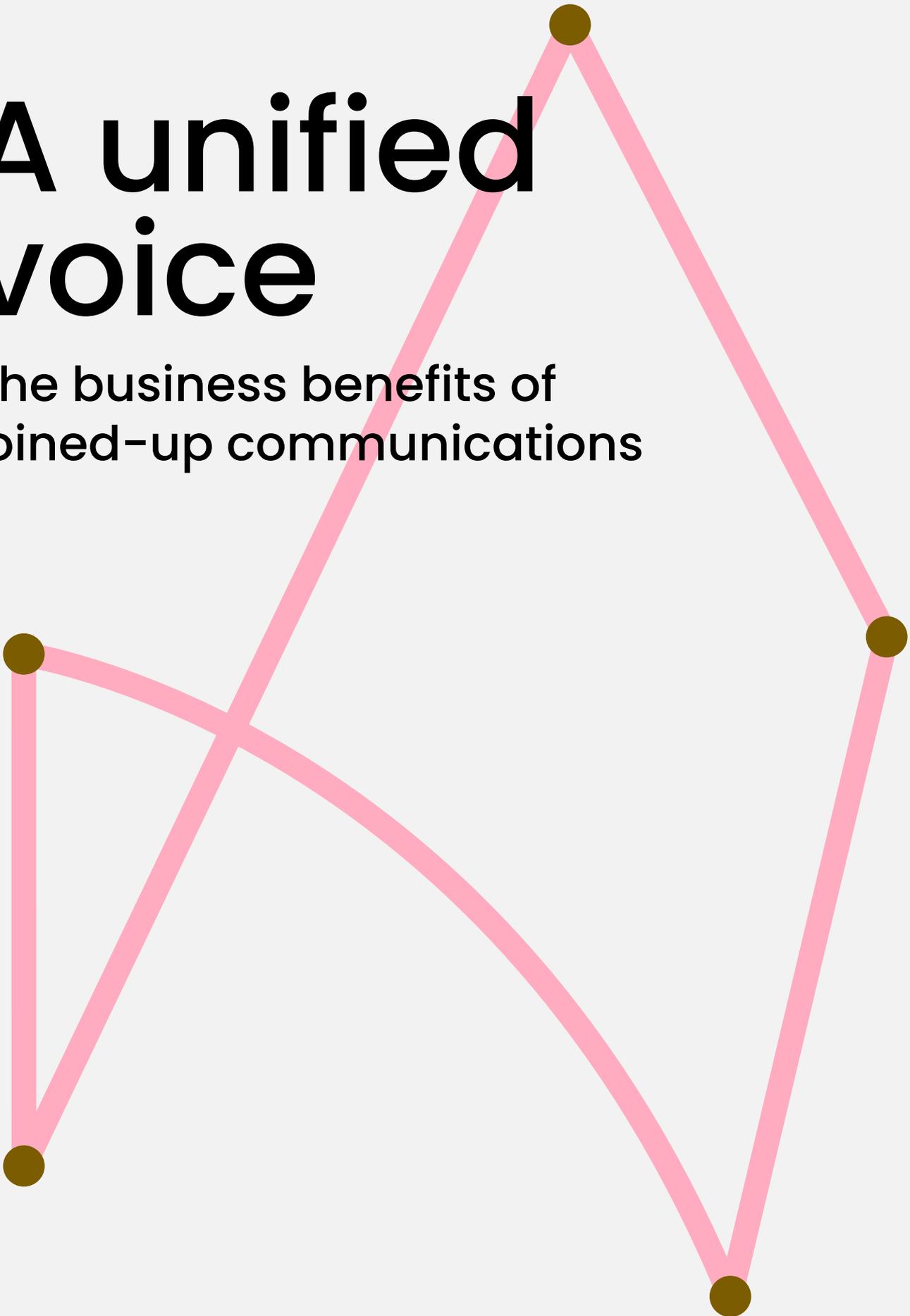


# A unified voice

The business benefits of joined-up communications





# A novel approach

Dealing with the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic has posed innumerable challenges for organisations, large and small; from Government to the NHS, and to businesses across the economic spectrum. All have been caught up in the unprecedented health and economic crisis.



**Nigel Howes**  
Chairman  
Definition Group

But if one common lesson has emerged, it is the absolute need for clear, consistent and cohesive communications when addressing both internal and external audiences, and other stakeholders. In a world that seems in danger of information overload, the ability to cut through with messaging that is compelling and engaging across multiple channels is an essential tool of the successful organisation.

How to achieve that effectively, without the time-consuming challenge of managing multiple agencies and their competing needs for attention and budget, is the problem that we have sought to solve at the Definition Group by expanding the depth and breadth of our service offer.

