



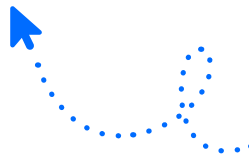
4 Effective Strategies for Communicating with **Frontline Workers**

Discover proven methods for
reaching manufacturing workers



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Introduction

The manufacturing sector is a unique and challenging environment for the internal communicator. During the industrial transformation triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic, it became abundantly clear that global manufacturing is powered by the frontline workforce. We don't need to tell you that communicating effectively with these employees is difficult. Individually and collectively, they are notoriously hard to reach. In a recent survey by [the Manufacturing Media Consortium](#), **more than four out of five (82%) of manufacturing leaders cited “speaking to their employees” as one of their biggest challenges.**

Manufacturing workers also complain about their difficulties in reaching their supervisors and senior management with questions and concerns. 85% of frontline workers report that the communication they receive while on the job is insufficient. [Furthermore, in the US, a recent Gallup report found that only 25% of workers in manufacturing say they feel engaged at work — a degree of employee engagement that is significantly lower than in any other sector of the US economy.](#) Similar patterns of low engagement can be found in manufacturing across the UK and Europe.





The problems created by poor communication and low employee engagement within manufacturing are particularly severe with regards to skilled workers. It goes without saying that losing skilled workers is both disruptive and costly for most manufacturing firms. According to a recent study by Deloitte, 75% of US manufacturing firms reported a “moderate to severe shortage of skilled workers.” By 2028, this skills gap is anticipated to leave 2.5 million manufacturing jobs unfilled.

It is therefore imperative that internal communicators within the manufacturing sector develop sound communications strategies designed to keep employees engaged and informed. For many non-desk workers, especially those within manufacturing (engineers, technicians, operators, inspectors, line workers, and so on) email is a virtually non-existent channel for communication. In many organizations, the main ways that management communicates with frontline employees is through posters, bulletin boards, and company magazines. These means of communication are outdated and ineffective as they rely on employees being in the right place at the right time in order to see them. This often leads to miscommunication and confusion. Where do employees send their questions or concerns?

The success of internal communications departments is paramount to the success of the entire manufacturing enterprise.

It's no surprise that poor comms strategies can lead to toxic company culture, high employee turnover, and, consequently, lower profits.

So, what do you do?

We've created this ebook as a first step toward answering that question. We've worked with internal communicators around the globe, helping them put together strong and impactful comms strategies that speak to all employees — desk and non-desk workers alike.

We'll share four common communications challenges in reaching frontline workers, and four proven methods you can use to address them.

Staffbase works with enterprise companies around the world that have highly distributed workforces, with the aim of putting people first and bridging the gap between desk and non-desk workers, allowing you to reach everyone and keep them engaged.

We do this through a native branded app that can be downloaded onto personal smartphones and accessed through desktop, allowing your employees to engage on their own terms. **This platform acts as a “digital front-door” to your workplace and encourages two-way dialogue between management and your geographically dispersed workforce while delivering the first employee experience intranet for everyone.**

But enough about us, we're here to help you.

So, without further ado, read on for four examples of how Staffbase clients have implemented strategies that address common internal communications challenges.



PROBLEM 1

Failure to Reach Frontline Workers

How to unify your message and engage your dispersed workforce with a common purpose

Manufacturing is all about production. But fully efficient production is impossible if your internal communications strategy can't reach all of your workers, like those on the factory floor or dispersed at multiple locations. In order to do their best work, manufacturing and frontline employees need specific, relevant information that caters to their day-to-day circumstances.

In largely dispersed companies, face-to-face communication isn't always possible, and email often lacks the immediacy needed when broadcasting crucial topics. Static or analog channels like signage or company newsletters are no longer up to the task of efficient communication in an ever-changing work environment.

Adding to these obstacles is the inability of companies to connect with their frontline workers in their native languages.

