

Oak Engage's state of IC report

Answering the key questions around internal comms objectives, trends, best practices and potential challenges, with expert insights.



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Welcome from our CEO

Effective internal communication within an organisation is essential. It has been proven to enhance productivity, drive efficiency and provide a better place to work for employees.

With huge changes in how we work in recent years, businesses have had to adapt their practices to help better support their employees and how they communicate and engage with them.

Since the pandemic turned a lot of reliance onto internal comms through 2020 and beyond, the role of the internal communicator has become a lot more complex.

That's why we've created our state of IC 2023 report. We wanted to study the sector, combining a survey with insights from industry experts to understand the priorities and challenges that arise within the internal comms industry, along with recommendations to help you succeed in your role as strategic advisors.

We want to be an expert voice and guide you towards making sure your internal comms strategy is the best it can be. We also want to advise you on how the ways of working are still changing and how you can keep your colleagues motivated and engaged.

We hope you enjoy.



Will Murray
CEO, Oak Engage

Key findings from the research

We conducted a survey of over 200 internal communication professionals. Here are some key statistics from the survey that will form the basis of this report.

Top priorities were around effective messaging:

- 1 Getting the right message to the right people at the right time
- 2 Improving the actionability of messages
- 3 Making sure the message is impactful

Biggest communications challenges:

- 1 People failing to act upon messages they receive
- 2 Employees are not contactable or reachable
- 3 Lack of an accurate and segmented audience list

Biggest roadblocks for communicators:

- 1 Lack of buy-in from C-level
- 2 Misaligned agendas across departments
- 3 Technology not fit for purpose

Top characteristics of poor internal communications:

- 1 Low morale/high staff attrition
- 2 Declining productivity
- 3 Lack of motivation

46% of internal communicators believe that poor internal communication causes staff attrition. This shows just how vital a well thought out internal comms strategy is.

It also highlights that communicators are aware of the impact poor communication can have on business. This correlates with the fact that their immediate priority is delivering messaging that engages and resonates with employees.

This report will delve a little deeper and give practical tips and advice on how we can minimise these negative characteristics and improve internal communication within your business for the future.

Priorities for internal communicators

We asked internal communicators: ***What are your internal communication goals and objectives?***

- 1 Getting the right message to the right people at the right time
- 2 Improving the actionability of messages
- 3 Making sure the message is impactful
- 4 Demonstrate the impact of communications to the wider business
- 5 Understanding the effectiveness of the communications we send
- 6 Getting people to actively engage with the content
- 7 Facilitating and enabling corporate change and transformation
- 8 Ensuring the message delivered is readable & uses the right tone

Our survey revealed that communicators' top priority is getting the right message to the right people at the right time.

The proliferation of communication methods means that employees are inundated with irrelevant and inconsistent messages. This results in noisy internal communications, causing confusion and frustration.

This also makes it a huge challenge for internal communicators to cut through and reduce the noise. New and better technologies need to be taken advantage of to combat this issue.

Improving the actionability of messages was second most important to communicators and third most important was making sure the message is impactful.

Your role as a storyteller means you have the ability to take what's currently going on in the company and tell the story through the lens of what matters most, making that narrative more meaningful as a result.

We've created a guide on [internal storytelling](#) so you can apply it within your organisation.



Issues for internal communicators

We asked internal communicators: ***Indicate your three most immediate priorities from these common issues.***

1 Lack of an accurate and appropriately segmented audience list

2 People failing to act upon the messages they receive

3 Problems supporting different audience demographics

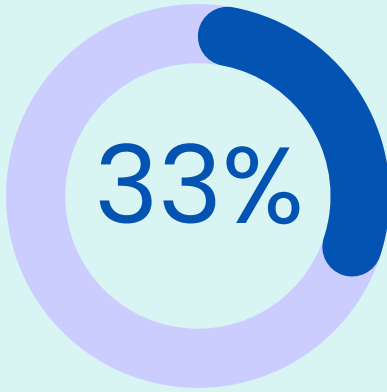
4 Employees are not contactable or unreachable (disconnected)

5 People require access to multiple systems to get what is needed

6 Contradictory messages that confuse colleagues

7 Messages failing to arrive or be delivered

8 Message dilution or corruption as it trickles down or cascades



Our survey revealed that a lack of an accurate and appropriately segmented audience list was the biggest challenge communicators need to address.

