![theEMPLOYEEapp®]

A PRIMER ON

Communicating With Deskless Employees

2.7 Billion Workers Don't Need to be Left Behind

Contents

Who Are Deskless Workers?

80% of the global workforce is made up of deskless workers. These are part-time and hourly employees who do not sit behind a desk for their jobs. They often don't have a company email address or easy access to their company's intranet. They are the healthcare professionals, assembly line workers, hotel staff, miners, truck drivers, restaurant servers, and cashiers. As a result, these employees have to rely heavily on their frontline manager, without communication or engagement from the companies they work for.

...And they are burning out, quitting in record numbers, and demanding change.

2.7
BILLION
people worldwide are deskless workers, many without access to company communication

> " The deskless worker comprises a significant percentage of the global workforce and tends not to receive the same attention when it comes to communications and engagement as compared to their deskbound counterparts.
>
> — Amy Jenkins, Director Client Strategy

Top challenges of communicating with deskless workers:

- Limited access to traditional internal communication channels like email, in-person meetings (town halls), and Intranets.
- Heavy reliance on the cascade of communication, which results in things being lost in translation and the message varying based on the individual manager relaying it.
- Without a direct line to employees (and vice versa), it can be difficult to get their feedback and include them in employee engagement initiatives that often favor a deskbound employee.

3 Ways to Engage Your Deskless Workforce

Why is it key to engage deskless workers?

Employee engagement is a measure of how committed and involved an employee is at work. This is a key part of the employee's relationship with their company. The main driver of engagement is when an employee feels like their manager and leaders care about them.

Gallup has conducted extensive research on this topic and its impacts on a company. In Gallup's Employee Engagement Meta-Analysis, they found that when engagement improves, this results in improved employee performance. They found that better engagement led to:

- 41% lower absenteeism
- 17% higher productivity
- 58% fewer patient safety incidents
- 70% fewer safety incidents

Improved employee experience also leads to an increase in quality with:

- 40% fewer defects
- 10% higher customer ratings

Engagement is positively correlated with profit as well with 21% higher profitability and 20% higher sales when employees are engaged. And highly engaged employees turnover less often.

Because deskless workers are often left in the dark and are in industries with the highest turnover rates, having an employee engagement strategy to is critical.

3 Proven Ways to Engage Deskless Employees:

1. Leverage Technology to Extend Your Culture Out of the Office

Our client, Veterans United, is known for its amazing culture (in fact, they've won multiple Great Place to Work awards). Their people have so much fun at work, and they want to extend their culture to employee families and employees away from work. They have some of the most fun digital, culture-building activities of anyone we work with. Here are a few of their virtual employee engagement ideas:

- They play Cash Cab where an employee will be invited to a "meeting" and then surprised to discover that they are actually playing Veterans United Cash Cab.
- Veterans United created their own radio station to share company updates and stories.
- They run VU's Got Talent
- And they focus on employee health and wellbeing with "Wellness Wednesdays", work from home tips, financial tips of the week, and so much more.

> " We had a few things we needed on [a mobile] platform. Luckily enough, everybody in our company has an email, everybody in our company has access to a desktop or a laptop. It was when they were away from work that we were concentrating on.
>
> **Cooper Lefler**, *Veterans United*

2. Localize Your Approach to Communication

NFI partnered with theEMPLOYEEapp back in 2016 because they couldn't reach 67% of their workforce—their deskless employees. Fast forward to today, and they have over 450 employees publishing content to their app.

Throughout their journey with mobile, they realized there was huge, untapped potential among their frontline managers. They saw that these local leaders could share updates that resonated more with their teams.

This has also enabled the corporate comms team to focus on top-down and executive communications. But their numbers really show how meaningful it is for communications to be so relevant and authentic—consistently, NFI is a top client for most likes and comments in their app.

> " With this mobile solution, we've been able to create a culture committed to communications and provide our employees with important information to help connect them to the greater purpose of our company and enable them to see their impact on the big picture of who we are and what we're striving to achieve.
>
> **JeanMarie Decker**, *NFI*

3. Make Sure Employees Know Each Other

Frontline workers are rarely all working the same shift. Do they know each other or people on different teams? Do employees realize you're all working towards one common goal?

