

Talk of the Office



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Communication matters

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DELIVERING a message across to all the employees in an office is a lot like trying to control kids in a classroom: some will hear; some will listen but will misunderstand at the end. And some will close the eyes to the message when all is said and done, and will later complain: "I didn't get it," or "Nobody told me."

Effective corporate communication involves at first the message itself, and then the medium that carries and delivers it. These two components of a communication dictate whether the employees will get and understand it. Most corporate communications will be able to grab the attention of an employee for no more than a few seconds, if at all. It is within that very thin window of opportunity that they will think and decide whether to read the message or just toss it aside.

Nowadays, employees process more information than ever before -- information dealing with their projects, their clients, their industry, their markets, as a whole. With all this information competing for the employees' attention, it is hard for a single corporate communication to stand a chance of making it through.

So, organisations have struggled for years to find the best and suitable way to get company communications to their employees. Such communications can vary from notices of service interruptions to announcements of

corporate events or media briefings. Communication is often a two-way street: it needs a sender and a receiver. If no one is paying heed, or you fail to grab the attention, there is no point of communications and you are just a crazy person talking to yourself.

The way a corporate organisation, body, or institute communicates with all its publics is corporate communication. Publics are both internal such as employees and stakeholders (share and stock holders) and external such as agencies, channel partners, media, government, industry bodies and institutes, educational institutes and general public.

Here a communications expert in Bangladesh comes up with his advices and insights.

Corporate communication communicates and ensures the consistency of relevant messages of activities taking place inside and outside of the company to all stakeholders, says Kazi Monirul Kabir, chief communications officer of Grameenphone, the leading corporate house in Bangladesh.

For effectiveness of any communication, Kabir says knowing the objective of communication, knowing the audience, choosing the relevant message and media are the primary elements.

However, effective corporate communication relies on much more.

Kabir stresses transparency for effective communication. This means being straightforward, informative and honest in all communications.

Also, the most effective communications at a corporate level will be well-structured, meaning the message will be organised and presented in an easy-to-understand fashion.

Energy is another key factor, according to the chief communicator of Grameenphone. Effective corporate communication will take on a sense of energy and urgency: the messages presented will convey a sense of importance and give the recipient a reason to take the information seriously, he says.

Frequency in communication strikes a working balance when it comes to frequency of messages. "On one hand, too little communication can lead to confusion and frustration.



AMRAN HOSSAIN

A woman communicates with customers at a Grameenphone Centre in Dhaka.

On the other hand, too much communication can be irritating and produce apathy," says the Grameenphone official.

And it is important that corporate communications maintain a professional tone.

Such communication helps companies shape and mould corporate presence, identity and reputation in the minds of customers, important stakeholders and other audiences, Kabir says.

The most important thing is anyone involved with corporate communications needs to know the recipients' habits and behaviours before deciding on the types of message and medium. It will not make sense if one uses technology-based communications with a receiver who is not tech-savvy; or to post an important message or announcement on their intranet when most people of the targeted group are used to relying solely on notice boards. An understanding of the target group will help decide on the best ways to use to get the message across.

And so communicating with hundreds, if not thousands, of staff mem-

bers within an organisation or among the stakeholders and clients is no small task. This challenge is further stiff in organisations that have a global presence, where corporate head office is in charge for delivering the same message to satellite offices in dispersed locations. So it is not enough to just create the message.

An organisation has to deliver the same message to all of its stakeholders, in order to maintain consistency, trustworthiness and ethic. If one of these points is missing or broken, the entire community can make the organisation dip into crisis. Corporate communication helps the organisation generate its message, combining its vision, mission and values, and will also support the organisation by communicating its message, activities and practices to all of its stakeholders.

So Kabir says it is important for an organisation to invest in corporate communication initiatives to perpetuate its long-term corporate image and brand identity, as corporate communication is often a key strategic enabler in today's highly competitive and information-driven business

environment.

"Sensible, thoughtful, consistent and well-articulated communication messages reinforce a positive image about a professionally run, well-managed enterprise or business."

