

Poppulo Knowledge
Whitepaper

Multi-channel employee- centric communications: The ultimate key to workplace engagement

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Poppulo

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Introduction

It's an increasingly problematic workplace communications conundrum: how to engage employees with company messaging when their lives are already swamped with information overload? Happily, there is a way through.

[Poppulo research](#) has shown that employees want company information that's relevant to them and which helps them in their job. And it also underlines the need for communicators to adopt a highly focused employee-centric approach to what they do – understanding what's relevant to different internal audiences and the channel mix needed to reach and engage them.

The route to ensuring employees receive the information they need cannot be achieved through a single communication channel – it demands an integrated multi-channel approach with a depth of employee knowledge to create and deliver relevant content.

In this white paper, [Joanna Hall](#), founder and Director of [Afire Consulting](#), outlines why this approach is the ultimate key to effective and engaging internal communications.

She analyzes the strengths and weaknesses of the various communication channels that are available and paints a picture of what a great channel mix looks like – and spells out the steps you need to take to achieve this in your organization.

We hope you find it valuable.

Tim Vaughan

Head of Content

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Preface

Technology and the Information Age that we now live in are both a blessing and a burden. They extend the wonderful opportunity to connect, engage, learn and share at greater speeds and ease. Yet this era places overwhelm, demands, constant change and confusion upon us all like never before.

As communicators, we face a difficult task in balancing the art of engaging staff and keeping our communication capabilities up-to-date and fit-for-purpose in line with business and technology advances.

But, let's remember that behind every business, every communication platform and every message received, lies a human being. People are at the heart of successful, effective internal communication. And when it comes to deploying, utilizing and maximizing our communication channels (whatever ones we use or choose), we must always remain mindful and knowledgeable of our employees preferences and needs.

The understanding of our colleagues is an Internal Communicator's secret superpower. It enables us to choose the right channels for them, share the right information in a way that makes it easy to digest, relevant and timely for them. Our superpower gives us insights to their behavior, their needs. And tapping into that is the silver bullet ingredient in our channel-mix recipe.

The latest 2019 State of the Sector report from Gatehouse cited that the greatest barrier to successful internal communications (IC) is the high volume of communications and lack of time employees have to read them. With demands facing communicators, demands on our audiences and scrutiny over IC resources, we need to take a much smarter approach to how we communicate.

The report also stated that the third biggest challenge was dealing with internal technology that's not fit for purpose. It's blatantly clear, therefore, that communicators need some help with managing their channels.

Getting carried away with adding shiny new toys to our channels mix or not fully understanding what channels are needed to engage our audiences might be something a lot of us are guilty of. Many of us are likely using (and getting frustrated by) the legacy channels available to us too.

We've all heard the phrase (albeit translated into English) from the French philosopher, Blaise Pascal, 'I have made this longer than usual because I have not had time to make it shorter'. Taking the time to interrogate what channels you have, as well as understand why and how you and your audiences are using them, is a critical step in delivering an effective communication strategy.

In this whitepaper, we will cover how an integrated channels approach has audience-centricity at its core. And how, with that focus, it will become the most effective way of reducing the demands and overwhelm on both your audience and you, as a Comms team.

An integrated approach will enable you to successfully deliver your communication strategy, maximize your internal communication resources and effect a more positive impact on your business... and your colleagues.

What is an integrated multi-channel approach and why is it so important?

An integrated multi-channel approach is the provision of relevant, complementary and consistent messaging across multiple channels in a tailored and targeted way to engage employees and improve their employee experience.

Such an approach is important because it is a critical component of a successful communication strategy.