Our growth strategy has brought together successful agencies with complementary skills, services and experience. Like-minded people with flair and creativity, as well as commercial nous and a commitment to outstanding client service. Successful in their own right, each of these award-winning agencies has recognised the potential of achieving greater things as part of a larger group.

Within our Group we now have all the communication services our clients need, from PR and Reputation Management to Internal Communications and Event Management, from Branding and Design to Digital PR, Content and SEO and from Crisis Communications to Animation, Video and Photography.

We work across the public and private sectors, for major brands, member organisations and businesses in many areas of the economy and for clients at home and abroad. Where other agencies call in external suppliers for complex projects with multiple service requirements, we

now have the skills and resources in-house to assemble multi-disciplinary, integrated teams who can deliver consistent messaging through all channels and to all audiences.

This is our novel **insideout communications™** model, a 'one-team' approach that is efficient and cost-effective and one which ensures the best possible outcomes for clients.

This Insight Report is based on the findings of a survey of 504 CEOs or Board members at major UK businesses in May 2021. Its purpose was to understand their future communications requirements and aspirations, as well as informing our thinking on the shape of services required to help them achieve their goals.

I would also like to thank a number of senior business leaders who took the time off from running their major organisations to speak to us in detail about their pandemic experiences and the lessons learned for the future.

We hope you find it an interesting and informative read.

# Executive summary

*For some, the crisis created opportunity; for others, it was a question of simple survival.*

British businesses have faced their biggest peacetime challenge in coping with the disruptive impacts of the pandemic.

For some, the crisis created opportunity; for others, it was a question of simple survival. Communication was at the heart of how organisations managed through the most severe consequences of lockdown. Key to their success was the way businesses engaged with frightened and bewildered staff as well as confused and concerned customers and clients. How well they managed both will impact on their future reputations and fortunes, post-pandemic.

As the economy recovers and businesses seek to re-build damaged balance sheets, the world of work for millions will be very different from that they previously knew. Change that may have taken a decade has happened within months, with familiar working patterns consigned to the office waste basket.

The survey of 504 CEOs or board members at major UK companies with 250+ employees was conducted by Censuswide. Fieldwork took place between 21-26 May 2021.

*Balancing corporate requirements and employee preference will be a major challenge.*

The British Chambers of Commerce report that two thirds of companies are offering some degree of remote working to their teams whilst the Institute of Directors say a majority of companies are re-assessing their place in society after COVID-19.

It was against this background and to understand how future communications requirements are being addressed in boardrooms, we commissioned Censuswide to conduct a survey of 504 C-Suite leaders from some of the biggest companies in the UK. Respondents were from businesses in diverse sectors of the economy, employing from 250 to more than 1,000 staff and with annual revenues ranging from £50 million to more than £500 million.

Over 90% of them indicated they would need to rethink their communications in terms of strategy, methods or frequency, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and its implications.

Our respondents were broadly in agreement that:

- Communications need to evolve
- Corporate reputation contributes significantly to revenues
- Communications during the COVID-19 pandemic have improved their reputations
- Communicating '*purpose beyond profit*' is vital
- An informed and engaged workforce is crucial to business success
- There is widespread concern about hybrid or remote working

These are some of the headline findings, but a deeper dive shows a conflicted business community. Our methodology allowed respondents to tick several responses, which provides more nuanced findings. For example, while there is widespread concern about the potential downsides of hybrid or remote working, the most common individual response was that it could create '*A better work-life balance for staff leading to increased productivity*'.

What this tells us, along with much of the other findings in this report, is that we are at a watershed moment in business life. The benefits of a strong workplace culture are widely acknowledged but how to maintain that in the 'new world of work' in the long term is uncertain. Balancing corporate requirements and employee preference will be a major challenge.

What is clear is that to successfully manage change on this scale will require enhanced and effective internal and external communications, underpinned by a clear and evolved strategy. This is the challenge that **insideout communications™** has been specifically designed to address.

***Has the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic caused you to rethink the communication priorities for your business and, if so, what new methods and channels do you intend to utilise in 2021 and beyond?***  
*(Multiple choice response)*

# 95.6%

of responses indicate a need to change communications priorities in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic

**Top 3 industries looking to change**

**Legal**

100%  
of respondents

**IT**

96.9%  
of respondents

**HR**

94.9%  
of respondents

**Top 3 responses: all sectors**

**26%**

We appreciate the importance of effective communications even more than before and are looking to develop a strategy for integrating internal and external messaging

**20.8%**

We will be utilising more/different communication than previously

**20.8%**

We want to communicate with customers/clients more often

# Joining the dots of business communications



**Louise Vaughan**  
Managing Director  
Definition

Amazon, Sports Direct, Wetherspoons, easyJet: just some of household names that have faced media and public scrutiny as well as reputational damage around their handling of issues spinning out of the pandemic. These challenges have included treatment of employees, dividend payments to shareholders and public money bailouts.