Fortunately, the negative impacts resulting from such poor communication to frontline workers are finally being recognized and addressed. [The McKinsey Global Institute](#) reports that companies implementing new technologies to enhance communication and keep workers better informed and connected are **raising productivity by as much as 25%**.

Overall, the increased reach enabled by digital communication results in a **marked increase in employee engagement, as more people feel a greater connection to their company's narrative and purpose.**

CASE STUDY

Geberit



Founded in 1874 in Rapperswil, Switzerland, Geberit is the European market leader for sanitary products. Today, the company employs around 12,000 employees, with 29 production plants in 50 countries. The company is a leader in its field in Europe, with a global presence through its subsidiaries.

The Challenge

The old intranet at Geberit made it difficult for communicators and key editors in the company to reach as many employees as possible. By using the intranet exclusively in the browser, employees without access to a computer were cut off from important information. This included the company's large non-desk workforce.

GEBERIT HAD THREE KEY REQUIREMENTS FOR A NEW TOOL:

1. A mobile version of the platform in the form of an app, to increase the reach to non-desk workers.
2. Intuitive operation for both users and editors.
3. An easy way for the workforce to interact (in the form of likes, comments, and participation in surveys).

The Solution

Geberit's Corporate Publisher Pierina Engelhard took up the cause of digital internal communications and, together with the communications team, introduced the new intranet, called GIN (standing for Geberit Intranet), which can also be accessed via an employee app. **After just eight months, 70% of the workforce embraced the new platform, happily participating in the dialogue it enabled.**

Filled with important information and jumping-off points to work-relevant programs, **the intranet now reaches both desk employees and non-desk workers in the production halls or in the field.** Thanks to this flexible access and the possibility of individual notifications, the intranet is also being used as a communication platform.

After just a few months using GIN, communication behavior in the company saw a dramatic transformation. Says Ms. Engelhard, **"We have important content for our workforce which we can now present clearly and in a way that's easy to find. That's a big added value for us compared to our old channels."**

GIN enables communication in over 30 management systems, allowing content to be published simultaneously. In this way, internal communication achieves significantly greater reach in the workforce without the additional effort of using additional communication tools.

Furthermore, automatic translation allows readers to see relevant content in their local language. This important feature now makes the intranet a place where everyone feels welcome. In just eight months, more than 70% of colleagues registered on GIN, with over 550,000 page views, approximately 2,000 news posts, and more than 8,800 likes.



Key Takeaway

Communicators at Geberit can now make strategic and operational changes to the intranet without burdening the resources of the internal IT department. The job of communicators no longer consists solely of communicating topical news, but also sharing strategic information and goal setting objectives. And there's the added ability of monitoring and measuring their success. By analyzing comments and feedback, the needs of various stakeholders can be determined and future content can be created accordingly.

For Ms. Engelhard, there are four good reasons for the success of the front door intranet at Geberit: its ease of use, greater opportunities for decentralized editing and maintenance, a new relevance of published contributions through targeted personalization, and the ability of all employees to participate equally in company dialogue.

“Through the comment function, we communicators can now feel how the different locations tick, what the employees like, and what they think about the company. If we can hear them a little better and evaluate these comments, we can improve internal communication and tailor it even more precisely to the needs of our employees.”

— Pierina Engelhard, Corporate Publisher, Geberit

PROBLEM 2

Low employee engagement

How to turn your frontline workers into your biggest employee advocates.

Having a disengaged workforce can be detrimental to your organization for a number of reasons. The most obvious is that disengaged employees are often the first to leave.

With the average employee exit costing 33% of their annual salary, disengaged employees are costly. And not just when they leave. Without a system in place to facilitate company culture, connectivity, and engagement, employees are more likely to be absent from work and create more errors. Conversely, there is evidence that highly engaged employee teams can increase company profits by as much as 21%.

It is self-evident that having an engaged workforce increases both productivity and profitability. The challenge is finding and implementing policies and procedures that result in increased employee engagement.

