

April 2009

TO: Reinventing Internal Communications (RIC) sponsor group
FROM: Ann Freeman, chair, RIC steering committee
SUBJECT: Short-term recommendations/project update

It is my pleasure, on behalf of the Reinventing Internal Communications Steering Committee, to provide you with the short-term recommendations and project update of the Reinventing Internal Communications initiative.

This initiative exists to influence and improve culture at the University, as articulated in its vision statement: “Internal communication at the University connects faculty, staff, and students to each other and to the mission and aspirations of the University and is trusted as an authentic, inspiring, and collaborative resource that nurtures our shared values, purpose, and strong connection to the University of Minnesota.”

FOUR SHORT-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS ARE DETAILED ON THE ATTACHED PAGES:

1. Create a formalized U-wide internal communications structure.
2. Improve audience-focused communications.
3. Develop a toolkit for communicators.
4. Adopt best practices from other higher education institutions and the private sector.

Some of the short-term recommendations will be the foundational work for long-term projects, while others can and should be implemented immediately. Note that the short-term recommendations, by their nature, focus on tools and tactics for improved internal communications. The long-term and final recommendations will address the role of internal communications in affecting the more difficult task of culture change.

AFTER WE RECEIVE YOUR FEEDBACK, NEXT STEPS BY THE STEERING COMMITTEE AND ITS WORK TEAMS INCLUDE:

- Obtain feedback on the early recommendations from the broader University community through consultation and other strategies.
- Review current RIC structure and critical path and make mid-course adjustments, as needed.
- Establish long-term recommendations, which are due June 1.
- Develop a detailed plan to implement long-range goals.

The work done to date has already been helpful in developing communication initiatives at the collegiate and unit levels as well as within central administration. The Economy and the U Web site, for example, was developed based on the principles and vision for this initiative.

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SHORT-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

1 CREATE A FORMALIZED, U-WIDE INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS STRUCTURE

Led by University Relations (UR), but composed of lead communicators in colleges and units and other stakeholders, this network would oversee and coordinate the implementation of recommendations from this initiative as well as ongoing efforts.

NEED AND VALUE

- Creation of such a network is critical to building the infrastructure and buy-in necessary to improve internal communications and to impact culture.
- This strategy would begin to address issues between department and unit communicators and UR.
- The adoption of a standard set of analytics provides a way to compare communications effectiveness across units and over time.

TACTICS

- Use University administrative and academic structure to identify appropriate members.
- Hold regular face-to-face meetings to share needs and coordinate efforts.
- Identify and adopt tools that facilitate the coordination of internal messaging across units.

OUTCOME

- Shared understanding of goals, commitment to plan, and shared use of communications analytics tools result in a coordinated U-wide internal communications strategy.
- The network will support the flow of information from leadership to employees and facilitate employee ability to influence and improve leadership.

METRICS

- Rate of participation by IC network team in planning and implementation.
- Rate and depth of use of standard, shared communications outcome metrics.
- Degree to which a shared sense of IC goals, objectives, and strategies is developed and embraced.

RESOURCES

- Human resource allocation: staff are assigned to this network.
- Possible investment in enterprise communication analytics tools.
- Possible investment in Web 2.0 and social networking technologies to provide platform for better informal communication.

NEXT STEPS

- Further develop network concept and prepare to officially charge the network membership.
- Responsible: ICSC and UR internal communications department (and those who are interested from Benchmarks and Best Practices work team).
- Identify metrics available via existing infrastructure and best-practice standards.
- Develop timeline for implementation.

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SHORT-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

2 IMPROVE AUDIENCE-FOCUSED COMMUNICATIONS

Develop an audience segments model as a systemwide tool for better targeting of messages; determine modes, preferences, and best practices for communicating with each audience segment. Using the model, build an interactive Web tool that provides step-by-step procedures and policies for communicating with each audience segment.