Under the crisis spotlight, business purpose, integrity and ethics have become the drivers of brand trust, loyalty, respect and, critically, corporate value. And, in an era of hyper-transparency, those brands that have fallen foul have been quickly exposed and vilified. Take a lesson from BrewDog: the irreverent cult beer brand, which has built its £215m value and reputation through the effective use of PR stunts, was publicly called out by 60 former employees for its 'toxic' working environment. It resulted in a heady brew of negative national publicity and open criticism from its crowdfunding shareholders.

BrewDog represents an unfortunate example of failing to join up the internal and external 'dots' of business communication, despite impressive PR stunts which simply couldn't distract from serious operational inadequacies.

Thankfully, other businesses are getting it right. As we can see from our findings, many forward-thinking companies are already taking steps to supercharge their communications strategies in line with continually evolving commercial and employee needs. Unlike the 'dogs', these winners appreciate the direct impact these developments are having on their own commercial value. According to research from Havas AMO, the world's top 15 stock markets owe more than a third of their valuation to corporate reputations. That figure rises to a staggering 47% for the UK's FTSE 100.

This means that now – more than ever – there's a commercial imperative for those brands doing it well and doing it right to seriously enhance their recognition, reputation and corporate value through planned, proactive and holistic communications strategies.

**Research suggests that reputation plays a critical part in the commercial value of a business. What contribution would you say your corporate reputation makes to annual revenues?**

On average, respondents felt reputation contributes to

**17.9%**  
of annual revenue

Only

**4.4%**

felt that reputation plays no part in their annual revenue

**The following sectors provided the highest estimates for the impact of reputation on their revenues**



Education is perhaps expected in the higher estimates on the impact of reputation. Historically, schools, universities and colleges have been subjected to local and national comparisons that have harnessed a competitiveness between establishments. Similarly, the consumer-focused travel and transport industry is vulnerable to criticism and negative reputation.

Meanwhile, the HR sector rated reputation higher than other sectors as a key influencer on revenue. This is likely to be driven by the HR function's close relationship with employer brand, employee experience and the increasing importance of values and culture in attracting and retaining key talent.

# The value of the Brand



**Fiona Corey**  
Managing Director  
Redhouse

The most powerful brands carry and convey an organisation's values and purpose. They achieve market stand-out and create compelling connections with their audiences, both internally and externally.

Brands are much more than an eye-catching logo. They represent the embodiment of behaviours, built up not just from what an organisation or business does but, importantly, how it does it. When the service or product provided is delivered as promised, time after time, then it embeds trust, generates loyalty and achieves recognition and regard.

Effective brands are based on truth: they stand for something. At their effective best, they resonate with their audiences on an emotional as well as a practical level. Brands that are not based on truth and stand for nothing are inevitably 'found-out' and simply fail. If today's public are both sceptical and savvy, then social media provides both judge and jury.

The brand mark is the graphical projection of reputation, whether that is in the public or private sector, in Government, B2B or B2C arenas. In the very visual world of communications today with its myriad of demands on our time and attention, the brand and its assets must work equally well across all platforms and channels.

Sometimes this means refreshing a long-standing and much-loved brand to resonate with the contemporary world; in other instances the emphasis must fall on defining and creating brands for new or emerging businesses that capture both their energy and purpose.

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## Businesses with the highest turnover tended to feel that reputation was more important



# Shared 'sense of purpose and values' helps energy firm come through tough times



**Bill Bullen**  
CEO  
Utilita Energy

Bill Bullen is CEO of Utilita Energy which provides gas and electricity to 790,000 domestic customers and 20,000 business users around the UK. It has its headquarters at Eastleigh near Southampton, a number of other office locations and a growing network of local hubs based in the communities it serves, many of which are in the less privileged parts of towns and cities. The company employs 1,500 people.



Even before the pandemic struck, the business had been exploring the potential for home working and re-configuring its property estate. The advance planning, particularly around IT and data security issues of remote-working, was crucial in helping the business to transition from an office-based environment to a totally home-based culture, just one month following the Government's formal announcement of the initial lockdown.

A number of years previously the business carried out a company-wide consultation exercise, from the Board to staff from every department and location – including contact centres, field engineers, sales, marketing and back-office teams – to identify and formalise a Vision and set of shared Values.

Bullen reflects: "That exercise, some time ago, gave people a genuinely shared sense of values and purpose, that the business wasn't all about the bottom line but that by doing the right thing by our customers, by providing services at a fair price, then we would become successful. And everyone had their part to play.

"That's not always the easiest thing to do in business. Like everyone

else, we've had our challenges. Nobody could have imagined that those values and our purpose would be put to the test in quite such a dramatic way as that imposed by COVID-19.