It will:

- Effectively deliver relevant communication in ways that are tailored to meet all employees needs
- Make it easier for employees to find, digest and understand information
- Reduce communication ‘noise’ and overload for employees and thus increase their focus and productivity
- Ensure greater levels of employee engagement and required action
- Ensure budget and communication resources are allocated to channels that are fit-for-purpose
- Enable effective measurement of your communication efforts
- Enhance the productivity of and value added by the Comms team

On the flip-side, taking a non-integrated and disparate and fragmented approach to managing your channels mix means you risk:

- Not knowing which channels to use and why
- Confusing, disengaging, distracting, overwhelming, excluding and frustrating your internal audiences
- Negatively impacting your business’s quality, safety or regulatory standards and customer satisfaction
- Wasting IC resources, and causing your team to feel overwhelmed and undervalued
- Damaging the reputation of internal communication and the stakeholders who you support

Our role as internal communicators is to ensure our messages are received and relevant, timely and targeted in order for them to be understood and acted upon. And whether you believe in the ‘Rule of Seven’ or repeating messages three times to get them heard, we know that for messages to stick they have to be repeated numerous times.



One size (or one channel, in the case of this whitepaper) never fits all because of the diversity across a workforce in terms of communication preferences, working styles, accessibility, availability and job roles. One channel will never be as effective as using a number of the right channels to meet the needs and be inclusive of our entire workforce.

If we want to leverage the power of repetition and variety, and combine it with the must-have relevancy when communicating, an integrated multi-channel approach is the obvious solution to enable us to do our jobs effectively.

How do you develop an effective integrated multi-channel approach?

An integrated channel approach aligns with and supports the successful implementation and delivery of the communication strategy.

Your channel approach should enable:

- Communications to be delivered, received and understood
- Information, knowledge and feedback to be found, shared and gathered
- The right actions to be taken by the right people at the right time

As with all things internal communication related, your approach to defining an effective multi-channel mix should have a priority focus on how to ensure your audiences receive, consume and understand content that is relevant to their needs and preferences – which in turn leads to greater employee engagement and a better employee experience.

If you are considerate and mindful of your audiences at every channel decision-point you won't go far wrong!

Then, following a seven-step flow of activities you will be able to create an effective, integrated multi-channel mix that meets the needs of both your employees and the business.

Step 1: Align with your business and communication strategies

All best practice internal communication begins with an alignment with the business' strategy and objectives. It is the only place to start when developing a multi-channel communication strategy.

The business strategy and its associated objectives, along with the communication strategy supporting them, will ensure your approach to defining the best channels to use has a long-range view and purpose. It should give you insight to the future desired state of the business enabling you to make smarter choices on the channel selection.

Useful questions to ask yourself:

- What is the business aiming to achieve and why?
- What is expected of employees in supporting and realizing the strategy and vision?
- What is the difference between current and future-desired state?
- How will/could IC support the business and employees in bridging this gap?

Answering these questions will provide you with the strategic direction and a clear purpose behind your channel mix decision-making.

Step 2: Conduct an audience needs analysis

Under the umbrella of the business strategy, and where all the action and behaviors happen, are your employees. It is therefore of utmost importance to spend time truly understanding them, in order to develop a channel strategy that is fit-for-purpose.

Key questions to answer at this stage include:

- What channels work well already and for which audience groups?
- What channels do staff prefer to use?
- Which channels do staff trust?
- What channels that currently exist are not used and why?
- What channel gaps do you have (that a new channel could fill to overcome your audience-reach challenges)?
- What communication limitations and challenges exist? e.g. no company mobiles provided, seasonal or volunteer staff with limited or no access to company networks, time-poor staff like doctors and nurses, remote workers like construction workers or drivers?
- What devices do employees have access to? And which do they prefer to use?
- What priorities do staff have (that may hinder their ability to be informed or digest information)?
- What content is most relevant to your employees? What are they most interested in and need to know to do their jobs to the best of their ability?
- What content metrics do you have that might support or question their response to this question?

In gathering the answers to these questions, it is likely that some themes will emerge and, if so, it is worthwhile creating some employee personas (or segmented audience groups) detailing how each persona likes to be communicated with, their content requirements and a summary of the challenges they face that communicators need to be mindful of.



