless of where or how they work.**

You may have a diverse staff body who face different challenges and have different preferences when it comes to obtaining information. Your internal communications strategy must consider each audience and identify the best avenues for reaching them. For example, do you have staff working remotely? Or frontline, offline employees who won't have easy access to digital platforms? Consider which options might be open to these members of your team and create an offline worker strategy to enable them to engage with your communications

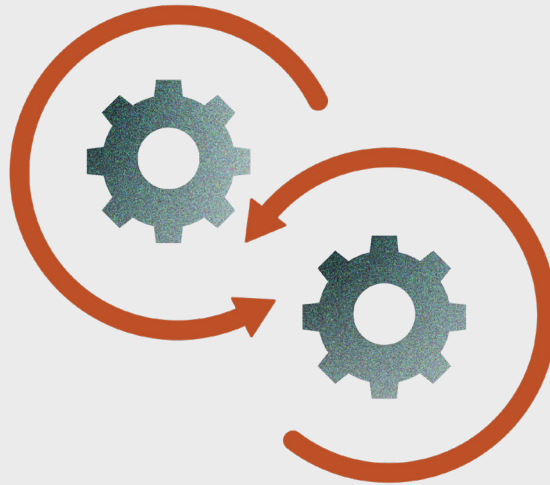
them to engage effectively and help your plan to be executed successfully.

You might want to consider:

- SMS or mobile apps (are there apps your employees are already using that you could make use of?)
- Face-to-face briefings
- Print communications

Ensuring inclusivity also requires you to consider the accessibility needs of your team. Are your communications suitable for individuals with auditory, visual or cognitive needs? Do you have non-native speakers or international teams where translations may be required?

As with all aspects of your internal comms plan, the key is in your research. By involving your team(s) in the development of your strategy you will empower



## Creating consistency

**To foster trust in your internal communications, the message must be consistent. Develop an internal brand for use across all your communications channels, to establish a common identity, build a sense of ownership and continuity within your content.**

