The internal communications mini-guide

Five ways smart enterprises are powering up internal comms (with the help of an adaptive collaboration hub)

slack

The secret to a great employee experience

Hear the words "employee experience" and you might picture a number of things: free donuts in the break room, the latest-model laptops, dog-friendly offices, unlimited PTO.

These are all nice perks. But smart CHROs know that one thing can increase employee engagement more than any of those nice-to-haves: great internal communications.

When a business communicates well with its employees—and employees communicate well with the leadership and each other—it has a huge impact:

- People understand the organization's mission and their contribution to it

- They come to work ready to do their best work and help others succeed

- They stay with the organization longer and want to develop and progress

- They go the extra mile for customers, boosting the customer experience

Contrast that with a business that communicates poorly:

- People feel disconnected from the organization, its leadership and mission

- They don't have the information they need to do their best work

- They're unengaged—sometimes even resentful—and move on faster

- Customer experience suffers, and hiring, onboarding and training costs skyrocket

This guide is about creating an internal comms environment that fosters great employee engagement and an exceptional customer experience.

"Internal communication is important for building a culture of transparency between management and employees, and it can engage employees in the organization's priorities. Employee engagement in the management literature is defined as the degree to which an individual is attentive and absorbed in the performance of their roles. Engaged employees often feel empowered, involved, emotionally attached and dedicated to the organization, and excited and proud about being a part of it."

"Driving employee engagement: The expanded role of internal communications," K. Mishra et al, 2014

Companies that rank highest for customer experience also report high levels of employee engagement—typically 79% of employees are engaged.

"Employee Engagement Benchmark Study," Temkin Group, 2017

Why internal comms goes bad

Internal comms people are good people. They want to help employees understand the organization's mission and activities, and foster productive dialogue across departments, teams, and reporting structures. But they're often up against some tough challenges:

Outdated technology
Most large companies still use email and a static intranet to get information to employees. But that one-way experience is increasingly at odds with the way people communicate digitally outside of work.

Today, employees want and expect two-way dialogue. They want to be able to ask questions, get answers, and give and receive feedback—and traditional comms channels just aren't geared up for it. That's why we're seeing an increase in employees using consumer-style communications tools to get stuff done at work.

Competition for attention
When employees have to trawl through irrelevant content on the intranet to find the one piece of information they're looking for, they're naturally less inclined to make the effort. Plenty of other, more immediate distractions (whether work-related or not) are there to divert their attention.

Fragmented workforce
Most intranets are designed or optimized for desktop viewing—and often fill up with content that's targeted at an HQ audience. Employees outside the "bubble"—on shop floors, in factories, in warehouses, in remote offices, and out in the field—are disconnected from important information, and may feel alienated or devalued as a result.

The cost of replacing an employee ranges from tens of thousands of dollars to 1.5–2.0x the employee's annual salary.

"Employee Retention Now a Big Issue," Josh Bersin, Deloitte, 2013

Why internal comms goes bad

Inefficient content delivery options
Then there's the issue of fragmentation. Good comms people know that employees use lots of different channels, so they end up replicating the same content everywhere to try to reach them "in the right place." It's inefficient, it takes up time, and it often just adds to the noise.