"But I have to say I have been enormously humbled by the way our people have responded. Even though they were working from their dining rooms, kitchen tables or their bedrooms, there was still this shared sense of purpose. We worked hard to ensure that everyone still felt part of something bigger than their immediate environs."

The business has always taken its internal and external communications seriously but during the pandemic it purposely ramped these up. Bullen sent out a weekly 'Bill's Bulletin' update on all aspects of the business to every member of staff. A Friday 'Ask the Boss' open forum event on Teams where he or a member of the senior management team would take questions from staff was introduced.

The business also saw take-up of its app reach half its customer base – 400,000 – and increased use of its 'Power Up' facility which allows



*“We have certainly seen the benefits of a shared sense of purpose within the business in some of the most challenging of times any of us have faced.”*

customers experiencing financial difficulty to take small, zero-interest loans to help meet energy bills. It was calculated that the take-up was equivalent to 10% of all pay day loans in the country. Bullen describes it as ‘a win-win’ in that it helped customers at difficult times, retained them through to better circumstances and reinforced brand loyalty.

Staff increased their charitable work during the crisis, helping at community food banks and clothing hubs. They raised funds to provide electric ride-on cars for children’s wards at hospitals, among many other initiatives. Throughout the crisis, productivity and customer service levels remained high and staff morale was resilient. Rankings on TrustPilot and Net Promoter Score went up and all other business performance metrics performed well.

Post-pandemic, most staff will work from home most of the time, periodically returning to the office for team meetings and to maintain social connections. For many, this will save up to £20 a day on the cost of commuting and buying even their subsidised lunch at work – a positive benefit.

Bullen adds: “We have certainly seen the benefits of a shared sense of purpose within the business in some of the most challenging of times any of us have faced. We are determined to maintain that going forward into a new world of work – and regular, informative and engaging internal and external communications will be an important part of that.”

**Do you feel the reputation of your business has been adversely impacted or improved as a result of how you communicated during the COVID-19 pandemic?**  
*(Multiple choice response)*

Just **14%** felt that their reputation had not been affected by their communications during the COVID-19 pandemic

**71.6%** of total responses thought their reputation had improved

**44%** Of those who felt the business's reputation had improved, the most common response was 'It's improved – we've done more promotion of our products / services to the market'

**51.5%** Of those who felt their reputation has been adversely impacted over half blamed the impact of negative media coverage

**Reason for adverse reputation impact by industry**



All these sectors struggled to adjust to WFH

On average just

**13.3%**

of responses indicated that negative media coverage had resulted in a downturn in reputation

This figure swelled to

**22.9%**

for companies with 750 – 1000 employees

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**A similar story emerges from the figures relating to the impact of disgruntled employees**

**10.1%**

On average just 10.1% felt this was an issue

**20.3%**

This more than doubled to 20.34% for companies with 750 – 1000 employees

The impact of negative media coverage and disgruntled employees is felt more keenly for larger companies – owing partly to the higher proportion of disgruntled employees, as well as the correlation between number of employees and brand recognition of a company which leads to greater media attention.

**Do you believe you have effectively communicated your 'purpose' to staff and customers/clients?**  
*(Multiple choice response)*

**98.5%**

of responses felt that their business does communicate purpose and acknowledge its importance

**0.8%** Just 0.8% felt that their company had no purpose beyond profit

**0.4%** Only 0.4% claimed they didn't feel a need to communicate their purpose to their staff or customers

**The most popular responses were:**

**32.1%** Yes, we make sure our 'purpose' is reflected in all our communications activity

**30.6%** Yes, our staff say it makes them proud to work for the business

**29.2%** Yes, we demonstrate our 'purpose' in practical ways through community support / charitable projects more than we did before

**Those who answered 'Yes, we make sure our 'purpose' is reflected in all our communications activity' (by sector)**



The importance of purpose in healthcare is clear, but the appearance of HR on this list tallies with the need for 'purpose' in order to retain and attract key talent.



# How 'informed and engaged' workforce leads to better productivity



Severfield plc is the UK's premier structural steel company responsible for some of the most iconic buildings on our skyline. These include such landmarks as the London 2012 Olympic Stadium, The Shard, football stadiums for Tottenham Hotspur and Arsenal among others, Heathrow T5, City skyscrapers and it is currently working on Google's new £1bn complex at Kings Cross.





**Alan Dunsmore**  
CEO  
Severfield

*“We do believe that an informed and engaged workforce leads to a more productive workforce and a more successful business.”*

The firm has 1,400 employees spread across 10 locations in the UK and Ireland, including at its headquarters at Dalton in North Yorkshire.

