

# How a Pizza Store Chain Slices Its Internal Communications Pie

Many people think of communication as a simple process, merely a series of statements and responses. They probably have never tried reaching hundreds or thousands of people. Such communication can grow cumbersome and complex.

As a corporate communicator, I find it helpful to remind myself that no matter what I'm doing, at the root of it I am having a conversation with my coworkers. I also try to remember that we're just people having a discussion.

Corporate conversations can mold internal culture. That's because in addition to exchanging information or news, conversation can create a connection between people. In managing communication for home-office employees and a network of franchisees in Michigan, Ohio, Florida, North Carolina and China, I've tracked my most successful efforts back to the following core strategies.

## REMAIN CONSISTENT

Arguably, being consistent with communication is essential in any industry. I have found it's critical to have a system that is predictable and reliable, particularly for our franchise network. Both our franchise and corporate communities depend on consistency for updates on things such as product information, marketing, sales achievements, events and growth.

When communicating updates, we make sure messaging and accessibility are consistent. This is done by sharing them on all our communications channels: email, a newsletter, a public calendar and an internal website.

For more routine communication, I prefer a monthly newsletter. 8-12 pages, it's emailed, uploaded to the internal website and printed; our delivery trucks bring it to franchisees.

The newsletter provides a platform for all corporate-office departments to display key news while offering our stores a dependable resource. Content of the newsletter changes with current events and franchise growth, but I try to stick to a consistent list of topics and features, including: a summary of our weekly PR updates, a franchise spotlight, marketing news, product development and updates, sales rankings, technology, philanthropic initiatives, customer-service tips and developments about new stores.

It's also vital to provide stakeholders with a way to share news. We have found this helps keep them involved with our brand. We make all of the communication platforms available to our stakeholders. I have found, though, that email generally is the most effective form of communication as most members of our team are constantly connected through either their computers or mobile devices.

I mentioned above the internal portal. It's called the *InnSider* and offers users immediate blog updates and an easily accessible database of information necessary to run a successful

Cottage Inn. It's set up similar to a digital newsletter and can be accessed on any internet-enabled device. On the *InnSider*, users can find product updates, ordering forms, operation and procedure standards, newsletters, press coverage and apparel.

## BE PERSISTENT

Internal communication stakeholders often are pulled in several directions and are busy with their daily roles and responsibilities. In our network, many franchise owners are not only proprietors of a franchise, but also its day-to-day operators. It's fairly common for franchisees to be unable to attend company-wide events as they are busy at their locations. In those cases it's the communicator's role to persevere and keep franchisees included. We do so by sending full event recaps, including photos and shout-outs to our award or raffle winners as part of the monthly newsletter.

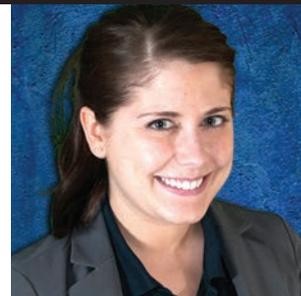
Often it is up to communications to make sure our stores are reminded of events, deadlines and other important information. While I make sure to do so with respect to their busy schedule, I stay persistent and clear on how the shared information is beneficial. The amount of detail I share with stakeholders largely depends on the information that I'm sharing and what platform I'm using. When communicating time-sensitive information or posting a blog update, it's often brief. A company-wide email will include more detail.

## KEEP THEM IN THE LOOP

My primary goal in communicating across an internal network is to keep everyone in the loop as much as possible. In some industries, that might mean making sure a CEO's message is effectively shared, or ensuring big news is disseminated internally before it goes public. In our case, it means keeping franchisees up to date on corporate happenings, such as grand openings, sales achievements and records, press coverage, philanthropic initiatives or product changes.

Our corporate office shares a building with our product warehouse, which gives us the opportunity to receive real-time product updates. For example, when a new product reaches our warehouse it is communications' responsibility to make sure that news is distributed with speed and accuracy to the field. We work directly with warehouse management by meeting often and communicating frequently. We want to make sure all stores are given the exact same information. Our franchised stores sometimes are located states away, so this communication is vital. ■

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**Uphill/Downhill:** A page from Cottage Inn Pizza's internal newsletter shows a lucky franchisee skiing in for high sales.