Poor access to information owners
Internal comms is an information conduit for the whole business—so it needs senior management buy-in, open access to senior stakeholders, and a two-way engagement channel with employees. But very often, it doesn't get any of those things, as outdated tech makes access and two-way dialog difficult.
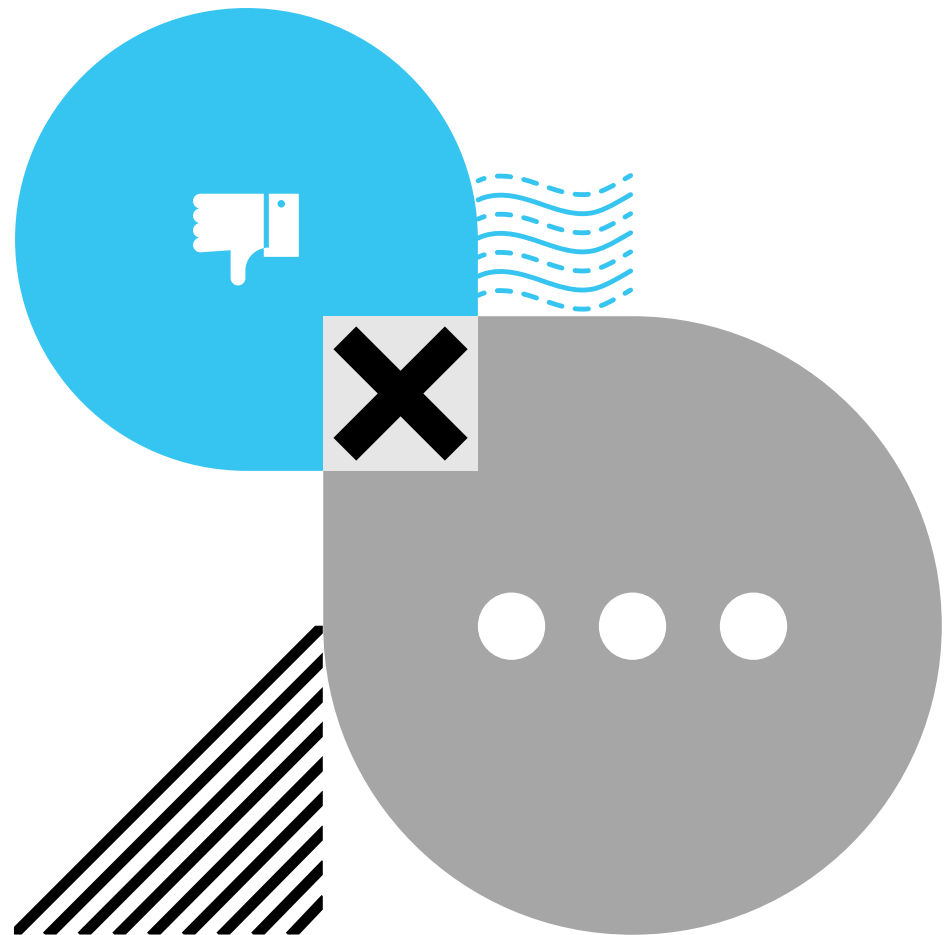
A tale of two employee experiences

Sylvie is a tech support agent in the consumer electronics sector. A creative thinker with a customer-focused attitude and a passion for problem solving, she'd be an asset to any company. But where will Sylvie want to work—Acme Anvils or Coyote Controls?

Sylvie has an idea. *She spends all day solving customers' problems—and recently, she's realized that a small tweak to one product could cut customer complaints in half.*

At Acme Anvils…

Sylvie emails her manager, asking how she can get her idea to the VP of product. Eventually, she hears back: the next version of the product was decided last month at the product roadmap meeting at HQ. There should be an announcement on the company intranet soon.

A month later, the announcement appears. The problem hasn't been fixed and customers keep complaining—not just to Sylvie, but also on social media.

Sylvie does her best to help, but she feels demoralized and undervalued by her employer. Not long after, she starts looking for a new job.

A tale of two employee experiences

At Coyote Controls...

On the train into work, Sylvie checks her smartphone and sees there's an online Town Hall later with the VP of product. He wants to hear from frontline workers about problems customers are facing, with any suggestions for improvements.

Excited, Sylvie raises her idea in the Town Hall channel. The VP sees it and thanks her publicly, gives her kudos points for her suggestion, and asks her to present via video in the next product roadmap meeting.

Sylvie's fix gets implemented, customers are delighted, and Sylvie's manager gives her a glowing performance review.

The power of open, two-way communications

Often, a lack of effective communication means top talent ends up walking out the door.

So how do you avoid being *that* employer: the one that doesn't communicate, doesn't listen, and can't hang on to its talent?