NEED AND VALUE

- Improving our ability to target communications and using the right communication tools is essential to effectively reaching and connecting with our diverse audiences.

SHORT-TERM TACTICS

- Adopt the audience segments model, and make it available for use by communicators.
- Conduct a formal review of research done on internal e-mail use at the U.
- Identify a communications professional responsible for internal communications in service areas where there are employees who do not routinely access a computer.

LONG-TERM TACTICS

- Determine policies and procedures related to e-mail use, and communicate this information widely.
- Research, determine, and implement a long-term, formal mechanism for communicating with employees in the service areas.

OUTCOME

- Communicators would utilize common strategies to reach audience segments within the University to improve effectiveness of communication.

METRICS

- Improved e-mail open and click through rates.
- Reduction in print communications, which would only be sent to key, targeted audiences.
- Increased use of range of best practices such as face-to-face communications.
- Improved audience satisfaction with internal communications.
- Improved student satisfaction with institutional and academic communications.

RESOURCES

- Resources needed to develop infrastructure.
- Human resource allocation costs.

NEXT STEPS

- Audience-focused and Infrastructure work teams jointly develop a plan for creation of this model as part of the more comprehensive communicator's toolbox (*see recommendation 3*).
- Develop timeline for implementation.

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SHORT-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

3 DEVELOP A TOOLKIT FOR COMMUNICATORS

Develop a Web-based toolkit for communicators to coordinate, align, focus, and improve effectiveness of communications U-wide. Address scope and mission of existing University internal communication resources, including but not limited to myU, faculty/staff home page, faculty/staff One Stop, OHR self-service, and mass e-mail lists. Identify effectiveness of various resources, ways of reducing redundancies, and strategies for continued development.

NEED AND VALUE

- A communications infrastructure is needed in order to effectively meet the internal communications needs of the University in a consistent fashion.
- This need is akin to transportation infrastructure needs (one may have the world's best cars, trains, and planes, but without the infrastructure to support them, they cannot be effective).

TACTICS

- Develop toolkit elements, including:
 - Print and Web-based organizational charts
 - Web-based list of standing meetings/groups
 - Web-based wiki acronym list
 - Discussion board to facilitate internal communications networks
 - Audience segment model
(see recommendation 2)
- Articulate and achieve buy-in for mass e-mail strategy.
- Mass e-mail strategy: Develop rationale, protocol, ownership, and maintenance for all mass e-mail lists. Clean current lists and delete those not needed. (Note: a revamped DDD e-mail list and protocol is under way.)

OUTCOME

- Communicators would have access to key resources for effective internal communications, improving quality, content, and consistency.
- Internal sites would be uniformly branded, defined, and leveraged to meet specific needs.

- Information that is not now easily obtained would be organized and made available for efficient use by communicators and others.
- Toolkit would result in a shared set of resources and expectations, a common understanding of current approaches, and a meeting place for internal communicators.

METRICS

- Communicators have improved access to internal communications resources and to each other.
- Audience satisfaction with internal communications is improved (content, timeliness, opportunities for face-to-face and two way communications, trust, quality, and quantity.)
- Culture of communications at the U begins to shift from top-down and one-way to a multi-pronged approach, driven by audience needs.

RESOURCES

- Resources needed to develop toolkit.
- Human resource allocation costs.

NEXT STEPS

- Infrastructure work team works jointly with the audience-focused work team to develop the long-term creation of this resource.
- Infrastructure work team identifies and builds strategy for recommendations that can be implemented now: organizational chart, acronym list, mass e-mail policies, etc.
- Begin building a comprehensive list of existing resources and channels.
- Develop timeline for implementation.

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SHORT-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

4 ADOPT BEST PRACTICES

Adopt best practices identified at other higher education institutions and in the private sector for University internal communications.

NEED AND VALUE

- Strategic internal communications is relatively new to higher education and to the University. Establishing best practices and benchmarks to measure success will be essential to the transformation of culture through internal communications.