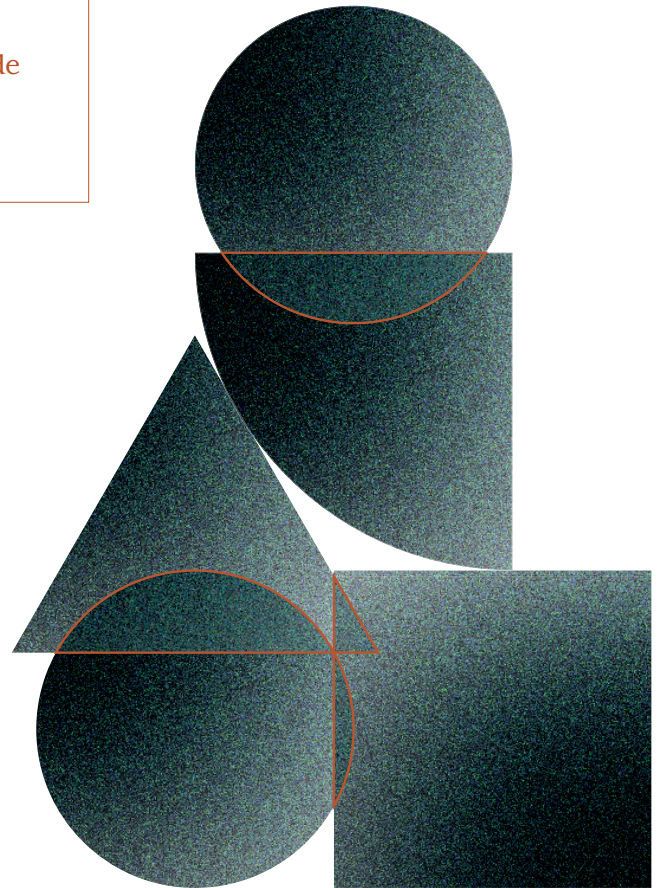


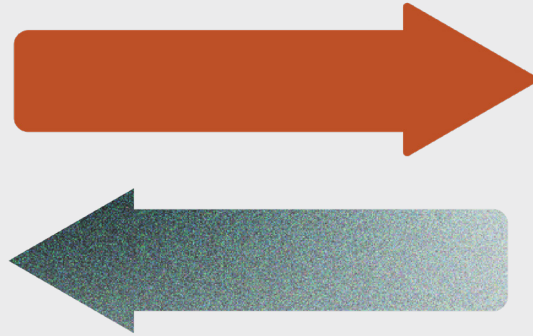
This consistency also ensures that employees are only receiving one version of your organisational 'truth', enabling them to make informed decisions, convey opinions and ideas, and carry out their work with confidence. You'll need to decide how to manage consistency of the information being disseminated through different channels to avoid unnecessary duplication, silos or outdated communication.

However you decide to set up your central communications, it's important to ensure that someone takes on responsibility for actively checking and updating it.

You could consider an intranet to facilitate this, as they provide a useful central hub which can easily be branded to increase consistency. There are many different platforms available but they often involve significant investment. If you are going to commit to an intranet package, make sure you've done your research and that it will provide all the functionality you are looking for.

If you are not in a position to invest in an intranet, or if you work in a smaller organisation where it might feel unnecessary, take a look at more simple, affordable platforms, such as Notion or Slack, and get creative to develop an informal intranet-style set-up where you provide links to key information and actively promote opportunities for two-way communication.





## Enabling two-way communication

It's important that your internal communications plan allows for genuine two-way interactions. You are unlikely to get buy-in from staff if communications are only top-down, and they need to feel they can communicate honestly without fear of censorship.

Employees need to be able to:

- Respond to information
- Express concerns
- Promote ideas

If you have, or decide to create, an Intranet, including forums can be an effective way to facilitate this. Alternatively, tools such as Slack can offer the same opportunities. Whichever platform you use, it's essential that it is monitored and comments responded to quickly and accurately, and that all levels of the organisation make use of it.

As well as official communications, ensure you make room for 'water-cooler talk'. These informal interactions between peers build positive connections, improve morale and contribute to more creative thinking and problem solving. Make the most of this by creating a culture that encourages informal communication alongside the formal.



## Avoiding overwhelm

Emails, notices, meetings, memos, web and social media content: there can be an awful lot of information thrown at employees on a daily basis. Your internal communications strategy needs to help streamline and manage this, not just become another part of the digital noise. Think about what is important and establish a clear focus for your messaging.

To do this, consider the following:

- How can you break down your internal communications into clear themes?
- Which of these themes are most important and what's the most effective way to communicate them?
- Are there any areas that can be consolidated?
- Refer back to your overall internal comms objectives: what's the value in each piece of communication? Does it support your objectives? Is it necessary?

When you are producing communications material, use the inverted pyramid framework on the next page to make your content effective.

It's also advisable to use a mixture of formats and content type, including using video and images, to maintain engagement, and to review communication campaigns regularly to evaluate their effectiveness.



## Essential

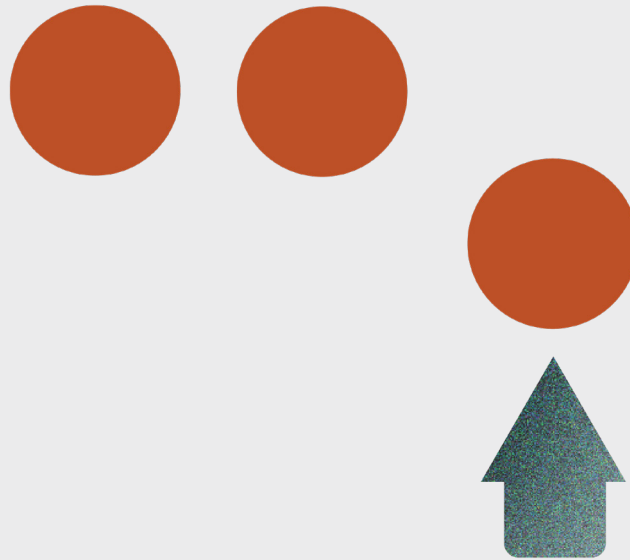
Information the reader must have for your communication to be successful. Key messages, who, what, where, when, why, how.