Culture plays a huge part, but culture needs a way of circulating through the business. More and more large enterprises are achieving that with the help of an *adaptive collaboration hub.*

What is an adaptive collaboration hub?

There's a powerful new way to streamline and accelerate the work of HR—from recruitment and onboarding to team collaboration and internal comms.

An adaptive collaboration hub is different from first-generation intranets and collaboration tools in some important ways. Rather than being rigid, top-down and one-way, it's:

- **User-driven**
  Managed by and for users

- **Fluid and organic**
  Supports the way each team wants to work on each project

- **Open**
  Sharing is the default setting (with air-tight privacy and security)

- **Channel-based**
  Organized logically into project, team, or topic channels

- **Searchable**
  So company knowledge becomes available and discoverable

- **Integrated**
  Unites all your HR and productivity apps in one place

- **Feels like home**
  So adoption is spontaneous and effortless

This isn't just a new way to support how people have always worked together.

It's a new way of working based on a new kind of collaboration.

Five ways an adaptive collaboration hub can power up your internal comms

An adaptive collaboration hub creates the kind of organization-wide communication and collaboration environment that internal comms professionals strive for, and employees value and desire:

1. Employees understand the organization's mission and their roles within it

2. Senior leadership is visible and accessible

3. Finding the right information is virtually effortless

4. People can easily ask questions and get the right answers

5. Employees are motivated to contribute ideas, and feel listened to and valued

1. Employees understand the organization's mission and their role within it

There's overwhelming evidence to show that when employees understand what their employer is aiming to achieve—and how their role fits into that mission—they're more prepared to give it their all.

That's been the experience of organizations like the Coca-Cola Company, which coaches employees to be brand advocates, and Autodesk, which is taking its 7,000-strong global workforce on a journey from a product business to a platform business.

It creates a virtuous circle: Employees who understand their role in the mission are more likely to go the extra mile for customers and each other, which delivers better results for the organization in terms of financial performance.

"A business cannot generate sustainable value and growth without employees understanding where it's headed, why, what it's going to take to get there, and why each employee matters."

Steve Soltis, Group Director of Employee and Leadership Communications, The Coca-Cola Company
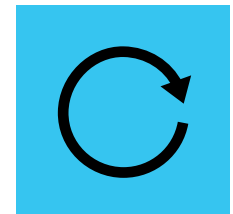
What it looks like

Communicating the organization's mission, values, and goals isn't a one-time exercise. For employees to be engaged, there must be a continuous process of "walking the walk."

Each employee should always able to see what the company is doing to achieve its mission, how they can contribute, and why their contribution matters.

A collaboration hub makes it easy to share information through the organization, so it reaches the right employee at the right time and on the right device. And as it's a two-way platform, it also provides a forum to quickly and easily discuss and clarify any points of confusion—minimizing misguided effort.

Formats like how-to videos, town hall video conferences and "Ask Me Anything" sessions bring management and employees closer together—even when they're geographically dispersed.

The facility to openly ask questions, submit ideas, and receive recognition gets employees more involved and allows them to feel they and their contributions are valued.
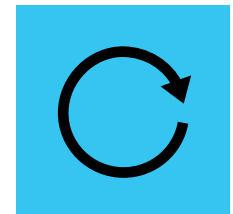
2. Senior leadership is visible and accessible

In organizations over a certain size, it's easy for senior leadership to become detached from the workforce—especially if they're based at HQ while the majority of employees are elsewhere.

That detachment can lead to low employee engagement. An "us and them" mentality can emerge, and employees can feel their efforts aren't appreciated at the highest levels.

At the same time, execs can become removed from the frontline work of the organization, putting them out of touch with the real concerns of employees and customers.

Resolving these issues involves making senior executives not just visible to the organization, but also accessible—to everyone.
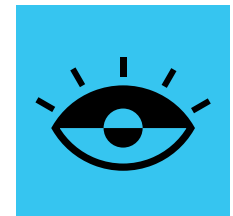
What it looks like

Think of it as a digital open-door policy: execs are available not just to communicate strategy and goals, but also to listen to feedback, ideas, and concerns.

