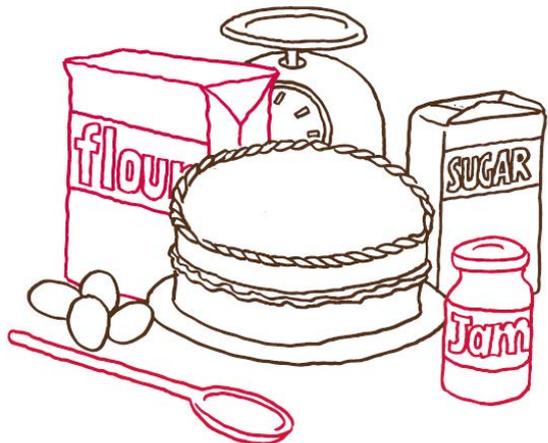


Let them eat cake

What internal communications
can learn from advertising



“ Islands of brilliance within a sea of mediocrity ”

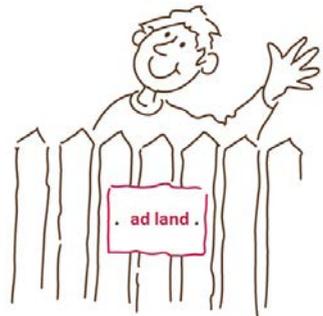
So said Drew McMillan, Head of Colleague Communication and Engagement at Virgin Trains about the state of internal communications in the UK.

Add to this Cosmo magazine’s recent lazy stereotyping of IC’s role as “organising birthday cakes” and you get the feeling internal communications lacks the reverence external comms has long enjoyed.

What we do really matters. We know the power of an engaged workforce, and the role quality, effective internal communication has to play in delivering it. Even adland’s woken up to it, with this month’s Campaign magazine talking of “employees as the business world’s greatest untapped marketing resource”.

Having worked on both sides of the fence, us Woodies have a rare perspective into both worlds. The inside’s the harder job with time, resource and budget all in short supply. A recent survey Woodreed ran among IC professionals brought this into sharp focus with 86% of respondents agreeing “There’s never enough time to do it properly, we’re always up against it”.

Despite the barriers, there’s much internal comms can gain from looking at the techniques of the ad industry. They’ve got more in common than you’d think. This thought piece explores some of these techniques and shows how they can be adapted inside.



¹ Woodreed ‘Barriers to internal communications’ survey via Waggl, 54 IC Professionals

I get so emotional baby

Both external and internal comms are trying to inform, influence and engage people, seeking to drive behaviour. People don't change the moment they step over the workplace threshold, they don't switch their brains to rational robot mode. They still react to the same emotional stimulus.

Good advertising makes people **feel** something. Emotional engagement's four times more powerful than rational in driving behaviour. Think OXO, Pret, Innocent, Lloyds Banking, MacDonald's, Comparethemarket.com. They tell great stories that play to our emotions. Why? Because they know experiences that trigger emotions are saved and consolidated in lasting memory. Emotions generated by the experiences tell our brains that they're important to remember. For a five-minute lesson on the power of storytelling in advertising search Google for Mad Men Don Draper's 'Carousel Pitch'.

Inside business your brand story is your strategic narrative - where your organisation has come from, where it's going and the part everyone has to play to achieve the vision. It's the first of Engage for Success' key enablers of employee engagement.

It's about telling your story in a way that will trigger the emotions, lodge in our memories, make us want to play our part.



What's Buster the Boxer done to our brains?

Money talks. Advertising's always had millions poured into research, making it super sophisticated. There's no reason why we can't get the benefit of this investment with our employee comms and use the same insights inside. Let's look at adland's shiny new tool, neuroscience, as one example. It tells us our brain applies four filters when processing comms: **Emotional** – we respond and pay attention based on our values, emotions and experience. **Historical** – we filter comms based on our own past experiences and memories. **Future** – our expectations and hopes for the future. **Social** – own situation, economic status, family trends and traditions.

Think about John Lewis' classic Christmas ads in this context, Buster the Boxer, Monty the Penguin, Man on the Moon just three. You can see how these filters have been considered, and the results spectacular. Every pound spent on advertising has generated over eight pounds of profit. Not sales, but profit*.



People are still the same people when they come to work, they can't just switch off these hard-wired filters. They'll be applying them when they are absorbing your internal comms too. It's about making it personal, making it reciprocal, making it memorable, keeping it simple.

* Les Binet, Head of Effectiveness Adam&Eve DDB

Ditch the corporate robot, shed the corporate armour

So important to emotional engagement is tone of voice. Us humans are hard wired to pick up on it. Companies like First Direct, Pret, Virgin get this. They're the masters and use it as powerfully internally as they do externally. At the First Direct customer contact centre the sense of the brand's personality is so powerful you can almost touch it. Yet plenty of organisations hide behind an armour of 'corporateness'. Friendly people turn into corporate robots the second they put fingers to keyboard. It's culturally hard wired. A legacy of corporate days past.