It is essential to understand the intended audience for each communication. It's necessary to find out what your audience cares about and what is relevant to them, so you can ensure the message resonates with each of them.

This correlates with the focus on creating and delivering engaging messaging. Internal communicators recognise that targeted messaging is key to engagement, but how can they achieve this?

Personalised news reduces the noise and ensure your people receive the most relevant content on their favourite channels to maximise engagement and keep your whole business aligned.

People failing to act upon the messages they receive was the second most immediate priority. Organisations need to be more strategic in their approach to communicating with their people.

Just because the content has been sent to the right people on time, you cannot assume that they will act on it. In order to really change their perceptions or actions, you need to understand their current mindset and plan how to appeal or adapt to engage with them.

Top blockers for internal communicators

We asked internal communicators: **Indicate the three most significant to your experience from these commonly reported blockers.**

Lack of awareness about the value of IC at an executive level



2.58

Misaligned agendas across departments

2.08

Technology not fit for purpose

2.04

Poor people manager communication skills

2.02

Lack of resource and/or budget

2.02

No seat at the table

1.94

Gaining acceptance that an IC strategy is necessary

1.92

Lack of analytics

1.86

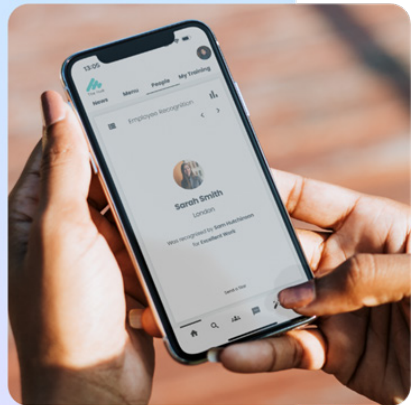
Trying to use comms as the answer to every problem

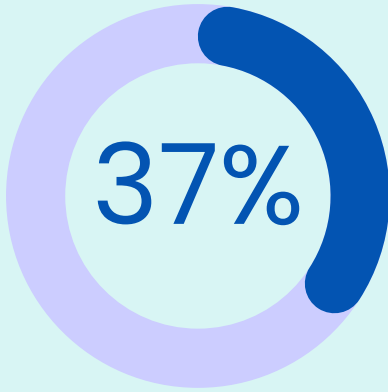
1.79

Lack of visibility into shadow/rogue comms channels

1.74

****A weighted average was calculated from the respondents' choices to determine a ranking order.***





37% of internal communicators surveyed believe their top blocker is lack of awareness about the value of internal comms at an executive level.

