

What Good Internal Communications Looks Like at Wells Fargo & Co.



[Editor's Note: PR and communications professionals consistently identify internal communications as one of their biggest pain points. We asked Oscar Suris to discuss internal communications at **Wells Fargo & Company** in relation to a recent **Institute for Public Relations (IPRA)** study, "What Does Good Look Like? A Quantitative Perspective on Best-in-Class Practices in Internal Communications." Available free at IPRA's site, the study interviewed 156 internal communications professionals and identified 22 factors it feels are hallmarks of best-in-class practices.]

When I reflect on internal communications at Wells Fargo, where our team—among its many responsibilities—keeps 265,000 employees informed, I'm happy to see we follow many success factors identified in the study, including:

1. Keep Employees Informed in a Timely Manner: It's the number one tenet of any robust internal communications program. Each year, we survey thousands of team members to gauge their satisfaction with internal communications. They've been clear: When there's news, good or bad, they want to hear it promptly from their employer via the company's internal communications channels. In fact, our research tells us the timeliness of our news delivery has one of the highest correlations with overall team-member satisfaction with internal communications. Earlier this year, Wells Fargo launched an efficiency initiative that could result in job losses. We wanted team members to hear directly from our CEO, John Stumpf, who used the moment to underscore how we'd stay true to our values in managing the situation.

2. Use Internal Online Forums and/or Platforms: In today's social media age, interactivity is increasingly a component of internal communications. At Wells Fargo, team members have the opportunity to comment online about stories we publish on our online portal. They also can form communities on our internal social platform. We have online communities for telecommuters, Windows 10 users and team members who work across multiple time zones. Leaders also make use of the forum.

Laura Schupbach, head of Wells Fargo Insurance, hosts a community blog called "On the Road with Laura," which puts her in two-way communication with more than 1,500 team members.

We've also made it easier for team members to share content, using widgets to post material to Twitter, LinkedIn or Facebook. In our internal surveys, team members also say they want a predictable cadence to the information they receive. Based on that, each Tuesday morning we now send an email with company news to all team members. More than 129,000 open this communication weekly. Our survey shows 96% of them are satisfied with its quality and timeliness.

3. Adopt an Authentic Voice: When employees hear from leaders, they want frank talk and accessibility. They also welcome an emotional connection. At Wells Fargo, we're blessed with a CEO who's a superb extemporaneous speaker and appreciates authentic dialogue. Following his lead, we aim for plain language over jargon, which frees us to acknowledge hard truths and empowers others to speak from the heart, whenever appropriate. Mr. Stumpf's most popular internal communications routine is his quarterly CEO town hall, broadcast via satellite and webcast to team members globally. He reviews financial performance, puts business issues and news into perspective and tackles tough topics during a live Q&A. In fact, he requests not to see team members' questions in advance. Team members know they will hear directly from their CEO in his voice during these regular fireside chats.

Using research-validated principles and practices can drive a successful internal communications strategy, reinforcing why certain tactics have earned their worth over time. When professionals leverage such insights, both internal and external, we improve our effectiveness and benefit from the collective wisdom of practitioners who preceded us. ■

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