CEO Alan Dunsmore says:

“We have always realised the importance of internal and external communications and the pandemic has only served to re-emphasise that. We recognised that we had not always been the best at it and begun to take steps before COVID-19 to tackle the situation. This included the development of an intranet to enable our shopfloor and on-site staff to be kept abreast of any announcements and information that we wanted to make. This helped to improve the situation and was valuable during the pandemic when our factories and sites remained operational for the majority of the time.

“Having a geographically disparate workforce brings its own challenges in ensuring staff receive information at the same time and hear it from the company first, rather than from external sources. We are also developing an app which will enable people at home or on site to access information.

“We do believe that an informed and engaged workforce leads to a more productive workforce and a more successful business. We are in the process of further developing our internal communications including the establishment of workplace forums where we can share information

but also gather feedback and ideas, first-hand. It is important that communication is a two-way process.”

The iconic structures that Severfield builds do, he says, engender a natural pride in achievement. This helps to create a sense of purpose among employees. A process is underway to look at how the business reflects that ‘purpose’ in its internal and external communications.

“This sense of purpose is something that is particularly important to the younger generation of employees and potential recruits, so we do need to get this right. It’s not a question of making bold statements about purpose; it has to be implicit in everything we do, rather than explicit.

“As a business we are fortunate in that what we do creates these iconic structures we can talk about. But we also need to ensure that we communicate the breadth of what we do, the smaller projects that may not grab the headlines but are equally innovative and financially important to the business.

“We want to communicate more to all our audiences. Our challenge is to decide not just what we say but how we say it, who we say it to, and what platforms and channels we utilise to deliver it.”

**Research suggests an informed and engaged workforce will create a more productive and successful business. What, if anything, do you believe an engaged workforce delivers?**

The importance of an engaged workforce is clearly supported by the data:

**Just 0.6%**

of respondents felt that an engaged workforce brought no advantages

**The top three benefits according to respondents included:**



It's telling that the three main benefits were commercial and external-minded, though the following responses were only marginally less and considered the operational and productivity benefits.

Direct commercial contribution is still most highly valued and most easily recognised among C-Suite respondents. However, the figures show CEOs recognise the positive internal impact of an engaged workforce only marginally less than internal productivity benefits.



There are a couple of outliers. For instance, the most popular response in the legal sector was 'Improved team working' (41.4%). This is significantly above the survey-wide average of 26.6% and suggests the legal profession relies on collaboration and close teamwork within a variety of specialisms, and is therefore more likely to experience and notice the benefits of improved team working.

# Old rule books thrown out as internal and external comms teams collaborate more



**Andy Holt**

Managing Director  
Words&Pictures

Board Director  
Institute of Internal  
Communications

If there's anything this year has taught us it's that any arguments about the importance of effective internal communication (IC) and employee engagement (EE) have finally been settled.

The crisis, and in particular organisations' responses to it, underlined the value of internal communications and the importance of maintaining a connected, motivated and engaged workforce. The necessity of a rapid response to remote working, and the need to reinforce a supportive culture for their people, meant companies needed to lean heavily on IC teams.

Consequently, new forms of communicating with a dispersed and concerned workforce meant ripping up the old rule books. Fresh ways of communicating with corporate teams had to be devised swiftly as new channels were created (and redundant ones resurrected).

While it was a time for a swift tactical response, in many cases it did more to align colleagues to their organisational purpose – an essential for any organisation. Furthermore, increased leadership visibility (through the PC and tablet) brought a genuine authenticity to corporate communications, raising engagement. It also accelerated that all-important union between internal and external communications and brand as teams collaborated to unify messaging and create a joined-up 'inside out' response to communications.

This timely approach continues to reverberate as organisations reset strategy, seek to align their workforce, within a hybrid model of flexible working, support their people's health and wellbeing while creating a more diverse workforce of many talents. All in the context of a changed world and responding to the transformed needs of their customers and stakeholders.

It is this golden thread, of a unified response, that weaves its way powerfully through these survey findings, making the case for 'joined-up communications' ever more compelling, timely and critical.

**Many businesses are planning for a hybrid home/office working regime. What benefits/risks, if any, do you think this has for your business?**

**73.8%**  
of responses expressed concerns about the risk or potential negative impacts of hybrid working

Despite this, the most common response (this was a multiple choice question) was 'A better work-life balance for staff leading to increased productivity'

**32.9%**

**This indicates a strong sense that hybrid working brings benefits for employees – and consequently potential productivity benefits – while some concerns remain in areas such as:**

**27.8%** Productivity

**28.4%** Training

**26.4%** 'A two-tier workforce'

**25%** Loyalty

# 29.4%

of responses from companies with a £500m+ turnover saw the benefits

compared to

# 25.7%

of average responses

This potentially indicates a greater agility and ability to invest in technology to support productive home working

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### Negative responses by company size:



Our data shows the more employees a company has, the less concerned they are about the risks of a hybrid-working model. The drop off increases exponentially as the headcount increases.