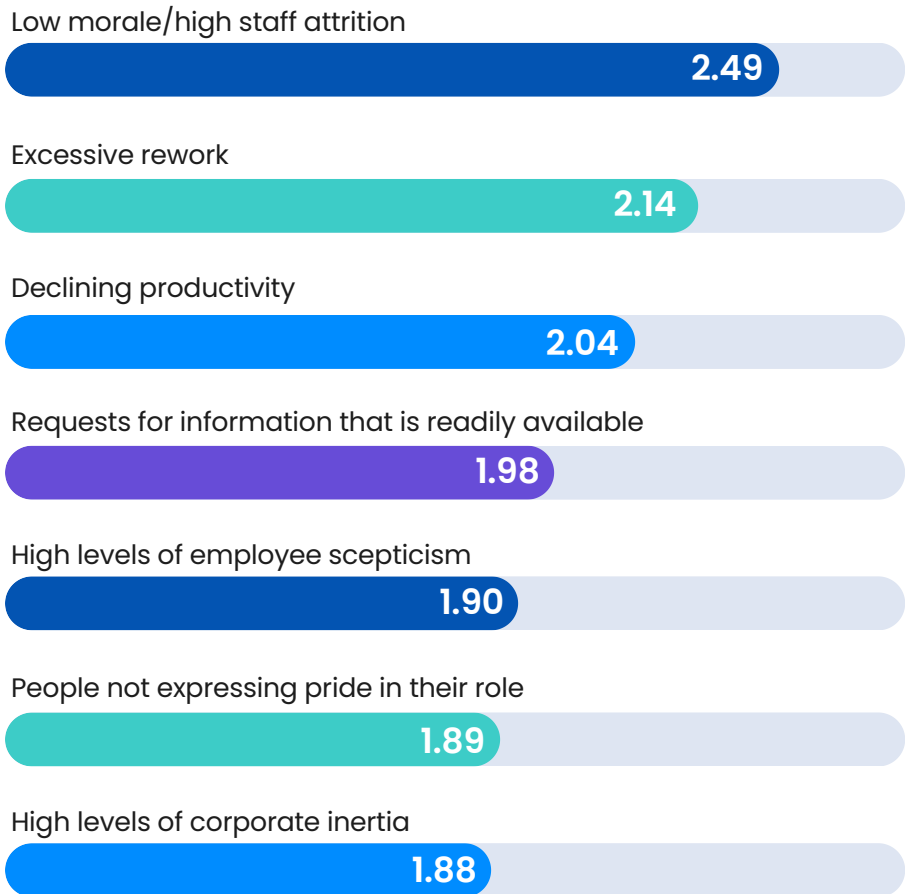
To get senior stakeholder buy-in, you need to have the confidence to influence others, demonstrate your expertise and build trust as a strategic advisor. Advise your leaders and stakeholders when something hasn't worked; It's about being open and honest, giving constructive feedback and the tools to be better communicators.

The second most significant blocker is misaligned agendas across departments. Managing and prioritising demanding stakeholders across different departments can be extremely difficult when they all think their content is the most urgent. Instead of catering to the teams that make the most noise and in order to not overwhelm employees with irrelevant information, a more strategic approach needs to be adopted.

The third most significant blocker is that technology is not fit for purpose while stakeholders think they already have the tools that they need. This is a worrying statistic and businesses need to start embracing new technologies in order to connect with their people, especially in the age of remote and hybrid working.

The impact of poor internal communicators

We asked internal communicators: **Highlight your top three characteristics of poor internal comms from the following list of behaviours.**



Failure to routinely position up-sell and cross-sell options to clients

1.86

People disengaging or not participating in meetings, surveys, events

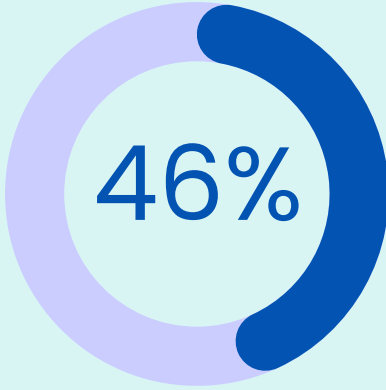
1.83

Lack of a sense of belonging within the business

1.71

****A weighted average was calculated from the respondents' choices to determine a ranking order.***





The survey revealed that **46% of communicators believe that poor internal communication relates to staff attrition.**

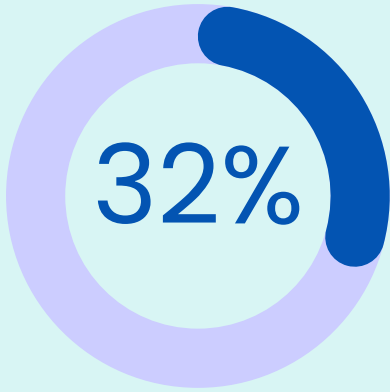
Replacing people is expensive.

The typical cost for back-filling someone leaving the business can be up to 70% of their annual salary. Lowering staff turnover eliminates recruitment costs, avoids training and mitigates the impact of leaver-related disruption and knowledge loss.

Retaining staff has become a huge issue over recent years and with hiring and training costs surging and employees quitting jobs amongst the “Great Resignation”, employers need to be doing more to create a culture that fosters employee engagement and appreciation.