Rather than one-way blasts to the whole organization, communications and discussions take place between selected groups, and are as public or private as they need to be.

The hub gives execs a place to communicate, listen and collaborate with all employees— wherever they are in the world, and whatever their choice of connected device.

The most effective hubs offer an array of communications options:

- Posted messages that allow employees to comment, ask questions or provide feedback

- Town Hall-style meetings with Q&As— by text chat or video conference

- "Ask Me Anything" (AMA) sessions with senior execs

- Private discussions with selected employees

- One-to-one direct messaging

The hub makes internal comms teams' lives easier too. It provides access to busy execs, making it easier to collaborate on communications, manage their rollout, and discuss any feedback and follow-up.
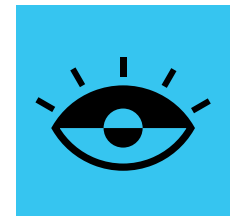
3. Finding the right information is virtually effortless

We've all heard the stats about the amount of time employees lose to searching for information. In 2012, McKinsey estimated it to be 1.8 hours per day per employee. And as recently as 2018, workflow automation company Nintex found that 49% of American office workers have trouble locating information.

When employees can't immediately find the information they need, one of two things happen:

- They waste time looking for it, impacting their productivity

- They decide they can do without it, potentially affecting the quality of their work

Making information easy to find can have a big impact on productivity and quality. What's more, employees enjoy a smoother experience at work, boosting engagement levels.

In 2018, Nintex found that 49% of American office workers have trouble locating information

"Definitive Guide to America's Most Broken Processes," Nintex, 2018

"When internal communications work well, your employees end up being so in tune with the business they'll begin to tell the company story for you—and they'll take pride in doing it."

"Best Practices for Internal Communications," Forbes Agency Council, August 2016

What it looks like

If someone has a question—about their remaining PTO allowance, say, or their benefits options—the information they request should be quick and easy to find.

The hub makes information accessible to every employee, whether they're using a laptop, a tablet, or a smartphone. It's easily searchable, cutting down the time employees spend looking for it, and easing the workload on internal comms.

It organizes information into intuitive channels, so people don't waste time looking in the wrong place—and important information can be pinned to the top of the channel where it's immediately visible.

Bots can be used to provide instant answers to frequently asked questions, creating an engaging experience for employees, and further reducing the volume of queries to internal helpdesks. And the best hubs use notifications to push important information to the employee's device—rather than them having to seek it out or wait for an email that might get missed.

Hubs also support engaging content formats—so if an announcement works better as a quick how-to video than a screed of instructional text, internal comms can choose the best approach.

Finally, the hub's value accrues over time, as individual queries and comments build up into a searchable knowledge base covering the vast array of topics employees have historically asked about. For internal comms teams, it's also a great resource for gauging how announcements are received, and which topics are being discussed the most—a useful indicator of what's top of mind for employees at any given time.

"It's [the difference between] pushing information out versus finding it yourself."

Max Shpirka, Organizational Tools Lead, trivago

4. People can easily get answers to questions

We've all had mornings like this one:

*"Argh, the coffee machine's jammed—anyone know what time the maintenance team get in?"*

"I think it's about 8:30?"

"I've sometimes seen their van in the parking lot at 7am"

"I don't think they work on Thursdays"

Sometimes, information people need right now isn't readily available on the intranet or in the company knowledgebase.

When that happens, people need instant access to a relevant specialist, so they can get an accurate answer rather than a bunch of speculative ones from their nearest coworkers. Without it, a lot of time can be wasted trying to track down the right person.
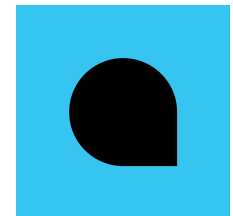
What it looks like

A collaboration hub connects everyone in the organization, so it's easy to find the right people and get the right information. You can set up topic-specific help channels run by domain experts, and getting advice is just a matter of posting a question in the right channel.