Upstate Vet was going through a merger and knew that they would need a way to connect their daytime staff with their nighttime ER staff. So, they started by making sure all employee photos, names, and roles lived in their employee app. Any time they had a new hire, they would welcome this way and share their info in the app. And then they opened up permissions for employees to be able to post, improving collaboration and allowing them to swap shifts and share stories.

> " The app changed everything. It's been critical to getting everything to all team members and make it so they can communicate with each other *and* with us.
>
> **Brittni Huff**, *Upstate Vet*

Why Deskless Workers Are Being Left Behind

According to a Ragan Communication study, the three most used internal channels for communication are email (98%), in-person meetings (88%), and an intranet (80%).

But deskless, or frontline, employees don't typically have access to these channels. Even though the COVID-19 pandemic showed us just how much we need and rely on deskless workers, investment in mobile-first technology still isn't where it needs to be. Why aren't we placing the emphasis on these essential employees as we should be?

The 2023 State of the Sector from Gallagher also found some trends that are quite alarming:

1. Lack of investment. 46% of communicators believe their company doesn't invest enough in communication technology. This is combined with a relatively low satisfaction with existing channels. We need to make the case for channels fit for purpose that reach our employees where they are.

2. Untapped people managers. Deskless workers already rely heavily on their managers, but most companies don't tap into their managers' potential and give them the tools they need to be great communicators. The State of the Sector backs this up, finding that 34% still view managers only as a cascade channel and not a partner with an active role in internal communication.

3. Lack of connection. Only 60% of survey respondents thought their communication channels were good at connecting people on a human level. This is only worse for deskless employees who may not even have adequate channels to begin with.

Being Left Behind

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Unfortunately, the top challenges for internal comms teams are still mostly the same: there just isn't enough time or budget. And not having the time and budget leads to other problems.

But more alarming is the lack of support and direction from leadership. This puts more pressure on communicators to prove the need for resources and show the value of good internal communication. So, how do we move forward? And where do we start?

Note that reaching disparate workers (both remote and deskless) are in the list of top challenges, but near the bottom. The first step is to pinpoint the specific challenges of communicating with these groups.
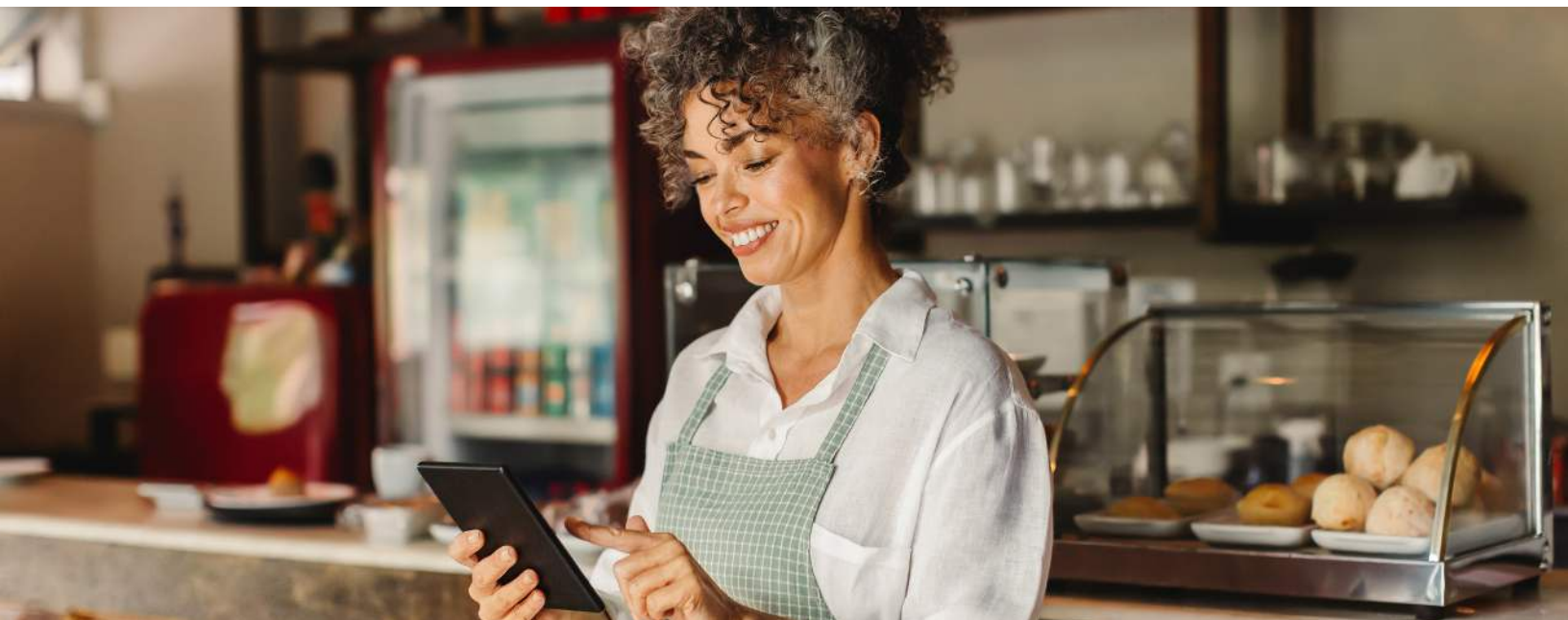
Saying deskless employees are a challenge isn't enough detail to come up with a good strategy. Is it reaching them that's the challenge? Engaging them? Knowing how to personalize content to them?