TACTICS

- Gather information about best practices in internal communications institutions in areas such as technology, faculty culture, frequency and content of internal communications, metrics, etc.
- Gather information about best practices in internal communications from corporations and nonprofits and determine what practices the University should adopt.
- Conduct an online literature search of higher education and employee communication resources to gather information about current thinking related to best practices in internal communication.
- Clear and honest communication—“Successful internal communication” is not communication that everyone agrees with. It’s transparent, timely, accurate, and honest.
- Make use of news feeds, blogs, videos, podcasts, and faculty/staff Web pages.
- Investigate and determine if social networking tools would be a viable solution for increasing internal audience awareness. The sites could contain high-level information with links to content on the U’s Web site.
- Develop blogs using informal, “real” rhetoric (i.e., not institutional), as suggested by the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education. Target faculty and staff and cover a wide range of topics and conversations about items of interest.

OUTCOME

- Internal communications is improved at the University through shared buy-in of best practices that build a culture of trust, openness, and shared understanding.

EMERGING RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR BEST PRACTICES

- Technology—Provide many ways for students, faculty, and staff to access information; not just one place to get information.
- Faculty culture—Regular faculty consultation regarding how to communicate internally. Faculty can serve as messengers of key information for their colleges and departments.
- Communicate frequently—Communicate with staff and faculty regularly, even daily. Update content accordingly. People won’t feel inundated if they trust and rely on the information, and if they are the correct audience for the information (see “audience-focused” communications).

METRICS

- Employee surveys on (a) satisfaction with communications and (b) sense of trust in and reliability of information and leaders. Need baseline information.
- Positive change in Pulse survey results.

RESOURCES

- Investment in surveys and focus groups will be needed to measure need, change, and improved outcomes.

NEXT STEPS

- The Benchmarks and Best Practices work team will continue to develop research recommendations.

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RESOURCES

LITERATURE REVIEW

Informal list of literature reviewed or sources tapped:

STUDENT COMMUNICATION (NATIONAL ACADEMIC ADVISING ASSOCIATION AND CCE RESOURCES)

- “Advising Without Walls: An Introduction to Facebook as an Advising Tool.” Julie Traxler, Rutgers University.
http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/AAT/NW30_1.htm#10.
- “Distance Advising.” Draft recommendation report, College of Continuing Education advising office.
- “Instant Messaging: Powerful Flexibility and Presence.” Wes Lipschultz and Terry Musser, Pennsylvania State University.
<http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/clearinghouse/AdvisingIssues/Instant-Messaging.htm>.
- “Saving Face(book): Engage Through Facebook and Retain Relevance.” Art Esposito, Virginia Commonwealth University.
http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/AAT/NW30_3.htm.

HIGHER EDUCATION COMMUNICATION

- “Administrators at U of Michigan Aim to Lead by Following.” Robin Wilson. *Chronicle of Higher Education*. July 18, 2008.
- “Internal Communications: Creating a Community.” Chapter from the CASE publication, Handbook of Institutional Advancement, written by Judith Turner Phair, Vice President for Institutional Advancement, University of Maryland Biotechnology Institute.
- “U of Louisville Emphasizes Communication on Its Campus.” Kate Moser. *Chronicle of Higher Education*. July 18, 2008.

EMPLOYEE COMMUNICATION

- “A Thin Line Between ‘Them’ and ‘Us’; As employees are increasingly viewed as a company’s most important public, the distinction between internal and external communicators is fading fast.” Sarah McAdams. *Journal of Employee Communications Management*, July/August 2007.
- “Dear CEO: A Letter About Employee Communication.” Ron Shewchuk. *Journal of Employee Communications Management*. January/February 2008.

