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THE JOURNAL OF
INTERNAL
COMMUNICATION

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Volume 5

Becoming a listening organisation at Intel Corporation

Christy Leonhardt explains how Intel Corporation's communicators have learned to leverage segmentation techniques and internal social networking to understand and reach their employee audiences.

Intel Corporation is a multinational semiconductor manufacturing and computing corporation, with 105,000 employees all around the world. Famous for the 'Intel Inside' marketing campaign, we strive to be *"market-inspired and experience-driven"*. Our external marketing teams are experts in terms of using segmentation techniques like building consumer profiles to target specific markets for our products; our internal employee communications team, however, has run

into challenges when trying to implement similar segment-driven approaches.

Our internal communications team first attempted a segmented marketing approach in 2005. Along with most other companies, we traditionally viewed the results of our annual channel satisfaction and usage surveys through a demographic lens; this time, we tried a new approach to understand how our employees were thinking and feeling about issues. After gathering lots of attitudinal and behavioural preference data, we generated psychographic profiles of our employees based on shared characteristics, such as *"motivated road warrior"* and *"disengaged veteran"* which we never actually put to use. In retrospect, our team lacked marketing savvy... how were they

supposed to communicate to *"motivated road warriors"* without a dedicated channel to reach them? Instead, we reverted to what we did best: segmenting our employee communications by country and job role, and using channels designed to serve those segments.

Making segmentation and social media work for us, not against us.

Fast forward five years. In 2010, a new internal communications director with a marketing background came on board. By then, there was also a huge shift underway across the industry, with social media empowering people to communicate on their own and – in effect – competing with corporate messages. At Intel, we had introduced a new internal social

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networking portal called Planet Blue, which enabled employees to blog and comment. So, to ensure our continuing relevance as professional communicators, we recognized we must do a better job of *understanding* and *listening* to our employees.

We focused on understanding and listening for several reasons:

- ▶ Becoming expert listeners would allow us to develop content that really resonated with employees.
- ▶ Understanding employee preferences and needs would help us make more informed media and channel choices.

▶ Employees were complaining about the “noise” they were experiencing due to the multiple sources of information available to them. We wanted to be part of the solution, not the problem.

▶ We needed to glean insights we could turn into actions that would deliver a higher impact.

So we once again tackled segmentation. Only this time, we did it in a way that would be more approachable for our internal communicators, and more sustainable. I called it “*experience thinking*” to align with Intel’s push to be a “*market-inspired and experience-driven*” company.

Communicators as experience designers

Our internal communications department includes a mix of writers, business analysts, web designers, video producers, project managers and content publishers. Most do not have a marketing background; thinking of our audience as individuals with unique needs and preferences wasn’t second nature to them. But to be successful, every person on our team needed to see how his or her work contributed to delivering a better employee experience – whether it’s finding information more quickly online, scanning an e-mail for salient data or being able to personalise our intranet. ▶

“ Look for opportunities to listen; make good choices when you’re posting an article, such as selecting the right channel; use language that will resonate with the audience; and make sure the message is really relevant to their audience rather than just contributing to the noise. ”



In my role as Audience Insights manager, I held a series of informal training sessions where I emphasized that they were all actually *experience designers*. Regardless of their specific area of work, I showed how they contributed to the chain that resulted in an employee either being annoyed or delighted with the communications they encountered on a daily basis. This proved to be a very empowering message, even for those who were doing more tactical production work.

Then, to help our communicators implement “*experience thinking*” in their

daily work, I introduced a memorable five-step framework: Know, Listen, Think, Act, Measure.

- ▶ **Know:** to keep abreast of the latest employee demographic statistics such as job roles, length of service, work location, general age brackets. (Note: this information from HR should be pulled regularly because you may learn things that surprise you. For example, my colleagues didn’t realise that our new hires are more often in their mid-30s rather than recent college graduates as they’d assumed.)
- ▶ **Listen:** to conduct both informal listening (being present in online forums, talking to people, picking up the phone and doing quick interviews) and formal listening (running surveys, holding focus groups, reading and analysing comments).
- ▶ **Think:** to take the time to look at the data and pull out the themes that offer productive insights. This is where many of us fail, because it takes time to do the

analysis, and we communicators are often under deadline pressures.

- ▶ **Act:** to apply those insights to your communication approach. It doesn't do much for a company to just have a few *'Huh, that's interesting!'* moments. You need to turn the data into something that's actionable.
- ▶ **Measure:** to use metrics that track a resulting attitude change or behaviour shift.

Including this final step in the framework has ensured we are measuring impact on our audience, not just our own activity. In the past, we had measured tangible programme activity – such as tracking the number of articles published and read, events produced or blogs posted. To measure audience impact, our communicators needed to set goals related to what they wanted their audiences to know, think and do. If, for example, management asked us to increase confidence in the corporate strategy

or decrease time spent searching for information online, such things are tied to attitudes and behaviour and require different kinds of metrics than newsletter readership or web link clicks.

