Reentry Communications Toolkit

The unprecedented coronavirus pandemic has completely changed the face of business — from large global corporations to small mom-and-pop shops and countless companies in between. Now, more than ever, strong brand communications are essential, as employers develop reentry plans to welcome employees back to the workplace.

Companies must communicate consistently, transparently, compassionately and empathetically as they navigate new challenges, address the needs of their returning employees and together adapt to the "new normal."

JACKSON | SPALDING

Establishing Your Approach

Consider these key elements as you develop and communicate your reentry plans:

TONE: Ensure all communications prioritize employee health, safety and well-being in a caring way that is consistent with your brand's voice and personality. Put your employees front and center in each communication.

MISSION: Communicate why it is essential for employees to return to work, underscoring your workforce's daily efforts to bring the brand's vision and values to life.

RELEVANCE: Customize communications to reflect your brand's values, specific company challenges or opportunities, and industry trends affecting your organization.

BENEFITS: Where appropriate, highlight the positive benefits of returning to work, such as having fewer distractions and being able to engage in person with colleagues.

AUDIENCES: Recognize that one size does not fit all when it comes to communications. Evaluate your communications with each target audience in mind to ensure messages are relevant. For example, messages addressing your WFH workforce will appear tone deaf if your audience includes frontline workers.

RESPONSIBILITY: Inform employees of new safety protocols and cleanliness standards that will be in place. Reinforce that your organization's operational decisions are guided by public health guidelines and your ability to secure sufficient personal protective equipment (PPE) and implement proper cleaning protocols.

MONITORING: Underscore the importance of — and a commitment to — ongoing monitoring efforts and being prepared to pivot quickly as the pandemic evolves.

CONSISTENCY: Establish a steady cadence of communications so employees can rely on regular updates.

DIALOGUE: Keep communication lines open for employees at all levels of your organization as an opportunity to gauge how the reentry process is going. Identify frequently asked questions and proactively address concerns.

PACE: Understand that returning to "business as usual" may happen gradually at your workplace, and that's OK. Evaluate if a phased approach might be best for your team(s).

Developing Your Communications Plan

As your employees re-enter the workplace — or adopt prolonged remote working practices — it is imperative to have a well-developed strategy for communicating effectively. Here's a look at the internal and external audiences you should keep in mind and the assets and/or channels you can leverage to keep them informed, mitigate concerns and correct misinformation.

INTERNAL

Audiences
- Senior leaders
- Employees
- Shareholders

Recommended Assets
- Pre-return survey*
- Key messages
- Email announcement
- FAQ document
- Tip sheet for how to stay safe at work
- Workplace signage to encourage safe practices

Channels
- Virtual town hall or staff meeting
- One-one-one outreach from senior leadership
- Focus groups (after return to work)
- Broadcasts
- Text messages/Apps
- Intranet page (or similar employee resource) with relataed information
- Training eModules*
- Email address or primary contact to field questions or concerns

EXTERNAL

Consider if/how any internal updates should be conveyed to external parties.

Audiences
- Consumers and/or clients
- Media
- Government officials
- Industry leaders
- Vendors, partners and influencers

Recommended Assets
- Key messages about employee reentry/reopening and any new operational procedures that might impact customer/stakeholder experience
- Public-facing communications for website, media, social media, etc.
- Video message from president or CEO
- Press release to announce changes to business practices, products, etc., or impact of COVID-19 on company
- Email to key external audiences
- Survey of key external audiences

Pro Tips

*PRE-RETURN SURVEY: Gauge the comfort level of employees and assess their concerns; publish the survey results and explain how issues are being addressed.

*TRAINING EMODULES: Produce eModules to review new protocols for maneuvering around the office; host "train the trainers" for leaders to ensure they appropriately brief their teams.