Personas help to ensure you keep the employee at the heart of your channel mix decision-making ensuring it is effective and inclusive. You can read this handy Poppulo [Top Tips to help you define your Employee Personas](#).

Step 3: Define your desired outcomes for each audience group

Once you have your audiences segmented the next step is to focus on the end result you are aiming to achieve from your communications. The business strategy gives you the framework of your communication focus and your audience needs analysis provides the targeted audience groups. Imagine your project or year ahead is complete – what are your desired outcomes? They will be what you need and expect each audience group to know, feel and do as a consequence of your communication efforts. The outcomes will be a step towards achieving the longer-term business strategy (or business project goals or whatever it is you are supporting from a communication perspective).

Using your employee personas, you can define your desired outcomes for each one, which will further ensure your communication approach is targeted and more effective.

Step 4: Determine your measures of success (aligned to your desired outcomes)

Gaining clarity on your desired outcomes will enable you to determine your measures of success. You need to be looking for the metrics and measurements to gather, so you can monitor and demonstrate the reach, engagement and impact of your communications.

Poppulo's [Essential IC Measurement Workbook](#) is a great resource to help you define the most relevant and effective measures to put in place for this step.

Knowing that you are on the path towards achieving your desired outcomes is imperative. It may be that your current channels do not provide the right metrics to monitor progress and if you also identify a communication channel gap for a particular audience, this could sway you towards implementing a new or improved channel to resolve both these issues.

Step 5: Conduct a channel audit

While you could arguably do this step at any point in this process, conducting an assessment of your channels after understanding your audience and desired outcomes means you will have a more employee-focused mindset and clearer idea of what you need your channels to do for you and your audiences.

Channels are the means in which your content and messaging can be shared to engage your audiences to take action or behave in the way you need them to. Your channels need to reach your employees, be accessible, easy-to-use and have the power to support engaging media content as well as give you data to show you are having an impact with your communications.

Assessing each of your communications channels can be easily done by listing them all in a chart similar to this one and completing each column:

Channel	Strengths	Limitations	Audience reach	Audience preference	Metrics & measures
<i>Email</i>					
<i>Intranet</i>					
<i>Mobile App</i>					
<i>Town Hall</i>					
<i>Magazine</i>					
<i>etc</i>					

Step 6: Define your content requirements (messaging and media flow)

Step six is all about spending time thinking about and defining what type of content you need to create. This is important in the definition of your channel mix because you need to ensure that your channels will support the flow of your content effectively. Having a ‘How to be Safe On Site’ guide posted on your intranet for construction workers to download really isn’t going to be an effective way of communicating with them!

Content requirements will fall out of a solid understanding of your employees needs. Staff want communications that help them do their job better, are of personal interest or relevance to them, or are engaging and entertaining – even better if your comms tick all three boxes! Knowing what your staff



want and need will determine what you should be communicating to them. After all, you are aiming to increase their level of engagement in the materials you've spent hours crafting for them in order to reach your desired end state (outcomes).

Understanding how your staff behave in communication terms (what they read, what content they engage with most, what channels they use most frequently) comes from not only hearing directly from them, but by having the right measures and metrics in place to validate their claims. Metrics will enable you to see what is the most popular type of content and how engaged they are with it. The more engaging and relevant the content the higher your chances are of helping knowledge stick and behaviors to change.

Poppulo's '[7 Top Tips & Insights for measuring internal communications – what to measure, why and how' guide](#) is a great resource to help you.

Step 7: Determine the best channels for each audience group based on all the above information and requirements

Step 7 is all about consolidation. With a long-range and a sound understanding of the business, your audiences, your channels and content needs, combined with a solid focus on what you're aiming to achieve, you will have the insights and critical eye over what channels will be needed for each audience group.