# Santander banks on internal communications



**Paul Diggins**  
Head of Internal  
Communication  
Santander UK

Paul Diggins is Head of Internal Communications at Santander UK. The bank has 23,000 staff working across its High Street branch network, contact centres and Headquarters. Highly experienced in the field of internal communications, Paul has held previous senior roles with global organisations, including Barclays, Rolls-Royce, Direct Line and T-Mobile.



Santander is consolidating its UK office sites into five main locations, including moving its corporate headquarters from London to a new £150 million, state-of-the-art campus in Milton Keynes in 2023. Around 5,000 staff based at either closing or consolidating sites have been offered new, dual location working arrangements, combining working from home with access to local office space in order to facilitate and encourage team collaboration.

As with many other large organisations, the pandemic has accelerated changes in working patterns that were already underway. Occupancy levels at Santander offices had fallen to around two-thirds as a result of its transformation programme and with more staff choosing flexible working. During the pandemic, the majority of office-based staff have been working from home with new technology enabling more roles to be performed remotely for the first time, including contact centres and live chat capability. High Street branches remained open throughout, with staff designated as key workers providing a vital service.

A disparate workforce and hybrid working patterns are likely



*“We listened more than we talked, and we acted on what we heard.”*

to become increasingly common in the ‘new normal’ post pandemic and pose challenges for internal communications teams everywhere.

Paul Diggins says: “My grandmother used to say that ‘God gave us two ears and only one mouth’: she meant, of course, that listening was twice as important as talking. In the pandemic that has been truer than ever and something we worked incredibly hard to achieve, conducting several all-staff surveys to gauge opinion and sentiment. We acted with compassion where we saw people struggling and have responded to feedback about future ways of working.

“With so much information coming at the public at home, and that includes our staff, on a daily basis – much of it perceived as confusing and contradictory, it was really important to us that the information they received from the company was simple, clear, consistent and aligned.

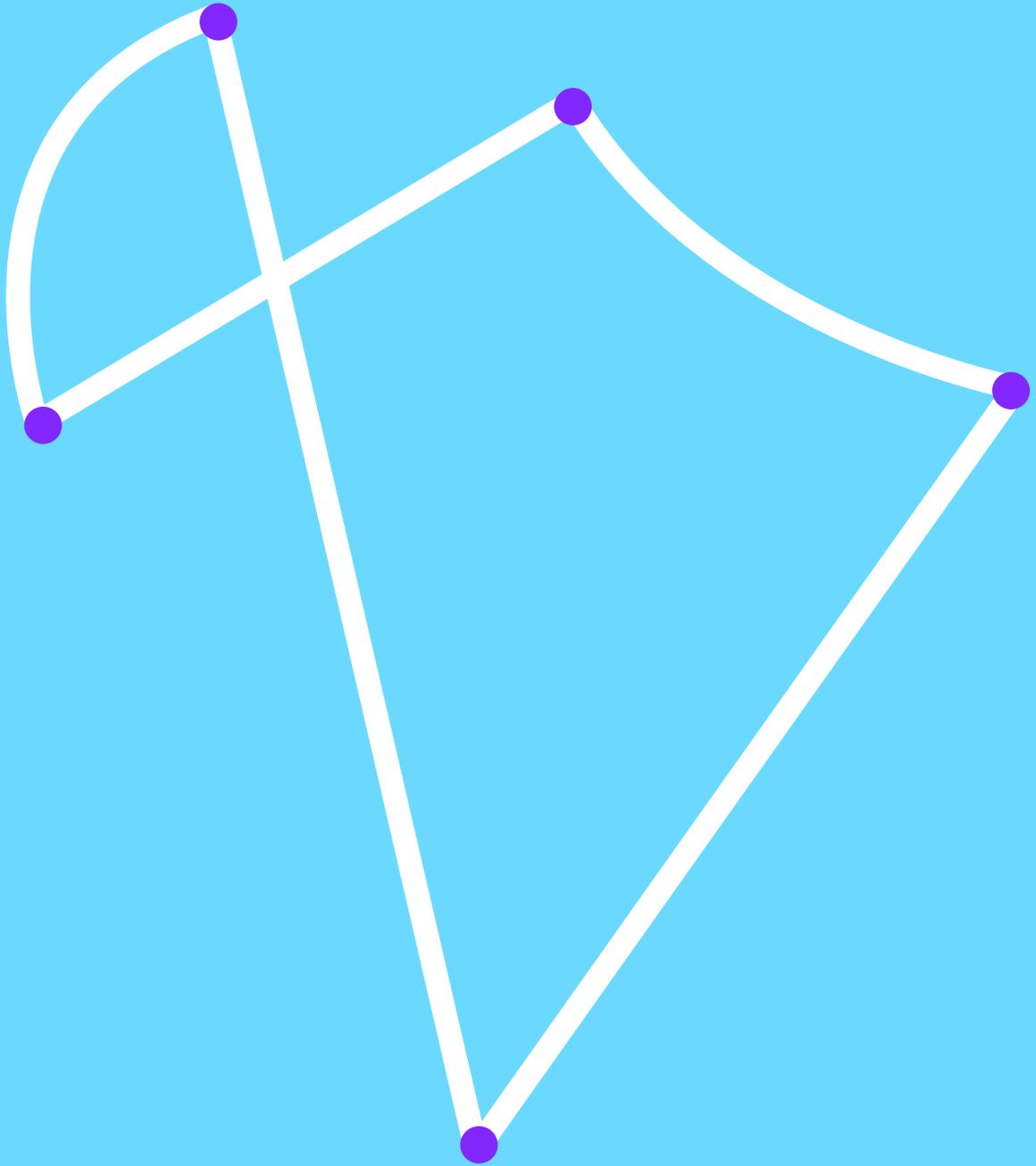
“As a business we have a clear purpose and one that is understood and shared by colleagues. That is to serve the community in which our people, their friends, and families, live, work and play. That sense of purpose was an important unifying factor

