

# GS Insight

A publication of Gibbs & Soell, Inc., Public Relations

Volume 11, Issue 4

## Employees: The “New” Marketing Communications Tool

Have organizations become so “customer-centric” that they’ve simply forgotten that employees can be one of the most valuable tools in the marketing communications toolbox?

Perhaps no single stakeholder has a greater impact on the success or failure of an organization than employees.

At all levels, employees are as important to the overall sales and marketing efforts as any one of the traditional “four P’s” of marketing: product, price, promotion and place. In fact, it’s the people – or fifth P – throughout your company that may very well be the most critical component of the marketing mix.

### Leverage the Power of Employees

Although often overlooked, employees serve as the company’s “eyes and ears” for corporate executives, marketing managers and others through their community participation. Depending on the product or service offering, employees very often are the key drivers of the sales and marketing process. Each individual is a potential touch point to the end customer.

While the sales force is typically perceived to be the frontline, there are many other employees in the trenches daily who are presenting the “face” of your organization. Marketing and communications professionals are responsible for identifying critical targets and programs needed for success. Customer and technical service personnel take on this role through their daily contact with customers. But the general workforce plays a pivotal role in the ongoing battle to win business regardless of their job description. Your administrative staff, receptionists, human resources, and financial team communicate with potential customers and service providers, future employees and stockholders, every day!

### Focus on the Inside

Most studies of employee communication have a common theme: when asked what they think their employees want from their jobs, managers often rank compensation and job security at the top of the list. Meanwhile, employees seek

acknowledgement for their individual performance and, critically, they want to feel like an integral part of the business. Without a close relationship to the business, how can they effectively help customers connect?

While corporate leaders are charged with devising and, ultimately, implementing a sound, strategic business plan, in today’s dynamic work environment, ensuring key messages are delivered takes a commitment from the top down.

Employees will often be the biggest cheerleaders for their organization and the key drivers of corporate information. So, what are your employees saying about your company?

In the end, the best advocates for the brand are those employees who are exposed to and understand their company’s marketing messages.

### Developing a Strategic Messaging Platform

Globally, companies spend considerable time and resources to determine needs and better understand purchasing behaviors. Using market research, database analysis, focus groups and a host of other techniques, target audiences are probed for their knowledge, with the ultimate goal of learning how best to inform consumers about your organization’s products and services. This knowledge is used to establish marketing and communications strategies, and set

## The “Inside Focus”

- Commit to using the power of your employees
- Establish a messaging strategy
- Determine the best vehicles for reaching employees
- Direct external messages toward employees
- Keep employees informed and involved



forth plans to reach targeted audiences with key messages.

Message development workshops help create and shape concise, relevant messages that support corporate and/or business-specific positioning, differentiate a company from its competitors, and articulate the unique characteristics and benefits of products and services. But corporate messaging needn't only be used externally. Consider developing a "Message Map" – a tool in which key corporate thoughts are defined and shaped for effectiveness, consistency and continuity of delivery to external audiences – for your internal community.

Helping employees understand your messages and how to convey them to customers, community leaders and other stakeholders is paramount. In the end, it empowers your employees to speak with a unified voice to position your brand, build stronger relationships and market your products.

As the consistency, clarity and personal relevance of information inside an organization improves, so too does the ability to make external messages resonate with customers. This scenario holds true for companies ranging from Fortune 500 corporations to entrepreneurial start-ups, and it spans from industrial sectors to the consumer marketplace.

## Delivering the Message

Ad campaigns, PR programs, trade show efforts, interactive media and direct mail are among the many tools that marketers use. For the most part, though, their focus remains entirely external, to encourage existing customers to buy again and, of course, attract new customers. By aligning these outside programs with internal communications, employees become better equipped to understand how they personally support the business


strategy and can drive your messages home to all external audiences.

While nearly every company claims that its employees are its greatest assets, many continue to struggle with how to effectively communicate with these most influential stakeholders. Some of the vehicles available to help organizations convey their marketing messages company-wide include:

- **Corporate and sales training** – From new product introductions to strategic initiatives, employees benefit from online training, product tutorials and other means of sharing knowledge.
- **Collateral materials** – Getting critical messages in front of employees can be handled through strategy documents, corporate brochures and reference guides, Q&As, print or electronic newsletters, and video.
- **Intranets** – Use the power your Intranet to provide employees with a single "warehouse" of company information.
- **Interactive media** – With global workforces and virtual offices becoming the norm, employee access to, and delivery of, information is possible through state-of-the-art distance learning programs that can include flash programs, e-mail push and CD-ROMs.
- **Event support** – Including employees in groundbreaking, sales meetings, corporate celebrations and annual meetings (from small gatherings to formal events) fosters a spirit of teamwork and gives you the chance to share key information.

## Now More Than Ever

In the wake of the WorldCom, Enron and Tyco scandals, maintaining an

open line of communication with employees has never been more critical. However, using that open line to deliver the right message is what counts. After the commercials have aired, editorials run and leads counted, it's the people around you who will live, breathe and convey your brand message to external audiences. Integrating employees into the main marketing mix ensures that they are well versed on your key messages and key contributors to business success. 

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