Push notifications mean the right person sees the question straightaway—even if they're not at their desk—and can get the right answer back.

"Hey, this is Dave from maintenance. I'm off-campus atm, but try pressing 1234 on the keypad."

In an instant, the coffee is flowing again, order is restored to the universe, and the working day can proceed as planned.

This may seem a small example, but examples like this add up. When everyone in the organization can get instant access to specialist help, friction is removed, productivity soars, and work feels more pleasant.
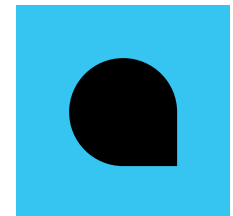
5. Employees feel listened to and are motivated to contribute ideas

One of the biggest factors driving employee engagement is the sense of being listened to and valued.

When an organization actively solicits feedback and ideas from its workforce, and—crucially—acknowledges and acts on that feedback, everyone wins.

The organization gets a steady stream of good ideas from people on the frontline, which can actively improve business performance.

At the same time, employees who feel heard, valued and appreciated are likely to put in more discretionary effort, stay longer with the organization, and inspire coworkers to do the same.

The value of feeling valued

"There are still organizations around the world that simply don't ask employees for feedback or ideas, or encourage them to share their opinions. Oftentimes, when employees in these types of organizations do speak up, they get squashed by bureaucracy and office politics. Not coincidentally, these places are also having financial troubles and are poorly ranked and rated online."

"The Employee Experience Advantage," Jacob Morgan, 2017
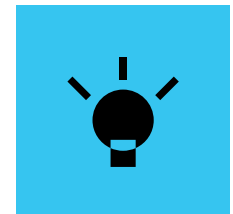
What it looks like

Employee feedback is an area where a collaboration hub can make a huge and immediate impact. It's easy to set up specific channels where people can submit ideas—for example, suggestions for product improvements driven by customer support queries.

Once an idea is submitted, senior management (or an appropriate person or team) can review it, ask further questions, or respond with their thoughts.

Voting on ideas and suggestions is easy, and so is sending out quick pulse surveys to all employees or employee sub-populations, to get quick insight into how people feel about a specific topic. Publicly recognizing employees for their contributions is a breeze too, with lots of options for giving kudos, awarding bonus points, and showing appreciation.

When that's possible on smartphones as well as desktops, listening to ideas and showing appreciation becomes an inclusive exercise. People feel seen, valued, and recognized—and motivated to do their best work.
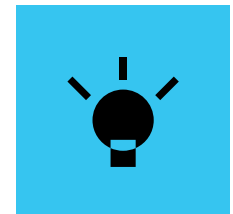
The power of great internal communications

Internal communications is a discipline that often goes unsung—but it has a critical role to play in the overall employee experience.

When an organization enables truly democratic and inclusive two-way communications, it performs better than organizations that still follow a rigid, hierarchical, and top-down communications structure.

In this guide we've looked at the impact of great internal comms on the employee experience, and the effect of that on the customer experience and financial performance.

But let's not overlook the impact on HR and internal comms teams themselves. Using an adaptive collaboration hub (and mindset) makes work exponentially more rewarding:

1. **Communications work the way they're meant to**
   When they see employees from across the organization interacting, sharing ideas, and recognizing each other's achievements, internal comms teams gain a sense of fulfilment, too.

2. **Comms pros can unleash their creativity**
   With a platform that supports everything from video and slide decks to podcasts and GIFs, communications pros can spend more time crafting content that will engage, inform, and inspire.

3. **Internal comms gets the recognition it deserves**
   When internal communications actively and demonstrably improves organizational performance, recognition from the C-suite isn't far behind.