Over a third (36%) of communicators believe that poor internal communication contributes to excessive rework and wasted time due to miscommunication.

If people don't have access to the information they need to carry out their roles effectively, it will lead to duplication and poor productivity.



Declining productivity and employee reluctance to “go above and beyond” was the third most likely to indicate an underlying comms problem according to internal communicators.

If you're not listening to employee feedback, showing appreciation and involving them in the conversation, then they're going to disengage and be reluctant to “go above and beyond” the realms of their job description in their day-to-day work.

23% of communicators also agreed that people asking for information that is readily available was also a key issue.

If this is happening within your organisation, you need to be asking why. Your people should have everything available at their fingertips if they are to carry out their roles effectively.

Our survey also revealed that 65% of informational requests could be addressed by employees accessing a self-service portal or knowledge repository.

This will not only ensure that employees have access to everything they need to do their jobs, but save effort, time and money.

Internal communication best practices

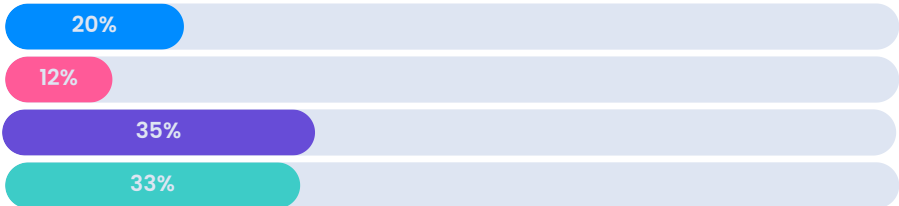
We asked internal communicators: **What best practices have you already implemented, plan to implement, anticipate implementing or have no plans to implement?**



Use of operational hooks to make the portal a must visit destination



Creating "content sandwiches" to drive readership

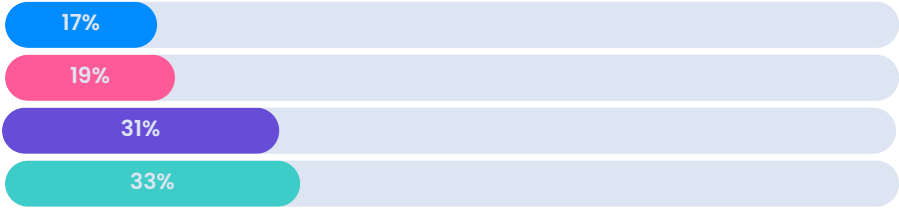


Soliciting employee created content





Syndication of externally created content to support core themes



Use of professional copywriters and editors to refine content



Leveraging workplace psychologists in the campaign design phase



Gamification models to drive engagement and repeat visits

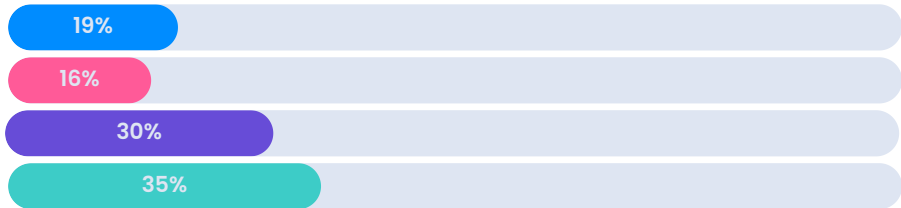




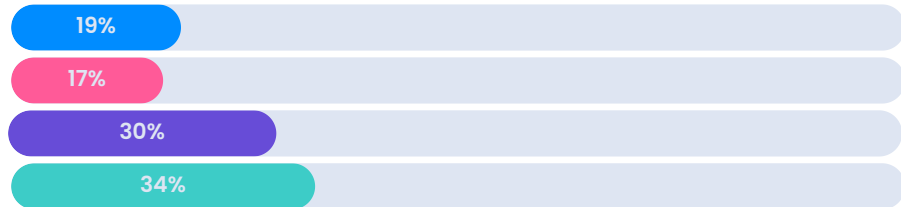
A/B testing to help improve resonance and impact