Challenge	% of respondents
Lack of time	34%
Disengaged employees	30%
Lack of budget	24%
Channels not fit for purpose	22%
Lack of analytics	22%
Poor manager comms skills	20%
Lack of clear direction from top	17%
Volume of comms too high	15%
Lack of advanced notice	15%
Lack of leadership support	13%
Remote/hybrid working	13%
Deskless employees	12%

2023 State of the Sector, Gallagher

Figure out what this looks like at your organization first. Then figure out what the ROI of fixing that problem is. This is what leadership wants to see, so it's a great place to start.

We also recommend conducting an Internal Communications Audit to illustrate where your channel gaps are. This will help you show leadership that you aren't effectively able to reach your deskless teams with your current technology. You might be surprised to learn how many employees aren't receiving key communications, or aren't receiving them in a timely manner or on a channel that is easy for them to access.

Case Studies

Engaging Deskless Workers

Read these case studies to learn how other companies have made key changes to reach and engage their deskless workforce.

Margaret Mary Health

This healthcare company realized their communications were outdated and not reaching their frontline teams. And with a team that was increasingly becoming more diverse, with more employees working remotely, a mobile-first app + intranet was the clear choice.

> " To get information to everyone at the same time and to make sure they see it. It was a no brainer to use the app.

Read Case Study

Waupaca Foundry

With a primarily non-desk workforce, Waupaca needed a solution that was mobile, accessible, and had the right functionality for their business. They now use theEMPLOYEEapp to share benefits information, production schedules, and outages, with analytics to track what's working.

> " We were so archaic in our channels before that we weren't able to track who received communication. At best, we were only reaching half the population.

Read Case Study

Veterans United

Veterans United is the nation's largest VA lender. At VU, culture and engagement are incredibly important, so they chose theEMPLOYEEapp to help them reach and connect with their employees when they weren't working at their desk or in the corporate offices.

> " Email is necessary, but it's boring. Mainly people, whether they're in the office or not, all they want is to feel connected.

Read Case Study

Ryman Hospitality

For the last several years, Ryman has relied on email for internal communication, but knew that it only worked well for deskbound employees. Now, they're shifting to a mobile strategy to reach, inspire, and engage the majority of their workforce: their deskless workers.

> " Email isn't practical for real-time updates for frontline workers. An employee app lets us share updates every day without flooding inboxes.

Read Case Study

About theEMPLOYEEapp

theEMPLOYEEapp was created by communications and HR professionals to address the challenges organizations face communicating with a dispersed and deskless workforce. theEMPLOYEEapp is an internal communication and engagement solution that allows workers to have fast and easy access to the information, documents, and resources they need to succeed in their work.

Our app allows you to target information to your employees when and where they need it on their smartphone, tablet, or computer, and empower leaders and frontline managers to engage and activate employees across the organization. Unlike most traditional communications channels, theEMPLOYEEapp creates a customized, branded experience for employees, encouraging your workforce to join together in a single, centralized channel.

Our Mission is to enable the effortless flow of meaningful information for organizations driven by frontline workers.

Request a Demo

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