At the beginning of this paper we spoke about overwhelm and not-fit-for-purpose technology hindering the success of communication efforts. So when it comes to deciding upon the channel mix best suited for each audience segment it would be wise to choose just 3 or 4 channels per audience. That way you offer flexibility and variety, are more likely to help your audience know what to expect from each channel and build their familiarity, competence and engagement in using them. Any more and you risk confusing the channel landscape and switching people off.

What does a great integrated channel mix look like?

Our purpose as communicators is to drive understanding, engagement and action aligned to the business strategy, not to create noise. Our communications, and channels through which we communicate, should serve that core purpose.

A great integrated channel mix will also encompass these elements:

- Enable employee engagement
 - » Build understanding and drive the right behaviors and actions
 - » Encourage employee voice
 - » Facilitate collaboration and knowledge sharing
- Improve and enhance the employee experience at work
 - » Reduce communication overwhelm and noise
 - » Easy to access, use and navigate
- Meet audiences needs and preferences
 - » Inclusive to all
 - » Serve audience communication preferences and working needs
 - » Offer choice and variety in the way communications are received or sought
 - » Allow targeting and personalization of communications
- Have clarity of purpose and ownership of each channel chosen
- Enable measurement, monitoring and evaluation of communications

Notwithstanding the fact that the messaging and content flowing through and across your channels must be consistent and relevant, all the above criteria should be met for each target audience when deciding upon your channel mix to create the most effective approach.