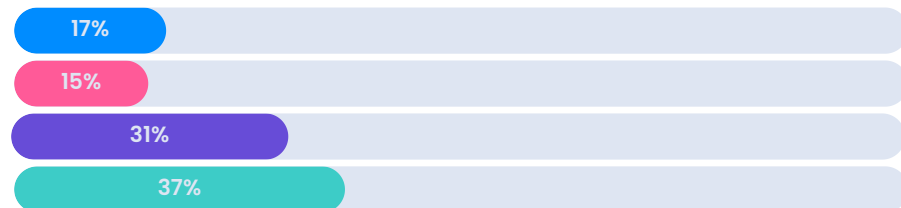
Focus groups to test how messages may be received or interpreted



AI messaging analysis to prevent inherent bias, ambiguity, etc.



Greater emphasis on employee recognition for deskless colleagues





Implementation of an employee reward scheme with campaigns



Over the next 12 months, the three main internal comms practices that communicators plan to implement are linked to content curation.

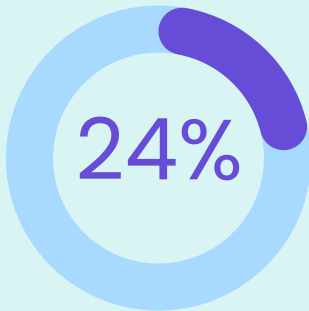
In the next 12-24 months, this transpires to AI analysis, demonstrating that many IC leaders see AI as the medium-term future of the profession.

However, with employees constantly being bombarded with irrelevant and inconsistent messaging, businesses need to look to new technologies now if they are going to make their messaging impactful and engaging.

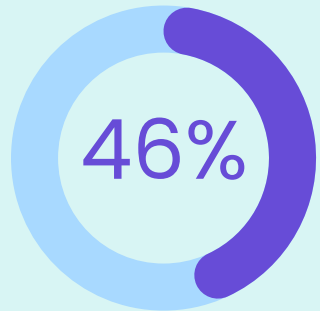
Oak Engage's [smart feed](#) reduces noise by personalising and prioritising feeds for every employee across channels and audiences.

Internal communication best practices

We asked internal communicators: **How long before a change implementation would you start communicating with those affected?**