Going the Extra Mile

POTENTIAL SCENARIO PREPARATION

In this ever-changing crisis, exploring additional safety concerns and considering potential scenarios is imperative. Consider developing proactive plans for:
- A second outbreak
- Government regulations prompting another wave of workplace closures
- An employee contracting COVID-19 who was on site/interacting with colleagues prior to being confirmed

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IDEAS

After working remotely for many weeks, employees may feel anxious or exhibit a lack of engagement when they return to the workplace. Here a few ways to help engage them upon reentry:

MUSIC: Create a custom Spotify playlist (or a few!) of fun, uplifting music for employees to enjoy during their commute and work hours, as appropriate. Invite employees to create playlists that represent your industry or culture, or ask senior leaders to create a fun "mix CD" for all to enjoy.

PODCASTS: Spread good vibes by encouraging employees to listen to positive, uplifting podcasts, like "Happier with Gretchen Rubin," "The Daily Boost," or "Inspire Nation."

GIFT BOX: Surprise employees with a welcome back present that could include branded face masks, hand sanitizer, face shield, sanitizing wipes, UV light boxes, snacks, etc.

MINDFULNESS: Consider offering complimentary memberships for a meditation app, like Calm or Headspace.

TOGETHERNESS: While typical office happy hours and catered luncheons may be off-limits, find other ways to encourage connectedness. Host a virtual book club, employee talent show or joke-telling contest to engage employees in new, safe ways.

Looking for more coronavirus-related support or resources? Check out Jackson Spalding's COVID-19 page.

Key Questions to Consider

Ask the right questions to determine the appropriate messages for your audience, key challenges and considerations, deliverables and how to measure the success of your communication efforts.

JACKSON | SPALDING

Operational/Workplace Policies

- Will your office be reopening gradually? Why or why not?
- Will employees still have the option to work from home if they're not comfortable returning to the office?
- Have you considered an A/B schedule to reduce the number of employees on site?
- Is your IT ready to help reconnect all employees to onsite resources? Should this occur in phases?
- Will office ingress/egress be affected?
    - Will new way-finding signage be needed?
    - Will there be new capacity limits on elevators?
- Have parking cards been reactivated? Air conditioning/lighting turned back on?
- Have you consulted your legal counsel to identify and prepare for any potential risks?
- Do you need to revisit the recommended capacity for conference rooms?
    - Should smaller meeting rooms be limited to one person only?
    - Should larger conference rooms have chairs removed so few people can meet within the space?
- Will there be a change in dress code for employees?
- What will be the new policy for onsite client meetings and/or other office visitors?
- Will there be new guidelines for using community spaces? (i.e., break rooms, copy/printing stations, kitchen, etc.)
- What will the new company travel policy be?

Employee Safety & Well-Being

WORKPLACE
- What protective measures will be in place at the office? (i.e., installation of plexiglass shields, separation of cubicles, adjusted floor plan, signage to maintain safe distances, capacity monitoring of elevators, sneeze guards at reception areas, etc.)
- What kind of new cleaning standards will be in place?
- Where will hand sanitation stations be available?
- Will some doors, which previously required a pin or key code, remain open?
- Should there be staff in place to help direct/enforce new policies and safety protocols?

EMPLOYEE-SPECIFIC
- Will employees be required to wear masks?
- Will policies be different for employees who are part of a higher risk group? Or who are navigating child care challenges?
- If employees have concerns about returning to work, what mental health resources will be available to them?
- Will employees require any training or supplies to safely return to work?
- Will temperature checks or screening be required prior to office entry?
- Will employees be required to take a COVID-19 safety webinar before returning to work?
- Will you establish an employee safety & well-being resource group (or activate an existing one) to engage employees of all levels in planning?

Additional Considerations

- Should you offer a welcome back gift or message for employees?
    - Welcome kits could include branded face masks, hand sanitizer, face shield, sanitizing wipes, UV light boxes, snacks, etc.
- Will you host a socially distant welcome back event or other (virtual) gathering?
- How will you decide if the office needs to close again?
    - Does any action need to be taken now to facilitate that potential transition back to working from home?
    - If employees must work remotely again in the near future, are there specific supplies/resources they will need to be more productive during a second quarantine?

Looking for more coronavirus-related support or resources? Check out Jackson Spalding's COVID-19 page.