It's also partly down to audience proximity - the words on an ad are written by anonymous adperson, internal comms are written by the bod you sit next to in the work cafeteria. It is harder, but even multibrand organisations can find a strong corporate voice inside that complements their consumer brands, as Woodreed did for PSA Peugeot Citroën (see [here](#)). The result?



**Now our employees
trust our comms**



HR Director,
PSA Peugeot Citroën.

In the new world of anti-corporate, anti-jargon, corporate robot's got to go. Woodreed's developed a smart digital tool that blends the best of technology with the skill of the copywriter to help clients keep their IC on brand. It's called Muse. Find out more [here](#).



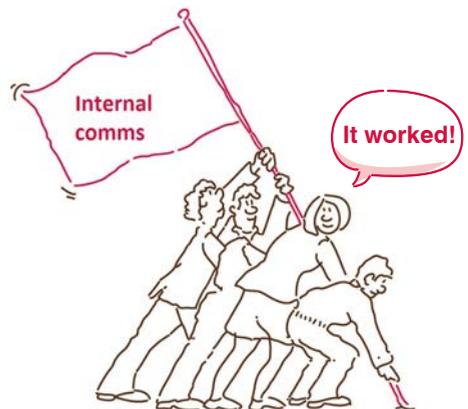
“ I didn’t have time to write a short letter, so I wrote a long one instead

(Mark Twain)

Justin Tindall, Group Creative Director of M&C Saatchi, nails it when he says good comms is about “paring everything back to only what’s necessary”. This applies equally inside. You’re not going to cut through by including everything and the kitchen sink. The audience won’t get past the first three lines, having neither the time nor the inclination. Less is more. Creative briefs are the lifeblood of ad agencies. They keep comms focused. It’s not realistic to write a brief every time you want to get a piece of comms out to your workforce. But it is helpful to consider these five questions for five minutes before you write:

1. Who’s the audience, and what do you know about them?
2. What’s your objective?
3. What are the key messages?
4. What do you want people to think, feel and do as a result of seeing the comms?
5. What’s the media?

It’s certainly not rocket science, but in the day to day stresses and pressure of working in internal comms, it’s easy to forget.



Comms written, now who shall we send it to?

Audience insight is the lifeblood of the ad industry. Again, it's the investment making the difference.

Organisations are developing more sophisticated ways of using their employee data. For career planning, training, succession planning etc. How about using that data to target comms too?

There's still a tendency to lump employees together as one homogenous 'staff'. Right now we're in a unique situation, with five generations in the workplace. It's causing a clash of cultures, a generational disconnect. If we fail to understand these differences and keep lumping people together we're going to be creating wallpaper comms to brick wall audiences. Understand how people want to be talked to – the message and the media. Don't write the comms and then think who to send it to. First start with the audience.

Woodreed was commissioned by a global logistics company to relaunch the comms for an employee benefits programme. At launch they'd used the generic, 'any company name goes here' comms pack thrown in by the benefits provider. The result: A less than 1% take up on a strong benefits package. The comms was entirely to blame, developed without any audience insight or sense of the brand. We developed a new campaign based on audience insight and used employee advocacy, perfectly aligned with their brand.

It worked.

“ **We haven't got the money
so now we'll have to think.** ”

(Ernest Rutherford)

With the average annual budget for internal comms the same as a one-page colour ad in the Sunday Times, arguably we need as much creativity as the ad industry, if not more. But are we breaking new ground, reaching for the stars? Or happy to keep our heads down and get on with business as usual? Constantly innovating and looking for new ways to engage customers, we think we can look and learn more from the ad industry. We can and should be doing more if we want to turn our islands of brilliance into a sustainable landmass.



About Woodreed

Woodreed is a specialist advertising agency that's been putting brand at the heart of internal communications since 1991.

We use the tools, methodologies, insights and creativity that marketing teams use to engage consumers, but we use them to engage your existing and future employees.

Woodreed is driven by our ambition to make workplaces better places to be. We do this by using the power of brand.

Woodreed plans brands and helps shape company cultures using various research tools and methodologies as well as the latest technology platforms. We create and run employee and customer workshops and focus groups. Our in-house creative teams devise multi-channel comms campaigns designed to move people.

Muse is Woodreed's online resource for the internal communications community. Muse combines the tactical - a service which gives internal communicators access to consumer quality comms written specially for the employee audience, along with a package of exclusive IoC accredited training and 'how to guides'. All members also have access to a community of like-minded Muse members to share ideas and best practice.

If you'd like to know more about Muse or Woodreed's proprietary approach to building brand-hearted cultures, please call Jo or Charlotte on 01732 424340.



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