



Evolving IT Communications

About Fretless Communications

To help our businesses pursue new, disruptive opportunities, we need to evolve our communications strategy and approach to keep pace with how IT is delivered, enhanced and consumed by today's savvy users. Fretless Communications has the battle-tested experience and public relations sensibilities needed to help you assess your current approach, identify some quick improvements, and establish an IT communications strategy for the long term. For more information, visit www.fretlesscommunications.com.

Times are changing. Not only is IT even more intertwined in every facet of a business, but it will be the disruptive force that propels companies and industries forward. Today, CIOs have a seat in the boardroom. IT professionals are partnering closely with business leaders to drive process improvements, upgrade legacy applications and systems, and uncover new opportunities. And, our tech savvy, mobile users expect the same experience at work as they have in their personal lives.

Yet, we still communicate the same old way. Sure, we may try some new techniques and use graphics, videos and social media more, but we are not staying in step with the rapidly changing IT industry. We have to evolve our IT communications approaches and processes or be left behind. Here's why:

We have a perception problem in IT. We grapple with hundreds of IT projects annually. Although some involve new capabilities and improvements, others require users to endure some change and discomfort. Perhaps unfairly, **our users judge us** harder for these instances, as well as for the outages and other intermittent access issues that require them to call the help desk. So, we are starting at a deficit that is exacerbated by poor or ineffective communications.

Second, while we strive to disrupt our industry, we live with legacy technologies and processes. Yet, our users expect faster implementations, more intuitive applications and a better overall experience. This includes improving the clarity, convenience and ease in the messages, instructions and support we provide when we introduce new capabilities.

Third, we compete for users' attention. Even if we craft the best communication ever, it still needs to rise above the hundreds of emails users receive daily for work, messages from friends and family, and all the social media noise. We only have so much time and attention, so in seconds, we all choose to ignore, filter or block messages we deem unimportant.

And finally, we compete daily with software as a service (SaaS) providers, outside consultants and even shadow IT systems. While it isn't the only factor, ineffective communications contribute to a business partner choosing what's behind door two instead of working with the internal IT team.

Of course, we do amazing work in IT and we are improving how we communicate, so don't be disappointed. There is a lot of room for improvement and even the smallest steps will make a difference. Whether you are a communicator joining an IT organization or an IT person tapped to communicate, this paper explores some of these opportunities and offers some helpful suggestions for evolving your IT communications program.

Perception

New Expectations

Short Attention Spans

Competition



What's Holding Us Back?

We are. While we have ambitions of engaging our users more effectively, we are stuck in our legacy approach to communications. And, despite agreeing it is critical, communications takes the backseat to our other IT initiatives, rollouts and outages.

Essentially, we treat communications as a tactic to convey a change or a box to check on our project plans instead of exploring an approach that will entice and compel a user to adopt a service. We are getting better, but traditionally, we hit send and breathe a sigh of relief that it is distributed. Unfortunately, this **project mindset and tactical approach** has set us up for failure. Here's why:

1. We typically don't invest in **dedicated communicators**. When we have budget, we invest in technical resources to support projects and deployments. As a result, we rely on half-time resources, project managers, consultants on a project, or someone good enough at communicating to plan, draft and distribute the news. He or she may not have the experience, time or focus to be successful.
2. Whether it is a lack of support or a desire for more control, each sub-team in IT feels compelled to have their own communicator. This decentralized approach may be fine in some instances, but it will likely lead to a disjointed and disparate experience for users because each team acts in its own best interest and not the greater good. We need better central guidelines, processes and cooperation across our the communicators.
3. We either have too many or the wrong expectations for our communicators. We all multitask, but if the role isn't well-defined, a communicator will juggle CIO presentations, project communications, emails and events for IT employees, and much much more. As a result, he or she is spread thin, but still expected to do it all.
4. Just like we rely on legacy systems and applications, we tend to default to a comfortable, but **tired and ineffective approach to communications**. Typically, this means a knowledge article and a blast email to all our users. While this helps with the time constraints above, it does not take into consideration what our users want.
5. We hold communicators to project deadlines even if it means forcing a communications out at an inopportune time rather than waiting to send it when it will be more effective.
6. If we are disappointed with a service's adoption, we demand another communications go out instead of understanding why it was unsuccessful. It could be the message was flawed or the user was too busy to read it. Or, perhaps they just weren't interested in the service.
7. Which brings me to the last point. If the service is flawed, the communication will not save it. That is not to say updates won't get the service back on track. However, a user will see the gaps, complexities, caveats and extra instructions in the message and decide it is not worth it.

We need to challenge our legacy project-oriented mindset to evolve to a more comprehensive and cohesive approach for IT communications. Looking beyond the project and developing more meaningful, user oriented communications will enable us to enhance our user experience and IT's overall brand.



What's Next?

It's hard to improve if you don't know where you stand. Having a baseline will not only help you identify some areas of improvement, but will also help you reset expectations and reposition how you do IT communications when there are differing opinions and pushback from those who prefer the traditional approach.

I'm not suggesting you hire someone to formally assess and baseline your IT communication approach and processes. However, here are some questions you should honestly answer to identify some areas of improvement.

Your Approach to Communications

- Do you have a formal communications program with dedicated communicators?
- Is it centralized? If not, is someone responsible for guiding, governing and coordinating activities across teams?

Your Communications

- How do you rate your communications?
- Are there some problems you can pinpoint today?
- What do the actual emails look like? Are they formatted similarly? How are they branded?
- Does one person send them or are your teams responsible for sending their own?
- What other tools do you use to communicate (service catalog, internal social media)?
- Have you measured the effectiveness of your emails? Do people read them?

Users' Perceptions

- How would users rate your communications?
- Have you surveyed or conducted focus groups about IT communications?
- Do you communicate differently with your various internal audiences?
- How do users provide feedback on services?
- Do you conduct regular surveys to determine user sentiment about IT?
- Do you monitor and measure user adoption for each of the service?

On their own, these questions won't solve your communications challenges. However, they will help you start thinking about how your approach to IT communications can be evolved to enhance your users' experience and IT's overall brand. That said, we have only scratched the surface with this paper. Moving forward, Fretless Communications will publish additional papers and blogs that delve further into various communications issues and improvements. In the meantime, follow our blog at www.fretlesscommunications.com.