- “Effective Organizational Communication: A Competitive Advantage,” *SHRM Research Quarterly*, Fourth Quarter 2008.
- “Engaging employees to drive performance.” *Communication World*; May/June 2008, Vol. 25 Issue 3, p20-22, 3p. <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=buh&AN=31866669&site=ehost-live>
- “How is your company or client using social media for employee communication?” *Communication World*; Sep/Oct 2008, Vol. 25 Issue 5, p17-17, 1p. <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=buh&AN=34467924&site=ehost-live>.
- “Internal Comms: ‘Perfect’ Doesn’t mean Award-Winning.” Rodney Gray. *Journal of Employee Communications Management*. July/August 2007.
- “Internal Communications the eBay way; Through risk, hard work and a little luck, the Internet giant achieved internal communications bliss. Follow its model and you can too.” Justin Allen. *Journal of Employee Communications Management*, Jan/Feb 2008.
- “You Ought to Communicate in Pictures; Video is no longer just the shiniest new toy on the technology front; it’s quickly becoming a vital tool for communicators worldwide.” Kevin Allen. *Journal of Employee Communications Management*. March/April 2008.
- “Six secrets of top performers.” *Communication World*; May/June 2008, Vol. 25 Issue 3, p23-27, 5p. <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=buh&AN=31866670&site=ehost-live>.
- “A clear case for transparency.” *Communication World*; Nov/Dec 2008, Vol. 25 Issue 6, p16-20, 5p. <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=buh&AN=35001231&site=ehost-live>.
- “Telling it like it is.” *Communication World*; Nov/Dec 2008, Vol. 25 Issue 6, p14-14, 1p. <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=buh&AN=35001229&site=ehost-live>.
- “The secrecy trap.” *Communication World*; Nov/Dec 2008, Vol. 25 Issue 6, p21-23, 3p. <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=buh&AN=35001232&site=ehost-live>.
- “Embrace the groundswell—or else.” *Communication World*; Nov/Dec 2008, Vol. 25 Issue 6, p10-11, 2p. <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=buh&AN=35001227&site=ehost-live>.

UNIVERSITIES SAMPLED

Yale
Emory University
University of Louisville
University of Purdue
Swinburne University of Technology
University of Michigan

PRESIDENTS WHO BLOG

- Southern Oregon University
<http://www.sou.edu/president/blog>
- University of Connecticut
<http://blogs.uconn.edu/president>
- University of Southern Mississippi:
<http://www.usm.edu/blogs/president>
- University of Washington
<http://depts.washington.edu/presblog/blog>
- Avila University
<http://www.avila.edu/President/presblog.asp>
- Colorado College
<http://www.coloradocollege.edu/welcome/presidentsoffice/blog>
- Michigan State University
<http://president.msu.edu>
- Pellissippi State Technical Community College
<http://www.pstcc.edu/president>
- Red River College
<http://www.rrc.mb.ca/index.php?pid=3898>
- St. Vincent College
<http://www.stvincent.edu/president/blog>
(written for a student audience)
- Towson University
<http://presidentcaret.org/blog>
(written for a student audience).
- MCTC blog
<http://www.minneapolis.edu/employees>

CORPORATIONS/PUBLIC SECTOR ORGANIZATIONS CONTACTED

Beckman Coulter, Inc.
St. Jude Medical
Boston Scientific
North Hennepin Community College
Mayo Clinic
Macy's
MoneyGram International
United Health Care
Tennant Corporation
Medtronic
Biothera
Christensen Farms*
Sygenta, Inc.*
City of Minneapolis
3M Community Affairs/3M Workforce Division
McKinsey & Co.
Schwan Food Co.
CIMA Labs, Inc
MN State Colleges and Universities
HB Fuller Ventures, Inc.
R&D Systems, Inc.*
Vertiva
Lockheed Martin
Cargill, Inc.
General Mills
American Medical System
Target
Best Buy

** These are the companies that responded. Many companies are swamped with addressing their own issues related to the global economic crisis and therefore were unable to respond to our informal survey. The Benchmarks and Best Practices work team will continue to try to gather this data. A suggestion was made to tap active UMMA members with ties to relevant companies, PR agencies, etc.*

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