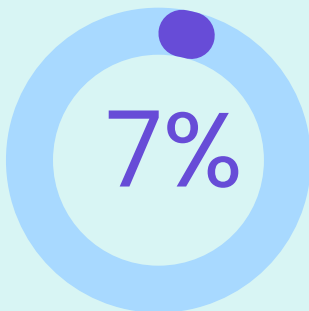
1 month



1-3 months



3-6 months



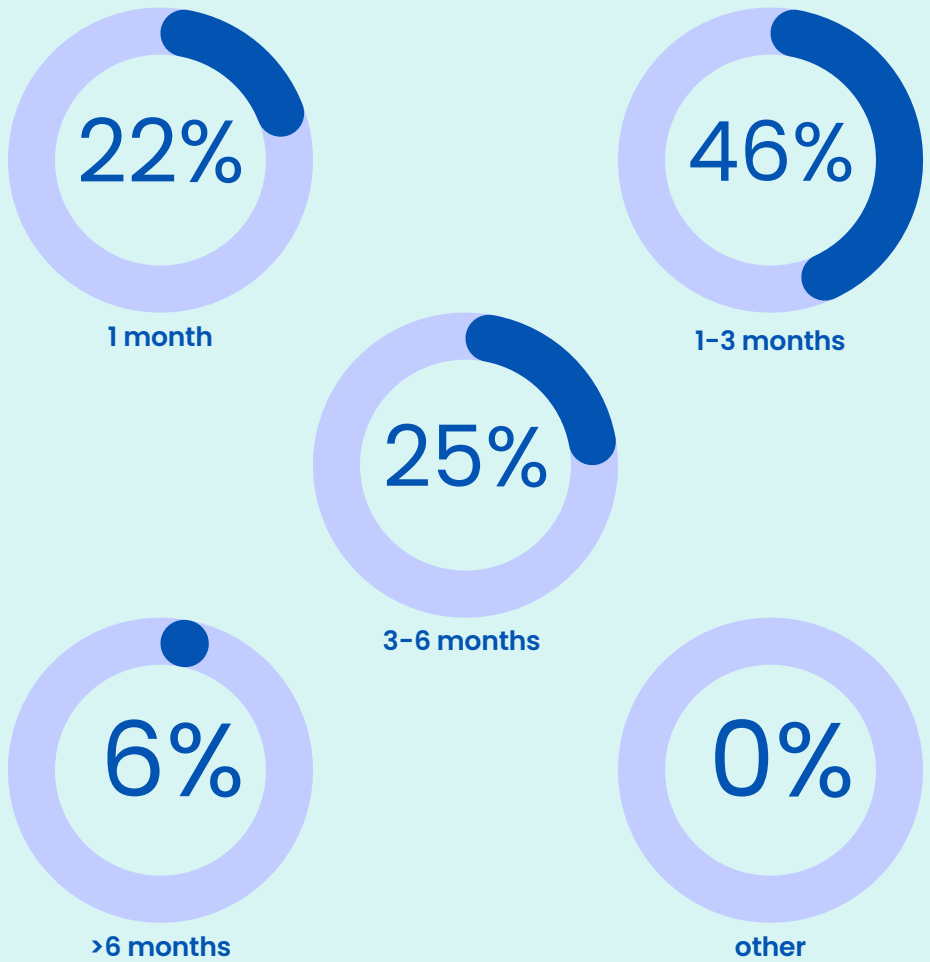
>6 months



other

The majority of respondents (46%) would start communicating a change to those affected 1-3 months before the change implementation and only 20% would contact employees 3-6 months before.

We also asked internal communicators: **For how long after a significant change do you continue to send messages to support and reinforce adoption and influence behavioural change?**



The survey revealed that nearly half (46%) will continue to send messages to support employees just 1-3 months after a significant change within the business.

However long it takes, you need to reinforce the message until it sticks.

Employees should feel heard and understood. Try methods like face-to-face meetings or Q&A sessions in addition to your digital comms to help in make your employees feel like they have been listened to and supported.

Oak gives you the tools to support your colleagues through change, reinforce the message so it sticks and also help make it easier to create a culture of inclusivity, recognition and positivity.

Making employees feel appreciated during a period of change will remind them that they are valued and help to retain positivity around it. Values play an important role here, make sure to align the communication with your company values, which will help employees adapt to the change.

Our recommendations

Create a culture of openness and recognition

Our survey revealed that 46% of communicators believe that poor internal communication relates to staff attrition.

This highlights the importance of internal communication and the consequences of getting it wrong. Fostering a culture of recognition will remind employees that you're part of one team that is encouraged to collaborate and support one another.

This will also create a safe space for employees to come forward and communicate any issues they may have. If people feel safe they're more likely to bring their whole self to work. And when people bring their whole selves to work, they perform better, which has a knock-on positive impact on productivity.

"Most important for a successful communication system is for leadership to hear from and listen to employees about their concerns and needs relative to their work. Employee communication platforms are a helpful tool to foster these conversations."

Suzanne Benoit,
Sociologist & HR consultant



“Every single one of us has both mental as well as physical health needs. The only difference is that physical health needs are often more obvious so it’s important for employers to create a culture where employees feel able to seek support when they need to. Business leaders and people managers play a key role in ensuring they create working environments where employees feel ‘safe’ to raise any issues. A healthy workplace culture of openness, transparency and good communication from the top down helps to create safe working environments.”

Lisa Seagroatt,
Workplace Culture Expert, Lecturer & Author



“Recognition is a key motivator and provides people with a sense of accomplishment. Appreciation makes employees feel more confident and improves productivity, a simple thank you goes a long way. Initiatives such as days without meetings and mental health days also play a huge part in creating a positive working environment. We offer ‘Oak bank holidays’ on top of the usual holiday allowance to ensure employees are getting the rest they deserve.”

