Break through the noise! The smart strategy that will engage any audience

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Answers to your questions

1. What are good data points to use for quick personas when leadership asks for them?

Data that support the development of quick personas can come from multiple sources, but the sources you select—and share with stakeholders—will depend on your target audience(s) and communication objectives.

Target audience(s). If your target audience is employees, you'll leverage data from HR systems,engagement survey results and/or original research. If it's an external audience, you may leverage industry or government data and your organization's data (such as buying habits, customer satisfaction scores, etc.).

Communication objectives. Having clear communication objectives is a helpful way to ensure you grab the right data when you develop personas. For example, if your objective is to help employees save more for retirement, you'll need HR data, such as age cohorts and enrollment in the 401(k) plan.

2. In this virtual environment, our associates are starting to get overwhelmed by communicating by email (too many emails). Any suggestions?

Here are five strategies to deal with this challenge:

a) **Quantify the issue and set a goal.** Conduct quick research with employees to understand if there is a problem and how it occurs. Do they get too many emails from corporate functions? Too many from their colleagues? When you have a good picture of the issue, set a goal. For example, reduce corporate emails by X%.

b) **Interpersonal communication.** Help employees understand the challenge ("We send 10,000 emails every day!") and how they can contribute to reducing volume. Share tips and best practices across your communication channels. Two examples:

- Avoid email chains. After two responses, move to a conversation by phone or web meeting.
- Don't use *Reply All*. Respect your colleagues' inboxes and only copy those who have a role to play.

c) **Leverage other channels.** Ensure there are alternative channels for employees, such as instant messaging and social tools (for example, Yammer or Chatter). Help employees and teams understand how to use these tools. And encourage leaders to start conversations there as well.

d) **Consult with functions or departments.** There are likely one or two groups in your organization that could use help streamlining their emails. HR and IT are good places to start. Run a few workshops with stakeholders to help them reinvent how they use email. For example, we worked with an HR team to reduce the number of people announcements shared by email. During a workshop, we set standards for email and brainstormed a new tool on the intranet designed to help employees find new hires by function or department.

e) **Create better email.** In our research, employees have no problem sharing the characteristics of bad email: lack of relevance, too long and no call to action. For employees, *bad emails* make the overload problem even worse. Gather a group of stakeholders from across the organization and develop standards for all-employee emails. For example, each email should:

- Focus on an action
- Cover topics X, Y and Z; that is, set the topics that warrant an all-employee email
- Be targeted, so the content is relevant (You may need to develop better distribution lists to do this.)
- Be scannable (subheads!), limited to 100 words and written at the seventh-grade reading level, so employees can quickly consume the content
- Use a visual, when appropriate, to explain a process or concept

3. **A comms challenge I have is working with a senior leader who has a "bad" habit of not always collaborating, sometimes sending out poorly done, impulsive things late at night ... help! Advice?**

As a first step, it's important to understand if your gut is right. Perhaps employees value these impulsive notes? Perhaps they're a big help when they start their jobs the next morning?

But, let's assume your impulse is correct. Start by demonstrating the impact these notes are having. Conduct one-on-one interviews (or a focus group) with employees to understand how they're perceived. Gather any e-metrics that are available, such as open rates.

Share that data with your senior leader. And be ready with examples of best practices, which could include: notes from other senior leaders in your organization (and supporting data), examples from other organizations that you typically benchmark against or a reworked version of his/her most recent communication.

Since this senior leader takes a DIY approach, share communication principles and practices that resonate with employees. A template may be helpful.

4. **With so many channels, how do you determine which two or three are the most effective for your primary audiences?**

Remember the expression, "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder"? The same idea applies to communication channels. The effectiveness of a channel is driven by what an audience needs to accomplish.

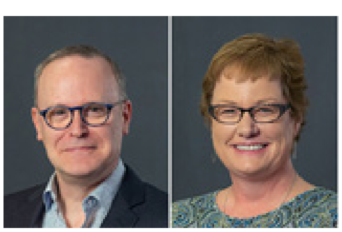
To determine which channels are the most effective for your audiences, start by asking: What are my primary audiences trying to do? Here are a few examples:

- Employees want to understand our progress with the annual plan.
- Customers want to know the latest offers.
- Members of a community group want to know how you're supporting the region.

Now that you have specific actions, you can make an informed choice about the best tool for the job. Or, even better, you can ask. Continuing with one of the examples from above, you could ask employees, "What is the best communication tool to help you stay up to speed on our progress with the annual plan?" You'll likely get multiple ideas but look for a common theme across the responses. Perhaps employees prefer interaction and discussion when it comes to the annual plan, rather than an email from the CEO.

Here's an additional layer to consider as you select communication channels: What's your objective? Do you need to create awareness or build deep knowledge? Select the tool(s) that aligns with your communication goal.

	Communication goal: Create awareness		**Build deep knowledge**
Sample communication channels	• Poster/billboard • Intranet/website articles, blog entries or leader/expert videos • Email • Newsletter	• Overview map • FAQs • Dedicated microsite/website • Detailed brochure • Manager, leader or expert toolkit • Web-based training or how-to video	• Leadership summit • Conference • Small and large group meeting with leaders or experts • Advocates/champions • In-person training or tutorial • Phone or chat support



Have more questions? We're always happy to help.

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