## Additional

Information that would be helpful for the reader to have but that isn't essential.

## Least Important

Information that is nice to have.

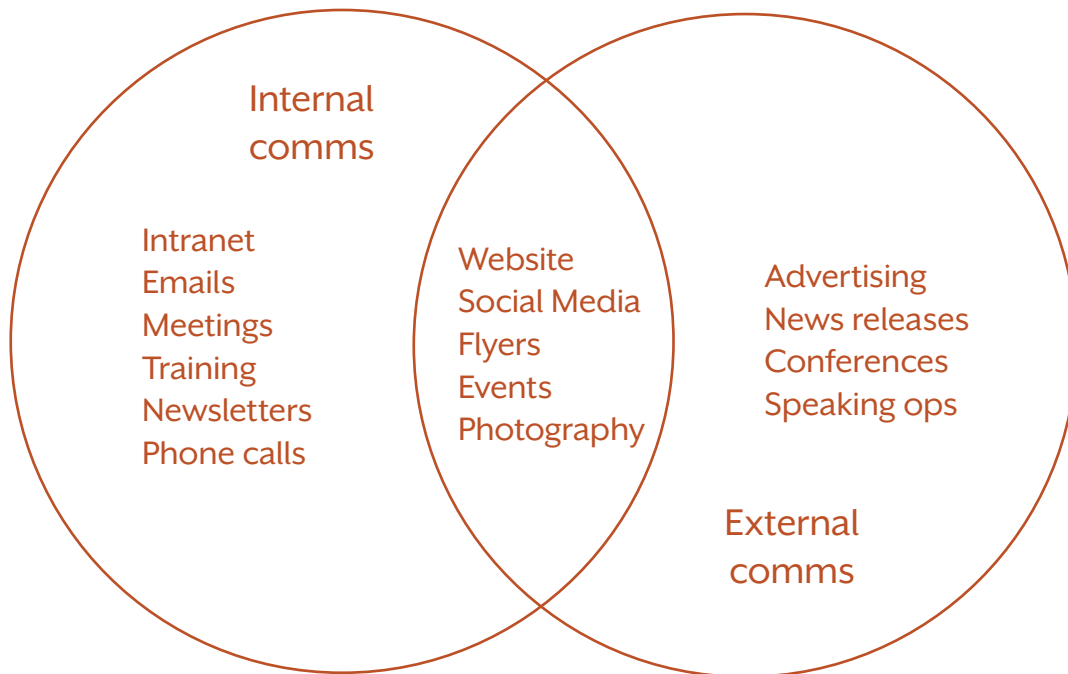


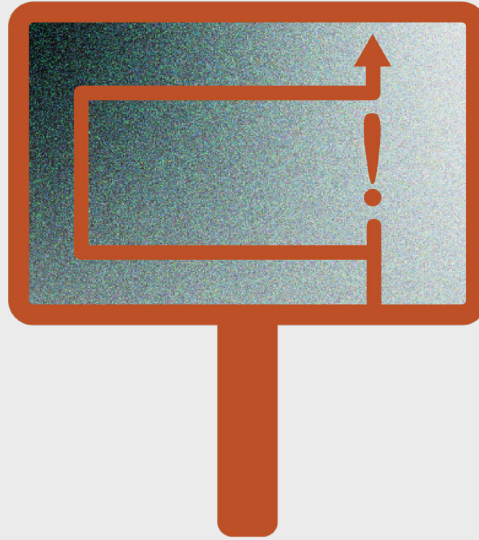
## Ensuring alignment

One of the biggest communications frustrations, in companies both big and small, is being told one thing internally only to find a different message being communicated externally - or, worse, that vital information has not been disseminated internally at all! This kind of situation will erode trust and goodwill, and will have a significant negative impact on your ability to communicate effectively with your staff.



Whilst the tone, focus, audience and delivery of your external communications may be very different from the internal, it's essential to maintain consistency with your key messages. If your internal and external messages differ in any way, be sure to communicate to your team what is being said externally and why. Provide opportunities for employees to ask questions or raise concerns and be as transparent as possible.