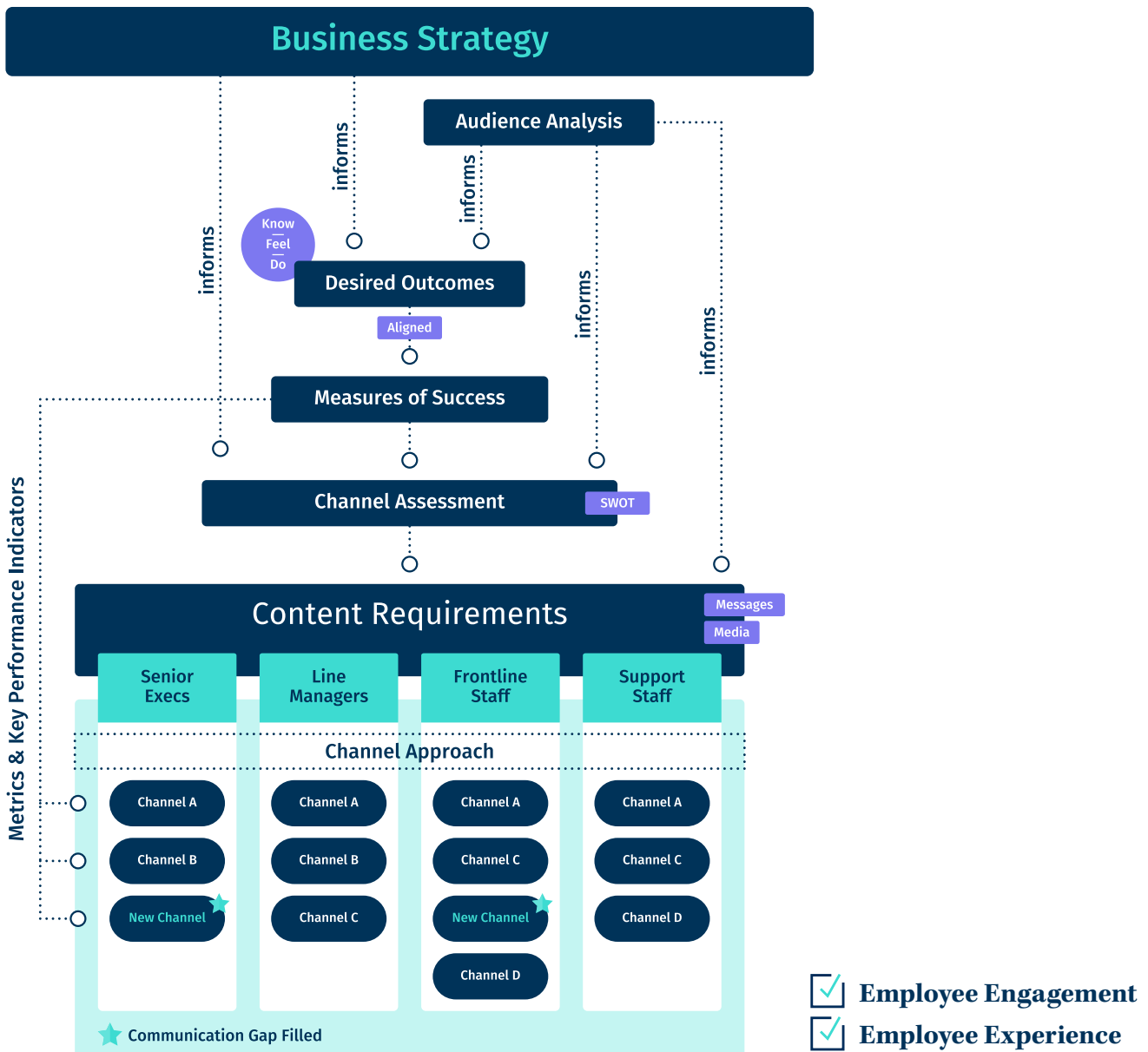


Poppulo makes it easy to create, plan, publish and measure the impact of workplace communications across a multitude of digital channels from email, mobile and intranet to video and social networks. Through one platform, IC practitioners can easily integrate their digital channels giving them the capability to manage and monitor their communications and employee engagement levels. It makes it simpler than ever to use the right channel mix for your audiences, maximise your time and content and demonstrate the impact your communication efforts are having on the business.

In summary, the steps to creating an integrated channel approach are:

Step	Activity	Purpose
1	Align with your business and communication strategies	To ensure your communication efforts support and meet the needs of the business
2	Conduct an audience needs analysis	To understand how to effectively communicate and engage with staff To develop a solid understanding of your audience needs, preferences, challenges and limitations To identify any communication gaps that can be filled
3	Define your desired outcomes for each audience group	To provide clarity on the purpose and focus of your communication efforts in line with the business direction
4	Determine your measures of success	To enable monitoring of progress towards your desired outcomes To demonstrate achievement of your intended communication objectives and measurement of the impact of your communications To implement corrective communication actions in a timely manner
5	Conduct a channel audit	To gain clarity on what channels you have, who uses them and what their relative strengths and limitations are To identify any channel gaps that require filling

Step	Activity	Purpose
6	Define your content requirements	To define the type of messaging and media you will need to create and how it will need to flow through your channels to your target audiences
7	Determine the best channels for each audience group based on all the above information and requirements	To provide relevant, complementary and consistent messaging across multiple channels in a tailored and targeted way to engage employees and improve their employee experience To drive employee understanding and action aligned to the business strategy



What channels should be included in your integrated channel approach?

To help you best compare and contrast the varying channels available to use, the following table details the various channel strengths and weaknesses in addition to recommending the best audience types to target using each given approach.

Channel	Channel type	Strengths	Limitations	Best Audience(s)
Manager briefing, team meeting, colleague huddle	In-Person	Highly interactive; builds relationships and trust; great for knowledge and information sharing with the opportunity for discussion and further clarity; good for sharing more complex or sensitive content	Requires staff to be co-located and available at the same time; requires Manager to be supported and willing to convey key business messages effectively	All staff
Town Hall, launch event, roadshow, conference	In-person	Interactive, engaging approach; good for delivery of credible, consistent messaging to larger numbers; good for colleague networking and relationship building	Requires considerable planning, budget and promotion; requires employees to be motivated to prioritize attendance over regular work; may incur travel costs and time for some staff	All staff, especially if location(s) accessible - bring the event to employees

