

Employee Engagement: A Mobile Communications Strategy is the Solution

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No one can question the pace at which mobile technology has transformed the way we do almost everything – from waking up in the morning with our iPhone as an alarm clock to reading the newspaper on an Android tablet and communicating with friends on Facebook. Corporate America is no exception and is quickly realizing that mobile is here to stay and is a necessary means to communicate and remain competitive. Nowhere is this more apparent than with the workforce and internal employee communications.

The Gallup Organization in a recent study on workplace engagement found that poor employee communications directly leads to a disengaged workforce that then correlates to decreased productivity and revenue. According to the study, only 30% of U.S. employees are engaged at work and this costs businesses almost \$550 billion per year.

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Now consider recent research regarding mobile technology. According to tech analyst group Gartner, by 2015 tablet sales will be higher than PC and laptop sales combined; by the end of 2014, 80% of businesses will support a workforce using tablets. Logic would therefore have it that if mobile can be utilized to improve employee communications, it would, in turn, boost engagement and productivity, saving corporate America billions. And, the mobile device is the common thread that directly ties companies to their employees.

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To create a mobile communications strategy, companies need to first realize that the mobile device is actually a computer. It is a platform through which apps allow for the dissemination and sharing of information. There is something very powerful about the fact that a computer can now be found in an individual's pocket. No matter where an employee is located, businesses can push information and communicate simultaneously and instantaneously with them; mobile social collaboration platforms exist to encourage employees to work together even though they aren't located in the same place; and corporate desktop intranets can become mobile intranets to allow employees to work anywhere at any time.

Companies are starting to look at which mobile strategy best suits them and their employees. Recently a Fortune 100 company offered its employees an app for their Apple and Android devices. Recognizing that most of its 50,000+ employees were not sitting behind desks, they sought to find a solution to communicate and engage with their employees at the same time. Mobile was the answer and a native app now allows them to push content to their employees' mobile devices allowing them to feel connected and 'in the know' regarding what is taking place at their company.

“Native” apps versus “web” apps

So what actually is a mobile “app”? Simply put, it is one of the millions of icons that exist in the app stores for download. At its essence, it is software developed for the mobile device. By developing a “native” app like the Fortune 100 company did, users can enjoy a robust mobile experience. Native apps offer functionality that includes push notifications to alert users when new content is available. Content can also be downloaded for offline viewing and listening when an internet connection is not available. If extensive customization and design are required, native apps can be expensive to develop. However, turn-key solutions like theCOMMSapp (www.theCOMMSapp.com) now exist to provide an affordable way to implement a mobile communications strategy quickly and without the need for IT or systems integration.



“NATIVE”
APPS

VS.

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Another mobile solution for those choosing not to go “native” are “web apps.” However, some might argue that web apps are not really apps – rather they are mobile websites that cannot be found in the app stores or are “skinned” to exist in the app stores by using a specialized form of coding called HTML5 that allows for the website to respond to the screens of different mobile devices. As a website, an internet or Wi-Fi connection must exist for the “app” to work. This can prove challenging for the employee who is not in an office, frequently is on the road or travels internationally. Nevertheless, for the company looking for a down and dirty mobile solution, a web app may suffice.

Mobile social collaboration

“Social collaboration” is one of the latest corporate America buzz words. And for good reason – there is something to be said about co-workers having the ability to communicate with and help each other no matter where they are located.



Social collaboration tools provide a way for companies to connect people, content and business data. The enterprise social collaboration market in 2010 was a \$600 million industry. Forrester estimates that it will reach \$6.4 billion in 2016. Solutions presently available include Cisco WebEx Social, Jive, Microsoft SharePoint and Yammer, and Salesforce Chatter, to name a few. Depending on a particular business need – for example, document /file sharing, peer collaboration, or access to company information – one platform may be preferable to another.

Social collaboration platforms do present challenges as they originally were created for the desktop. While many now offer a mobile version (i.e., a web app), user experiences may vary. In addition, since social collaboration platforms can be costly and often require systems integration, the need to confront IT and security may make the decision to embark on such a mobile communications strategy one that communications professionals wish to avoid.

Mobile corporate intranets

Corporate intranets have been in existence since the Internet became commercialized and present another strategy for communications professionals to consider. As with social collaboration platforms, most corporate intranets were developed for desktop computing first. Recognizing the importance of mobile, developers today are conforming existing intranets to the mobile device. However, this does not necessarily make for a user friendly experience.

According to Prescient Digital Media, satisfaction with intranets overall is poor and if employees don't like a particular solution, they won't use it. Stephan Schillerwein, former Research Director at Infocentric Research says that more than one hour is wasted every day by workers ineffectively searching for information needed to do their jobs. While intranets were a good place to start 15+ years ago, unless developed with a mobile first approach, significant cost and time may be spent developing a solution that will never be used.

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As the workforce becomes more disparate, employees will yearn for greater communications, to be in touch and connected. Similarly, companies will remain vexed with how to communicate simultaneously with their workforce and to keep their employees engaged. Mobile technology provides a solution for both. It is here to stay and allows employers and employees alike to connect, share and engage.



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