EX pays off

Experiential organizations (those with the highest employee experience scores) see these advantages over average EX performers:

2.1x **more revenue**

4.4x **more profit**

2.9x **more revenue per employee**

40% **lower employee turnover**

"The Employee Experience Advantage," Jacob Morgan, 2017

Slack: The collaboration hub for the way big companies work today

Throughout this guide, we've talked about the concept of an adaptive collaboration hub. It won't surprise you to learn that at Slack—and at many other large, distributed organizations around the globe—the hub used for internal comms is, of course…Slack.

To see how you can use Slack to action the ideas we've discussed in this guide, visit our **Internal Communications how-to page**. And for further useful reading, check out the resources below.

"I've had more contact with other internal teams during the first six months of using Slack, than I've had during my prior six years at the company."

"The Business Value of Slack," IDC Research, 2017
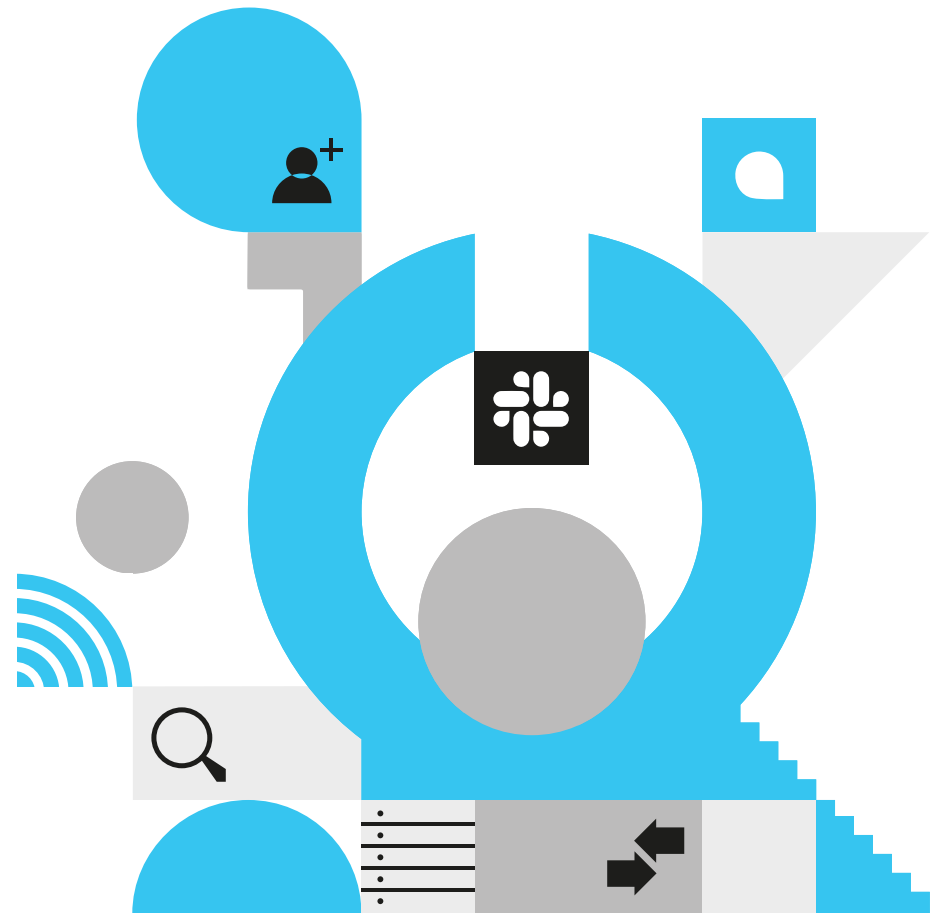
Learn more

The Slack-Powered HR Department
A quick guide to some of the ways
Slack can help

Integrations for HR and team culture
Check out our App Directory

We should probably talk.
Schedule time with our team.

LET'S GO

About Slack

Slack is a layer of the business technology stack that brings together people, data and applications—a single place where people can effectively work together, find important information, and access hundreds of thousands of critical applications and services to do their best work.

From global Fortune 100 companies to corner markets, businesses and teams of all kinds use Slack to bring the right people together with all the right information.

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