Channel	Channel type	Strengths	Limitations	Best Audience(s)
1-2-1 meeting with Manager	In-person / virtually	Trusted source of information; allows a personalized interaction; good for complex, confidential or sensitive messaging to individuals; builds rapport	Requires Manager to be supported, willing and remember to convey key business messages effectively otherwise risks messages not getting through to staff; time intensive for Managers	All employees
Video conference	In-person / virtually	Great for sharing information consistently to a number of people; interactive, visual and engaging; saves time and travel costs; recordable for future reference or sharing later	Requires good internet connection; wise to pre-arrange tech support (to troubleshoot!); high quality video systems are expensive; can hinder interactivity if large numbers attend or connection is poor	Staff with access to a PC, laptop or mobile and high bandwidth; groups of staff who are not co-located
Teleconference	In-person / virtually	Great for sharing information consistently to a number of people; enables two-way discussion; saves time and travel costs; good for knowledge sharing and keeping teams connected	Lack of visual cues may inhibit interactivity and contributions from attendees; requires active management to involve and engage all participants	Staff with access to a PC, laptop, landline or mobile phone; groups of staff who are not co-located

Channel	Channel type	Strengths	Limitations	Best Audience(s)
Webinar	In-person / virtually	Great for sharing information consistently to a number of people; good for on-demand viewing at a later time	Less interactive and more formal than video or teleconferencing; participants can easily be distracted or disengage if content isn't relevant and interesting; requires structuring, planning and advertising to maximize attendance and reach	Staff with access to a PC, laptop or mobile and high bandwidth; groups of staff who are not co-located
Company social network, eg Yammer, Workplace	Digital	Great for group work, collaboration, crowd-sourcing and knowledge sharing; great for sharing a variety of content like blogs, videos, documents, photos and polls to build engagement; mobile access capability; can share content from other channels	High cost to implement and drive engagement; staff involvement may vary depending on culture, age group and communication style; inconsistent reach; can create silos	Staff with access to the company network either via PC, laptop or mobile
Intranet, company website	Digital	Often seen as a credible and consistent source of company information and news; broad reach; great for sharing regular news updates in a timely way	Volume of content can feel overwhelming; often frustrating to navigate or search for information	Staff with access to the company network



Channel	Channel type	Strengths	Limitations	Best Audience(s)
Mobile App	Digital	Allows for personalized, tailored content; great for on-demand access to news and information wherever employees are; great for hard-to-reach employees, remote and on the road or shop floor workers; good for urgent 'push' comms	Drives an 'always on' culture; risk of firewall and access issues especially if not single sign-on capability; can be expensive; needs resources and desire to drive engagement; staff involvement may vary depending on age group	Staff issued with company mobile phones
Email	Digital	Low cost; excellent reach; quick and easy to distribute to large numbers of staff; good for driving readers to other information, channels or content to enhance knowledge and understanding eg. video, website; personalizable and easily measurable with the right platform	Distribution list accuracy and maintenance can be complex and time-consuming; messages easily overlooked or deleted by recipient; requires stand-out headlines to improve open-rates; not suitable for more complex messaging - that's best delivered in-person	Best for staff who use PCs or laptops regularly; also good for mobile users
Text messaging	Digital	Best for short or urgent updates or reminders	Can be perceived as intrusive, so appropriate timing of messaging required	Company-issued mobile users, otherwise need employee consent



Channel	Channel type	Strengths	Limitations	Best Audience(s)
Digital signage	Digital	Visually appealing; great for promoting events or short messages	Staff can become oblivious to content after the novelty wears off, unless content remains relevant and engaging	Staff at sites with digital signage technology set-up
Newsletter	Digital / Print	Highly effective communication channel if content is concise, relevant, timely and targeted; inexpensive digital options readily available; great for keeping staff updated on a regular basis; personalizable and easily measurable with the right platform	Print can be costly to produce and distribute; print version less easy to personalize or tailor than digital version; high risk of disengagement and low open-rates if irrelevant or too much information included	All staff
Magazine	Print / Digital	Visual, engaging and informative; good for general, non-time-critical information sharing and updates; good for reiterating key company messages; great for sharing employee stories and achievements to reinforce the right behaviors	Print can be costly to produce and distribute; articles may be outdated by the time of production; impact hard to measure	All staff With the right distribution considerations, especially appreciated by staff with limited access to computers