About the mindset of a successful communications team, Kabir says focusing on the objective of communication is an essential element for success.

Great flexibility and adaptability are required for the communication team to act swiftly for which a good understanding of the competitive and external landscape along with industry knowledge is crucial, he says.

Kabir distinguishes between corporate communication and that in other traditional office or division.

"In Grameenphone, corporate communication is a separate function within the communications division of our company."

It closely works with investor relations, employee communication, government relations, corporate advertising, public relations and media relations, he says.

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AMRAN HOSSAIN

Focusing on the objective of communication is an essential element for success.

Take care of your email

STAR BUSINESS DESK

MANY companies have still not realised how important their email communications are. They send email replies late or not at all, or send replies that do not actually answer the questions you asked. If your company is able to deal professionally with email, this will provide your company with that all important competitive edge. Moreover by educating employees as to what can and cannot be said in an email, you can protect your company from awkward liability issues.

By requiring employees to use appropriate, businesslike language in all electronic communications, employers can limit their liability risks and improve the overall effectiveness. A company needs to implement etiquette rules for the following three reasons:

Professionalism: by using proper email language your company will convey a professional image.

Efficiency: emails that get to the point are much more effective than poorly worded emails.

Protection from liability: employee awareness of email risks will protect your company from costly law suits.

So following are the things to do.

Be concise and to the point: Do not make an email longer than it needs to be. Remember that reading an email is harder than reading printed communications and a long email can be very discouraging to read.

Answer all questions, and pre-empt further questions: An email reply must answer all questions, and pre-empt further questions. If you do not answer all the questions in the original email, you will receive further emails regarding the unanswered questions, which will not only waste your time and your customer's time but also cause considerable frustration. Moreover, if you are able to pre-empt relevant questions, your customer will be grateful and impressed with your efficient and thoughtful customer service.

Use proper spelling, grammar and punctuation: This is not only important because improper spelling, grammar and punctuation give a bad impression of your company, it is also important for conveying the message properly. E-mails with no full stops or commas are difficult to read and can sometimes even change the meaning of the text.

Make it personal: Not only should the email be personally addressed, it should also include personal i.e. customised content. For this reason, auto replies are usually not very effective. However, templates can be used effectively in this way.

Use templates for frequently used responses: Some questions you get over and over again, such as price of a particular product, or directions to your office or how to subscribe to your upcoming product. Save these texts as response templates and paste these into your message when you need them.

Answer swiftly: Customers send an email because they wish to receive a quick response. If they did not want a quick response they would send a letter or a fax. Therefore, each email should be replied to within at least 24 hours, and preferably within the same working day. If the email is complicated, just send an email back saying that you have received it and that you will get back to them. This will put the customer's mind at rest and usually customers will then be very patient.

Do not write in CAPITALS: IF YOU WRITE IN CAPITALS IT SEEMS AS IF YOU ARE SHOUTING. This can be highly annoying and might trigger an unwanted response in the form of a flame mail. Therefore, try not to send any email text in capitals.

Take care with abbreviations and emoticons: In business emails, try not to use abbreviations such as BTW (by the way) and LOL (laugh out loud). The recipient might not be aware of the meanings of the abbreviations and in business emails these are generally not appropriate. The same goes for emoticons, such as the smiley :-). If you are not sure whether your recipient knows what it means, it is better not to use it.

Do not use email to discuss confidential information: Sending an email is like sending a postcard. If you don't want your email



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to be displayed on a bulletin board, don't send it. Moreover, never make any libelous, sexist or racially discriminating comments in emails, even if they are meant to be a joke.

Use a meaningful subject: Try to use a subject that is meaningful to the recipient as well as yourself. For instance, when you send an email to a company requesting information about a product, it is better to mention the actual name of the product.

Use active instead of passive: Try to use the active voice of a verb wherever possible. For instance, 'We will process your order today', sounds better than 'Your order will be processed today'.

With details from www.emailreplies.com

Do not make an email longer than it needs to be. Remember that reading an email is harder than reading printed communications and a long email can be very discouraging to read