when there was so much uncertainty around.

“We listened more than we talked, and we acted on what we heard. It was also crucial to recognise that there was not a ‘one-size-fits-all’ solution. Not everyone could satisfactorily work from home for a variety of reasons, so it was important to be able to provide safe spaces at local offices where they could go.”

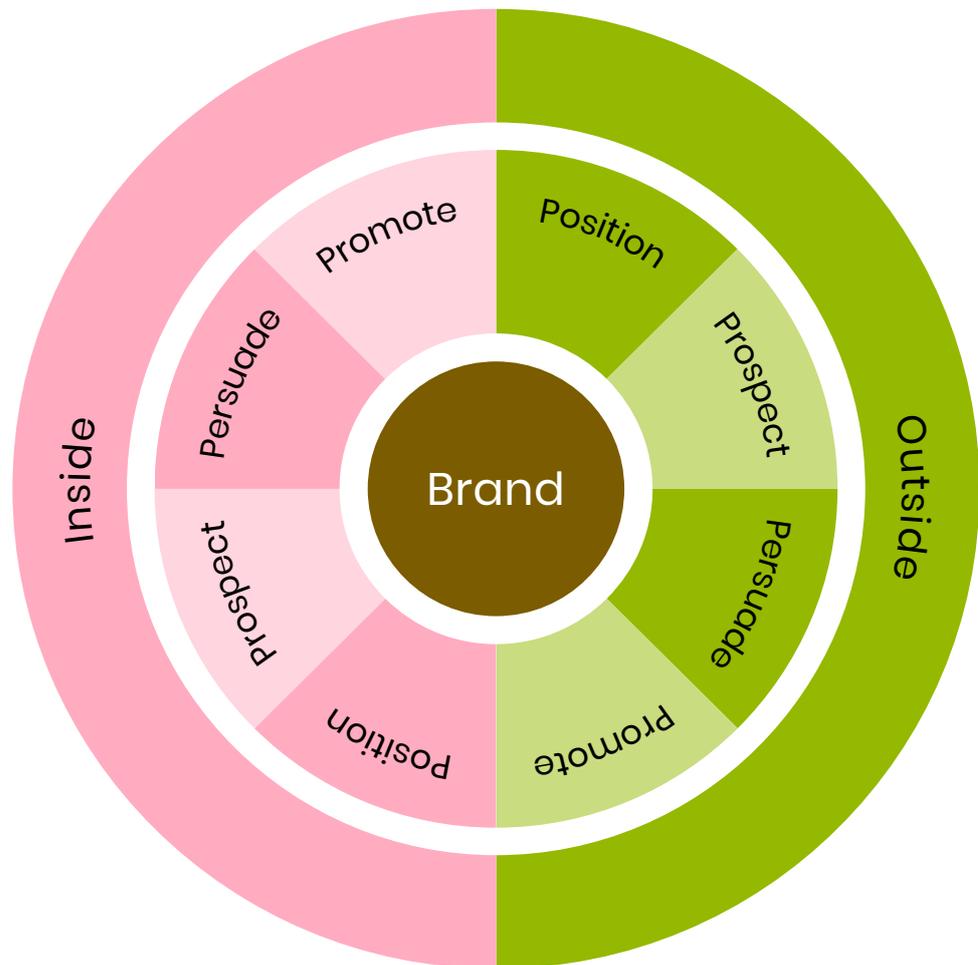
Regarding the future, Paul says: “The role of internal communications has long been appreciated but the pandemic has reinforced its importance in helping to create informed, engaged and productive workforces which ultimately make for more successful companies.