Will Murray
CEO at Oak Engage



Understand your audience

Our survey revealed that a lack of an accurate and appropriately segmented audience list was the biggest challenge communicators need to address.

It is essential to understand who the intended audience is and who you're communicating with. It's necessary to also find out what your audience cares about, so you can ensure the message resonates with each of them.

Putting your audience first is key. We've created an [internal audience persona template](#) to get you started.

[Pulse surveys and polls](#) will enable you to better understand your audiences, providing the ability to create messaging that will really resonate with people based on actual evidence. Different audiences will need different channels. Planning and creating a strategy will allow you to think about each audience and their needs. What do you want each audience to know, feel and do as a result of your internal communications?

If you have too many channels or channels that are unsuitable for your audiences, your people will feel overwhelmed and miss out on company news.

Influence your stakeholders

The top 3 blockers for internal communicators are linked to senior level buy-in, misaligned agendas and stakeholders thinking current technology is fit for purpose.

Clearly the main obstacle for communicators are attitudes. Attitudes need to be changed at the top before you can effectively influence attitudes across the business.

As a communicator you need to be able to have influence over and prioritise your stakeholders. But what makes a good influencer?

Be prepared and plan

It's no good turning up to a meeting with senior stakeholders unprepared. Take time beforehand to make a plan and write notes. Use a stakeholder map and a SWOT analysis to help you.

Know your audience and stay authentic

As a communications professional, it's all about your audience. Think about the outcome first and what you want them to know, feel and do. Then you can work out the appropriate messaging for people of different communication styles. Start a meeting five minutes early to build rapport and get to know their personalities.

Don't be afraid to challenge

It might seem scary but be brave. You need to demonstrate your expertise and build trust as a strategic advisor. Advise your leaders and stakeholders when something hasn't worked, be open and honest and give them constructive feedback and the tools to be better communicators.

[Havebury Housing Partnership](#) uses Oak for their intranet, 'The Hive'.

The Hive is the organisation's primary internal communications platform. It is used to share all news, conduct consultations and focus groups and encourage communication and engagement across all business areas. Developing an intranet formed a key element of their communication strategy.

Communications Manager, Hayley Lambert explains that proactive communications are now firmly on everyone's radar, starting with their Leadership team:

"Communication is more streamlined and integrated. There is a comms place at the beginning of every project plan. The strategy is continuously evolving in collaboration with the leadership team."

"The message is that we all play a part in the wider organisation, and to let us know if you have news or information. I used to stumble across things but now we get so many people coming to us who didn't before, and all managers bring communication up in meetings - they know when to bring us into the plan. It makes our life - and their life - so much easier."

"We launched 'The Hive' in September last year, and it has been well received by the organisation. We look forward to testing the capabilities of Oak's product to improve our internal communications culture."

Hayley Lambert
Comms Manager
Havebury Homes



When it comes to getting buy-in from senior stakeholders, we have created an [intranet ROI and business case guide](#) which gives you a clear action plan and the steps you need to take to demonstrate the value of investing in effective internal communication.

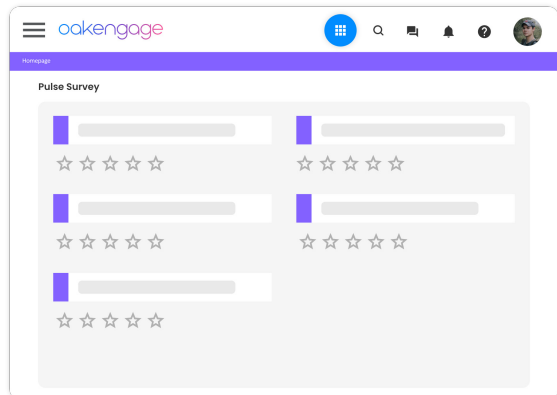
Measure your success

A huge challenge that the report highlights is the lack of awareness of the benefit and value of internal communication at C-level. Another focus of internal communications professionals is to demonstrate the impact and value of communications to the wider business.