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CASE STUDY

Seaboard Triumph Foods



Seaboard Triumph Foods (STF) started in 2017 with a million square foot facility in Sioux City, Iowa. Two thousand employees work at their 24-hour facility, five to six days a week. As a food manufacturing company, STF processes 20,000 hogs per day and ships 25 million pounds of pork each week!

The Challenge

With a workforce that's 80% non-desk, it's Erin Cantrell's job to create a centralized hub of information for all employees. That means reaching employees who work the same hours as the executive team and HR staff as well as those on the overnight shift running through the early morning hours.

Erin is a Communication Specialist who serves as the one-woman team responsible for STF's internal communications, social media, website, employee engagement efforts, marketing, photography, public relations, and community partnerships.

In addition to finding a way to mass-distribute internal information, creating accessible communications was a major priority for STF. **Accessibility included making information available in employees' native languages, answering questions for everyone to see, and offering a comms tool that allows flexibility of access whether employees are at work or want to check-in from home.**

The Problem of Engagement

85% of employees are not engaged or are actively disengaged at work. (Gallup) Disengagement has far-reaching business outcomes that go beyond not responding to the company survey.

Gallup also found that compared with bottom-quartile engagement companies, top quartile engagement companies have:

25–65% lower turnover

48% fewer safety incidents

22% higher profitability

21% higher productivity

The Solution

STF Connect is a branded mobile app from Staffbase, launched in 2017. Today, 56% of the STF workforce is registered in the app. Erin can craft engaging internal communications with sizable reach. When internal communicators have a tool to enable employees, communication becomes more than a megaphone for announcements. **It transforms company culture and creates positive business outcomes.**

Beyond getting critical information to the employees on the factory floor, Erin has seen an increase in engagement and productivity while observing fewer costs and employee injuries.

With the Staffbase employee communications management platform, Erin can easily measure the engagement of her employees and create strategic future internal comms plans.

Social wall features such as commenting and liking give internal communicators far more insight into employee engagement and keeps all questions about a topic — questions that employees will inevitably share — all in one place as a single source of truth.



Key Takeaway

Research shows that improved internal communication alleviates business problems and supports employee performance. Companies like Seaboard Triumph Foods are saving time and money with an internal comms solution that makes sending and receiving comms easy and efficient. Insights into the effect of internal communication on business outcomes — and the impact of an employee communications management platform on employee engagement — point to a concrete and calculable return on investment.



PROBLEM 3

Communicated Organizational Change

How an employee app can help you manage the uncertainties associated with change.

As the saying goes, “change is the only constant.” Uncertainty during periods of change, however, can have major ramifications on the economy. In the UK, you need not look further than the period following the Brexit vote. Regardless of one’s views about the merits of Brexit, there’s no question that the uncertainty about future UK relations with the EU are having substantial economic implications, as evidenced by a slower rate of economic growth, a weakening pound, and increased volatility of the London stock exchange.

Although change at the enterprise level is frequent and potentially the key to future growth and long-term sustainability, if it’s poorly managed it can lead to uncertainty and failure. **How a company manages internal change is therefore essential to the success of the business.**

Change and uncertainty can have major impacts on employee happiness and productivity. [The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work](#) reported that over half of the 550 million working days lost annually in the US from absenteeism are stress-related and that one in five of all last-minute no-shows is due to job stress.

These numbers typically climb when organizations undergo periods of change that may cause uncertainty about job security or ambiguity about changing job roles. It’s no surprise that employees who suffer work-related stress perform worse than average, with one in four employees saying they struggle to be productive at work when they feel stressed.

CASE STUDY

RHI Magnesita



RHI Magnesita is a leading supplier of refractory materials and products. They have 14,000 employees (60% of them plant workers) on four continents, 35 production sites, and they generate over 2.7 billion euros in sales annually.

