

“Social Media and the Workplace- How Effective Communication is Beneficial in an Ever Changing Workplace Environment”

We are living in a world that social media has effectively dominated. Whether it is Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Reddit, Tumblr, Instagram, etc., many of us spend the majority of our time on our Apple or Android phones, tablets or computers chatting away with our fellow classmates, employees or bosses and friends or family members. This is clearly not how the world was working twenty years ago. Information was presented in a far more formal manner, dominating in press releases, newspapers and TV. Social media, however, does not only dominate in the communications/journalism world, but in the workplace, too.

In *Effective Social Media Strategies- Four Tips, Four Benefits*, author Madhur Chaturvedi explains, “with the explosion of social media usage around the world, social media websites have become an important platform for businesses to engage with customers, prospects, employees and candidates.” According to Chaturvedi, companies use social media platforms to “engage with existing and prospective customers, reinforce brand messaging, influence customer opinions, and provide targeted offers and service customers more efficiently.” Human Resources departments across the nation are also using social media to communicate with prospective employees. I know this first hand: I was sought out through social media for a previous internship I held through a news station. However, I am not going to discuss how social media ties in with news stations- that is already apparent. Rather, how social media is effective in companies that wouldn’t otherwise think to use this form of communication as a means to contact employees. As Chaturvedi says, “companies are deploying internal social media tools to drive greater employee engagement, collaboration and productivity.”

Social media is allowing the workplace to be more engaged, aware and informed of changes throughout the company. Taking advantage of this new phenomenon will prove to be attractive to employees looking for a company that is more “up-to-date” with the latest technologies and means to inform. It will make the working life easier and in-depth with information for them. Overall, the company will improve with their mission, sales, customer service and efficiency, according to Chaturvedi. I found this article to be most intriguing, as the new era we are living in depends on social media to inform people.

How Companies are Utilizing Social Media

Many companies are also using social media as a beneficial platform to reach out to their employees and inform them about upcoming products, activities and events within the company. These companies’ social media efforts using Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Reddit and Instagram to name a few, benefit not only the employees in the company, but the consumers that invest in the company, as well. We see this in companies such as Nike, in which the sports lifestyle brand uses Twitter religiously to inform buyers about their new products as well as events and happenings in the stores’ respective communities. As a journalism major, I have learned that social media is part of an expanding world, determined to update employees in the quickest and simplest way possible. In my findings, I have noticed that Facebook and Twitter are the most popular

means of social media among employees. Facebook allows for more posting space for companies to identify with their employees, while Twitter allows for quick updates. Updating employees about benefits is important, and with the new technology that social media provides, the methods in informing employees can be quicker. In my previous internships, I have seen social media take a guiding role in communicating through employees. Workers chat with each other and create online groups through social media platforms such as Facebook and Google Chat. These work to be mediums that make communication throughout the workplace easier for employees, especially in workplaces where there are a lot of employees scattered throughout the company in different cities, states or countries. These virtual groups provide ways for management to connect with employees.

“Employers spend millions of dollars to offer a benefit and sometimes a surprisingly small amount to ensure that employees understand and appreciate it.”

It is clear that employers try respectively hard to ensure that their company’s benefits are being communicated properly and in an effective way to their employees. However, getting their employees to listen and remember the information communicated can sometimes pose a challenge to employers. This is why employers choose to utilize social media as a part of their program in effective communication to their employees. Personally, I find that in this day and age, social media is one of the best ways to communicate with employees. Whether it be through direct communication, it is almost always common for people to be utilizing social media through their smartphones, tablets or computers. This poses an environment in which we are always wired. Ways to change this miscommunication are to make sure employees are aware of their benefits within the company before they begin their job. They need to know what is involved with the job at hand and what they are entitled to. An example that would help would be to share the benefits involved in the interview for the job. I know that would seem impractical, as job benefits and pay involved are not usually discussed during the interview process itself, but it would remind the applicant the benefits of the company, both literally and figuratively, and what they are entitled to, should a problem arise.

According to Milliman, “Plan before you launch; don’t sugarcoat bad news; stick to your message; make sure the managers and supervisors are on board; rinse and repeat.” In other words, news and information about the company’s benefits must be given in a format that will allow employees to fully understand what is being offered to them.

“In addition, what may seem like a minor change to an employer can be perceived as a major change by the employee. For instance, when you’re converting a vacation/sick leave program to a PTO program, it’s important to communicate all the transition details. Is it clear what’s happening with the sick bank an employee has saved up?” In addition to the information provided by the website, I believe employees will exaggerate any form of information given to them. While the employer may not think it is important to effectively communicate this form of a change to their employee so they understand it, they are risking

miscommunication with the employee. Human Resources departments in workplaces need to better communicate their benefits with their employees. “Develop a comprehensive social media strategy; establish a two-way communication model; retain control of content being posted on behalf of the company; set targets and measure performance.” Establishing and utilizing their four points will allow for effective communication within the work environment.

Gamification

Gamification is a new form of communicating effectively with employees throughout companies, and incorporating technology to teach employees about the benefits available to them.

One form of communication we discussed in class is Gamification. According to Mashable, Gamification is a form of communication in which “game mechanics and game design techniques” are used in non-game contexts. They can be used to ensure effective communication among workers. According to Mashable, “typically gamification applies to non-game applications and processes, in order to encourage people to adopt them, or to influence how they are used.” Gamification can also include completing surveys and researching information on websites. These activities are generally done in groups throughout the workplace and on days when there are special activities planned.

Research from the Society of Human Resource Management

According to a survey conducted in January 2013 by the Society of Human Resource Management, 72 percent of companies believe their employees are “somewhat knowledgeable” about the employee sponsored benefits available to them. While this is a broad number, 14 percent of companies believe their employees are “not very knowledgeable” and the same number believe they are “very knowledgeable” about their companies benefits. In my opinion, all employees should understand their benefits process. It is their workplace and they should know what they are entitled to. The survey also states that health care is the most important benefit to the majority of employees, with a vote of 84 percent. SHRM also asked if employers feel they are effectively communicating their benefits, with 57 percent of them “somewhat” agreeing this is true. Only 20 percent strongly agree, 18 percent somewhat disagree and 5 percent strongly disagree. This research highlights the correlation between how well employers feel they are communicating their benefits and how effective they feel their communication is to their employees.

According to the SHRM, 63 percent of employers made changes to their employee benefits communication materials. Prior to these numbers, the study found that 84 percent of employers use online or paper enrollment materials compared to only 4 percent of employers using social media. 65 percent of employers use group employee benefits communications with an organizational representative and 51 percent of employers use one-to-one employee benefits counseling with an organizational representative.

What Can Employers Do to Utilize Social Media for Benefits Communication?

There are many ways that employees can establish social media for employee benefits. The company can use LinkedIn to establish networking for the

employees. The company can create a YouTube channel to make videos containing benefits information for employees to watch on their own time. As stated on Oracle, the company can also create “industry-specific” media platforms such as message boards and guest books for others to post their thoughts about the company’s benefits. In conclusion, we are living in a rapidly changing environment, and to utilize social media in the workplace would essentially make communicating benefits to employees easier to understand. Though it is beneficial to talk to employees in person about their available benefits, utilizing social media would allow employers to see the benefits available to them on their own time. Employees would not have to worry about memorizing information given to them, and they would have the information on hand whenever they need it.

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