This time around, our request of team members was simple. Look for opportunities to listen; make good choices when you're posting an article, such as selecting the right channel; use language that will resonate with the audience; and make sure the message is really relevant to their audience rather than just contributing to the noise. In other words, just pause and ask: have I done everything possible to give my audience a great experience? That became our mantra.

Turning insights into action

It turns out coaching our communicators to embrace *"experiencing thinking"* and to become active listeners was the easy part. Actually applying what we learn from our listening activities has been a bigger challenge. However, we've had

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some successes that might inspire others to use insights to enhance the internal communications function. Here are a few examples:

▶ To supplement our annual surveys, we launched a quarterly message comprehension tracking survey that told us whether our key messages about the corporate strategy were actually getting through (or not). I also reviewed all questions submitted during our CEO's quarterly webcasts, which was pretty labour intensive as they often numbered over 600, but it generated a lot of solid qualitative data. I extracted key themes, created a 'word cloud' and

selected a few verbatims that reflected the general sentiment of our employees, then packaged it into a report for our CEO. Knowing what was on their minds really helped him prepare to speak with employees during site visits.

▶ Last year, our HR group embarked on a promotional campaign to encourage employees to maximise their contribution to their retirement accounts. First, they looked at the data to see who was contributing at the maximum amount and who was not, and compiled a profile of users. They found that active investors liked having hands-on access to their accounts and were very sophisticated

in their knowledge of stocks and bonds, they liked balancing their accounts and not going through a broker. A second segment of passive people said they just wanted the default plan and would go in and check it maybe once a year. Finally, another group – mostly made up of young people who weren't thinking about retirement at all – hadn't even realised that they had a benefit that the company would match and weren't investing at all. Our communications tapped into those insights by tailoring messages to appeal to these different segments and publishing them in the places where they congregated – both virtual and real.

“ Our programme managers use insights to learn how groups of employees are more likely to accept or reject changes, then determine whether to double down on communications to a specific group to help them understand why the change is necessary. ”

► Our new employee ambassador programme provides another example of how we have turned insights into action. Intel's marketing group wanted to recruit internal advocates for our new products. Ambassadors needed to be very credible, authentic spokespeople for Intel in the social media sphere. Initially, the programme managers issued an all-staff bulletin inviting employees to volunteer; those who answered were enthusiastic but often lacked credibility. They shifted gears, and after looking at employees' Twitter feeds, realised some of our most experienced product engineers and internal communicators had large Twitter followings and a strong social media presence. They refocused their recruitment to those people – which generated a much more powerful ambassador network for Intel, which in turn has resulted in a measurable increase in brand recognition.

Being part of the conversation

In summary, every part of our organisation understands why and how they should use

insights in their traditional professional roles. Our most senior people act as communication consultants, so insights inform the strategic plans they write for business partners. Our content managers use insights to develop their editorial roadmaps based on what people are most interested in hearing about. Our programme managers use insights to learn how groups of employees are more likely to accept or reject changes, then determine whether to double down on communications to a specific group to help them understand why the change is necessary.

Beyond these traditional communications functions that we manage, we've also learned to be good listeners when others are talking. Intel was an early adopter of internal social media, and our employee social networking platform, Planet Blue, is now an active source of peer-to-peer conversations. Our internal communicators know they must be active participants in dialogues that pertain to corporate strategy, services and benefits, both to

ensure correct information is shared but also to pick up on questions and attitudes. In this new world where professional communicators don't necessarily control the conversations, we've learned that being part of the conversation is part of "experience thinking" too. ■

Biography \ Christy Day Leonhardt

Christy Day Leonhardt joined Intel in 2000 after a 15 year career in public sector marketing. She has since held a variety of internal communications positions at Intel: intranet writer/reporter, Russia team lead; environmental marketing manager; audience insight manager; and Intel's 40th anniversary celebration program manager (for which she won an Intel Achievement Award). She is currently Senior Leader Communications manager.

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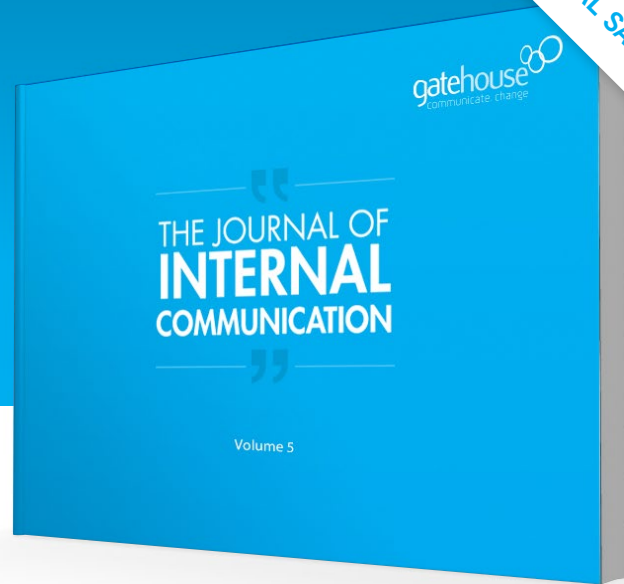
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