Prior to 2017, the company existed as two separate entities: RHI and Magnesita. While the merger of two companies can be exciting and yield significant economic benefits, it can also be a time of great disruption and uncertainty for employees. RHI Magnesita knew that strong internal communication was imperative for enabling the success of the merger and was crucial in getting employees to embrace the change.

RHI Magnesita approached Staffbase because they believed an employee app could help facilitate communication and keep employees operating at peak performance amidst the change.

Prior to the development of their app, called MyRHIMagnesita, internal messages usually ran top-down via the company intranet. This was a problem considering that more than half the company's workforce worked in factories and lacked intranet access and/or a company email address, effectively making them unreachable.

Like in many manufacturing plants, the only way that management communicated with workers was via printed communication.

"Communication mainly traveled in one direction, which is not a good way to get started on implementing cultural change," said Stefan Rathausky, Senior Vice President of Corporate Communications at RHI Magnesita.

“We wanted more momentum, more direct communication, stronger collaboration, and more involvement on issues. An employee newspaper could no longer fulfill these requirements. An interactive tool was necessary and important.”

MyRHIMagnesita was launched as a pilot program to 350 users. Members of the works council ensured that the app complied with data protection regulations and generated the desired added value for the workforce. And frontline employees in one entire production plant in Germany tested how the app would be accepted and used.

MyRHIMagnesita went live to all 14,000 company employees on the day the merger was completed. “We wanted everyone, from Brazil to China, to know what was happening at our headquarters in Vienna, and vice versa,” said Katharina Skarabela, Team Lead Digital & Online and Head of the App Project.

To help employees get maximum value from the app, MyRHIMagnesita includes an **App Manual, available in eight languages**. There is also an “App Tips” news channel, explaining how employees can **subscribe to local news, personalize profiles, and turn push notifications on and off**.

In addition, employees can find useful information in the app, such as menus from local restaurants, press articles about RHI Magnesita, fact sheets on the company, brochures, event registration forms, surveys, quizzes, and shift schedules. They can also read or watch health and safety manuals and videos, and communicate via a chat function.

Throughout the merger, MyRHIMagnestia was one of the main drivers of cultural transformation. At its completion, the successfully merged company reported an astonishing 11% revenue growth.

The bottom line is that MyRHIMagnesita is much more than just an app. Along with its integrated desktop version, it became the central information and communication hub for the newly merged company and has since won various awards for outstanding corporate and workplace communication.



Key Takeaway

Employees don't resist change, they resist uncertainty. Driving your company through change can be difficult, but not only can thoughtful change management practices and effective communication increase profits, **it can shape and strengthen your entire company culture.**



PROBLEM 4

Targeting Health and Safety Regulations to a Global Workforce

Hardhats on! How to reduce safety-related incidents with a safety-first strategy.

Every year, [more than seven million employees in the US are injured on the job](#). This can have serious implications not just on the employees themselves, but also on the employer who has to deal with high costs and long legal battles. [The Liberty Mutual Workplace Safety Index 2021](#) shows that the top ten causes of serious, nonfatal workplace injuries amounted to \$58.61 billion in direct US workers compensation costs. This translates to more than one billion dollars per week!

Work-related accidents are often a result of poor training or onboarding processes as well as insufficient reinforcement of good practices. Improving your safety culture is an ongoing process that requires a substantial commitment on behalf of the entire company — everything from alerts

about dangerous conditions, updated protocols, and phone numbers for external agencies must be frequently updated and immediately available to all. This effort improves the safety and ultimately the efficiency of your non-desk workers.

Every year, more than 7 million employees in the US are injured on the job.

CASE STUDY

MaxMara

Max Mara Fashion Group

Max Mara Fashion Group introduced a new way of communication to enhance collaboration and engagement with its entire workforce. Max Mara Fashion Group is recognized worldwide as the precursor of modern pret-à-porter fashion. Since 1951, the group has designed, manufactured, and distributed fashion to a total of nine brands. Today, they have a network of over 2,500 brand stores and more than 5,500 employees working across the globe.