Measurement is a common problem throughout the internal comms industry. But what does success look like? This needs to link back to your objectives. It's so important to measure success and demonstrate the value back to the organisation.

Some examples can include:

- Adoption rates
- Employee satisfaction
- Staff retention
- Pulse surveys
- Sign ups



“Your company is measured on the basis of business performance, so look at how IC directly or measurably – even if indirectly – affects business performance. I recommend including these two questions in your survey. What are the top three priorities facing the organisation? What are the three things you’re working on? Think about what you want people to do – and find out how often that shows up in what people are saying.”

Mike Klein
Internal Comms Strategist



You can measure the success of campaigns with Oak’s in-depth analytics. Our analytics provide insights on how audiences are reached and will collectively measure the success and reach of campaigns so that a meaningful story can be crafted from the results and feedback.

Embrace technology

It’s clear from the report that communicators need to take more advantage of new technologies. 22% of communicators believe that either the technology they have is not fit for purpose or that their stakeholders think they already have the tools they need.

This is worrying. Businesses need to start embracing technology in order to connect with their people, especially in the age of remote and hybrid working environments.

"Our report shows that 22% of internal communicators believe that the technology that they have at their fingertips is currently not fit for purpose. This is a worrying statistic and we believe that intranets should be working a whole lot harder for them."

"Oak Engage can empower businesses to reach every employee, every time by using personalised news which will stop your employees being overloaded with irrelevant information and boost employee engagement. Today's teams need a new way to communicate that reduces noise and this is what we're focused on."

Will Murray
CEO at Oak Engage



Our state-of-the-art technology is revolutionising workplaces and enables you to get the right message to the right people at the right time. This means you don't have to worry about all of the channels on your channels matrix and you can focus your already limited resources on the things that truly matter.

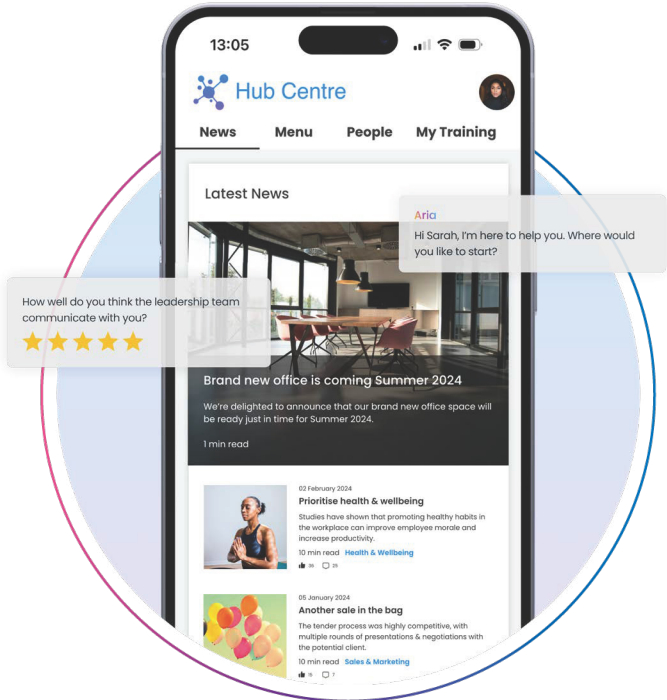
Making the message compelling, thinking about your audiences, how it will be relevant, and the priority. Oak takes care of the rest and delivers messaging across your channels. Think of it as a smarter way to deliver news. It will allow you to cut through the noise and deliver the right message to the right people when it's most needed.

An award-winning employee app and intranet solution

Oak Engage empowers your teams to get the right message, to the right people, at the right time.

We're here to make communication simple. We believe there is a better way to use technology to engage employees, cut through the noise, and inspire action that puts people at the heart of organisations.

The customer is at the heart of Oak Engage, with an attentive support team on hand to help with any customer queries.



Trusted by the **world's biggest brands**



Ready to get started?

We offer a free and personalised demo service,
showcasing our intuitive and easy-to-use platform.
Tailored to meet your specific needs.

[Book a demo](#)