Channel	Channel type	Strengths	Limitations	Best Audience(s)
Display materials and merchandise, e.g. posters, mouse mats, pens	Print	Great for promoting or reinforcing a brand or key message	Once out-of-date difficult to remove; budget and resource required to produce and distribute; impact hard to measure	Office-based staff
Desk drop	Print	Great for visual appeal; good for sharing detailed information that needs more time to digest or for promoting an event	Budget and resource required to produce and distribute; often seen as not environmentally friendly; requires periodic desk clean-ups	Desk-based staff only
Letter	Print	Great for visual appeal; good for sharing detailed information that needs more time to digest or requires future reference	Budget and resource required to produce and distribute	All staff, especially those with limited access to computers
Flyer / brochure / leaflet	Print	Great for visual appeal; good for sharing detailed information that needs more time to digest or requires future reference	Budget and resource required to produce and distribute	All staff, especially those with limited access to computers
Noticeboard	Print	Good for visually sharing company progress or target achievements; best for non-urgent yet visually informative communications	Requires board ownership to manage and clean up content otherwise risks sharing unregulated, outdated information	Staff with no or limited access to computers or who are time-poor

How to effectively integrate your chosen channels?

As mentioned earlier, an integrated multi-channel approach is the provision of relevant, complementary and consistent messaging across multiple channels in a tailored and targeted way to engage employees and improve their employee experience.

After following the seven steps to defining your channel approach for each of your target audiences you will:

- Understand the business direction and needs
- Understand your audience needs and preferences
- Have clarity on your desired future-state and outcomes
- Know the best way to reach and communicate with your audiences
- Know which channels you plan to use and the content that will flow through them
- Have an employee-centric mindset

And you can finally put your integrated, tailored channel-mix into action. To do this effectively here are some best practice tips:

- Plan your messaging framework for each audience
- Plan the timing of communications and events to suit the working needs of your target audiences
- Focus on providing consistent, relevant messaging repeatedly through your channels
- Play to the strengths of each chosen channel
- Repurpose content to make maximum use of the communications created and reinforce key messages consistently, e.g. video clip from a town hall recording reposted in your social network
- Keep a variety of media formats flowing through your chosen channels to maintain interest and play to individual learning styles

Above all, remember that our purpose as communicators is to drive understanding, engagement and action aligned to the business strategy. Through smart channel selection and usage we will help achieve that, but only if we keep an employee-centric mindset at all times.

Internal communicators are critical enablers. Employees are the ones who ultimately decide what action to take.



About the author



[Joanna Hall](#) is the founder and owner of [Afire Consulting](#). She has a wealth of experience in internal communication, leadership and organizational culture spanning 20 years. She is passionate about making businesses happier and more successful places to be through the power of great communication.

Through her consultancy, Jo helps her clients create a great place to work by engaging with employees, harnessing their capabilities and ideas, and combining her expertise to design ways of working that make life easier and happier for employees.

In that quest, she is also an avid supporter of fellow Internal Communication practitioners, helping to build their capabilities and confidence to enhance the standards and reputation of the profession and drive the creation of a happier working world.

No wonder so many of the world's top companies love Poppulo.

Nobody makes it easier to plan, create, publish and measure the impact of your communications on one platform to engage employees in a great experience. We developed the world's software specifically for employee communications, and now we've added an exciting new mobile app to our product mix. Poppulo Mobile, Poppulo Email and Poppulo Insights – it doesn't get more powerful than that.

It's a pleasure to partner with:



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