The Challenge

In April 2018, Max Mara Fashion Group developed a plan to implement a digital platform to act as a one-stop-shop for internal communications. They wanted to provide their employees with all vital job-related information in one place. It was critical to find a solution that would **enable chat and collaboration between their entire workforce regardless if they were based in Europe, the United States, or Australia.**

The new solution also needed to **host all corporate documents and policies**, such as wellbeing initiatives, health benefits, payroll, and e-learning opportunities.

Max Mara's Fashion Group HR Director says,

“The goal was to develop a supportive engagement tool enabled by all Max Mara Group collaborators from all around the world.”

The Solution

The implementation of the Staffbase app was announced to the entire Max Mara Fashion Group workforce in December 2018. The app was launched in a phased approach, with the first wave going live to all of HQ in Italy. The second wave included the entire retail network within Italy, and the last phase was launched in November 2019 to the rest of Europe, Australia, Russia, USA HQ, and all retail networks.

With 79% of the global workforce using and interacting with the app, Max Mara Fashion Group has been able to successfully engage their employees while evolving the platform and its content. 80% of the organization are monthly active users, meaning that over 3,700 employees per week are using the app.

The app is structured to provide relevant information to employees based on various criteria, including location, role, company, and brand. This means that employees only receive updates that are relevant to them. Additionally, the group has enabled over 50 editors worldwide within the company to create more than 130 targeted channels.

One of the biggest successes of Max Mara Fashion Group's MMFG People App was its ability to connect and engage their entire workforce during the pandemic. In March 2020, when Covid-19 began shutting down headquarters and retail stores, the HRM Department was able to respond immediately by providing daily information, protocols, and dedicated e-learning courses to their employees. MMFG People became Max Mara Fashion Group's single source of truth for all information about Covid-19.

The company created a dedicated "Safe&Care" page where important guidelines for employees in both the HQ and retail stores could be found. It also gave employees direct access to the "Safe&Care" team to voice their questions and concerns. **This section of the app holds resources and e-learning modules with advice on how to cope with an emergency, as well as best practices for preventing the spread of Covid-19.**

Additionally, in order to keep everyone safe, employees were required to log in at the start of each shift and sign a mandatory declaration form agreeing that they were up to date with all Covid-19 protocols. This created a safe global community with the aim of keeping all colleagues informed, helping them know whether they need to quarantine or self-isolate, and eventually creating a smart back-to-work environment.



Key Takeaway

Communicating to a workforce spread across 105 countries is a challenge for any business, especially during a crisis. The implementation of a mobile-first solution has allowed Max Mara Fashion Group to inform, engage, and align their entire workforce by providing up-to-date and relevant information. This proved especially beneficial during the Covid-19 pandemic, proving the immense value of an employee communications management platform in times of crisis.

“The most important aim of our app is to stay connected to our employees by not only communicating government and company regulations but to also engage with them.”

— HRM Director, Max Mara Fashion Group



Conclusion

Achieving effective two-way communication between management and employees has never been easy in large companies. It's particularly challenging in the manufacturing industry, with its dispersed workforce often dominated by non-desk workers spread across different locations and time zones around the world.

Nevertheless, ineffective and outdated communication strategies often remain the norm. As a consequence, employees feel isolated and unheard. At the same time, productivity and profitability suffer when management can't engage and communicate with its workforce.

Especially as millennials and members of Generation Z begin to dominate the manufacturing workforce, traditional methods and channels of internal communication are no longer adequate. This ebook draws on four examples of real firms that successfully addressed these problems. What the solutions have in common is that they each use communications technology in a way that engages an entire workforce.

Staffbase aims to create a positive, engaging, and relevant experience for all employees. With our employee communications management tools, we put people first. Get in touch to find out how we can help you create a customizable, branded, multichannel communication platform that will reinvent the way you engage with your employees.

**Want to see how Staffbase can connect
your manufacturing workforce with an
employee comms management platform?**

Book Your Personalized Demo