“In my view, internal communications teams have two key objectives as we re-set for this new world of work: one is to ensure we don’t go back to just being seen as a function to broadcast information but one that adds real value to the business and the other is to help leaders to communicate with confidence and authenticity.”



# insideout communications™

**insideout communications™** has been designed and developed by the Definition Group. It brings together a comprehensive portfolio of multi-channel communications services which our 50-strong team of talented and highly experienced professionals use to create innovative and integrated solutions bespoke to the specific needs of individual clients.



# definition group

The Definition Group consists of four award-winning agencies providing a comprehensive range of communications and related services to clients throughout the UK and internationally. It has offices in central London and Leeds.

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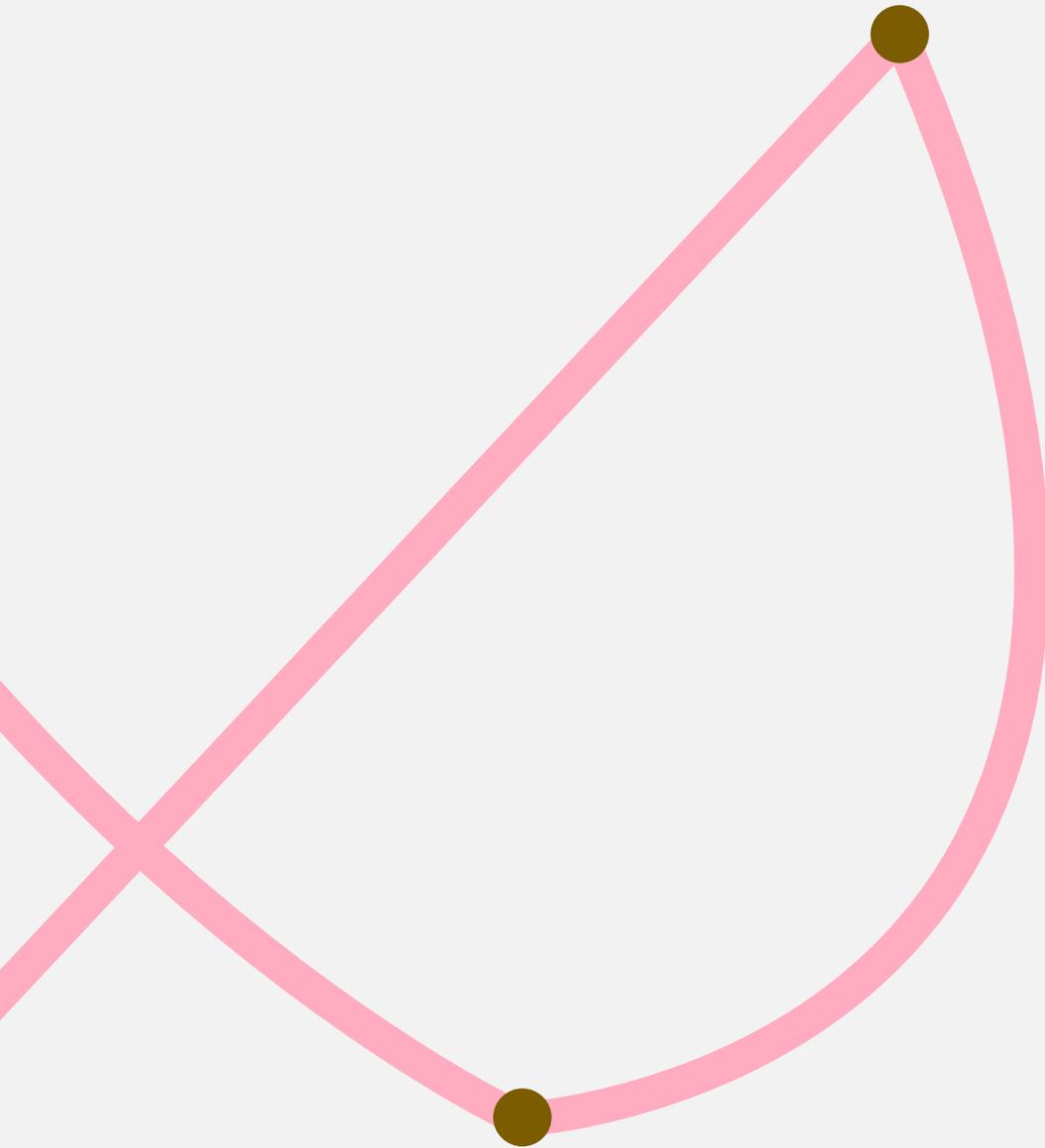


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# Who we've worked with





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