## Planning communication contingencies

If your organisation is faced with a crisis situation, your internal communication methods and structures will be put to the test so it is important to have considered contingencies before such an event occurs.

Creating a crisis communications plan enables you to anticipate and prepare for emergencies, ensure you have appropriate policies and protocols in place, minimise impact and more effectively manage the situation. Some key points to consider from an internal communications perspective are:

- Are there situations where your normal or most-used method of communication is too slow or at risk?
- Do you have an alternative? Does everyone know to use it in an emergency?
- Is your alternative method robust to most crisis scenarios?

Having an efficient, reliable, shared communications platform that allows all areas of your organisation to talk to one another, as well as senior management, in a crisis should be the foundation of your crisis communications plan. Remember as well to clearly inform your internal teams of any external messages and give an explanation as to any differences from internal ones.

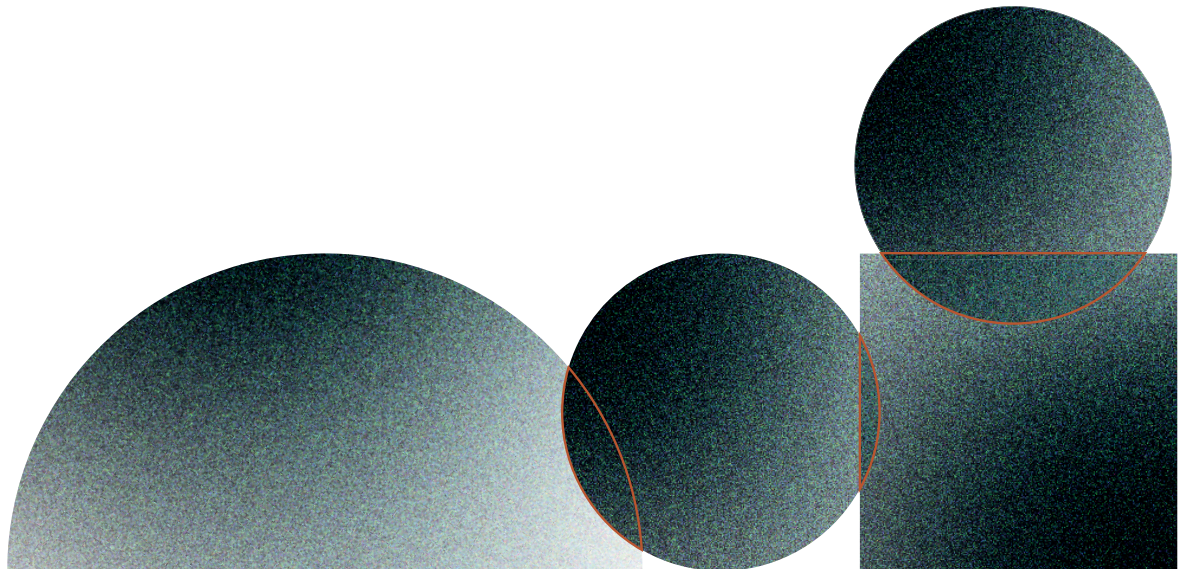


## Engaging in the conversation

Whether you're conscious of it or not, internal communication is already happening within your organisation. Actively engaging with it and creating an effective framework to guide it is essential for a successful, productive workplace. The key things to remember are that it is a two-way process and that refining your strategy will be an ongoing exercise requiring regular review.

Following the guidance outlined in this document will help you to establish a strategic direction, remove duplication of effort and reduce the risk of incorrect or outdated information. In turn, this will help to unite the team(s) behind your organisation and offer significant benefits to both individuals and the business as a whole.

Want some support to put this guidance in place and create an internal communications strategy uniquely tailored to your organisation's needs? Get in touch - we can help!





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Graphex House,  
Adcroft Street,  
Stockport SK1 3HZ

0161 477 1415  
[pr@sgpr.co.uk](mailto:pr@sgpr.co.uk)

