

Why you need to draw the line at agencies that are not internal communications specialists

Issued by [icandi CQ](#)

7 Aug 2018

As we move into a communication world where high expectation, low marketing budgets and growing competition is the order of the day, the communications pool of public relations, below-the-line, integrated, above-the-line and digital agencies are scrambling to assert themselves in the new pecking order. Suddenly every agency is a social media expert, knows how to make your company "future fit" and has an iron-clad grasp of how AI will shape your workplace and industry. Even if you milk cows for a living... Willing to wage your entire media budget on that? Don't think so.



In the age of the general specialists, the line has blurred, along with the specialist skills and resources needed to engage specific audiences to meet particular objectives. As long as it goes viral and gets thousands of impressions clients should be happy right? This logic might fly with the On Fleek crowd, but when it comes to engaging your most valuable assets – your employees – you're going to need an agency that sees them for the complex powerhouses they are – radical consumers, brand ambassadors, social influencers, workplace recruiters, bottom line impactors, idea generators, tech users and product drivers.

Employees are not a line item you can afford to "add on" to your PR, BTL or ATL agendas and budgets. Employees are an excel spreadsheet unto themselves. They are your business, your brand and potentially your clients. So, you really want to keep them productive, engaged and living the brand message every day. Let's put it another way. As an organisation, would you like to achieve 47% higher total returns for shareholders over five years? Because that's what companies with highly effective internal communication practices are achieving, according to Gallup, along with a 21% increase in productivity and 22% increase in profitability. That's a sizeable line item.

The key here is "highly effective". We'll say it again – internal communication practices need to be "highly effective". They need to engage employees to build and support brands. They need to help employees make the connection between their role and the greater strategic intent. If your agency is not delivering employee experience touchpoints that enable change, create advocacy, support behaviours and help build a high-performance culture, they've crossed a line they shouldn't have. Because there's a big difference between "good" and "great" internal communication. Good communication informs. Great communication engages and inspires. Most agencies can deliver the message but won't have the skills and resources to engage employees to the point of creating a desired action or behavioural change.

Do you see now why internal communication is such a complex area requiring a very specific set of skills, knowledge and resources? Not only do they engage the full employee experience through various touchpoints, they align action with the employee lifecycle. This is especially critical for larger organisations, i.e. the more complex their employee networks, the more in-depth and nuanced their internal communication needs to become. These top companies understand that, which is why they partner with specialist internal communication agencies: GSK, ING, General Electric, HSBC, Coca-Cola, Vodafone, Aggreko, Thomson Reuters, Starbucks, Barclays, RBS, Zurich, Investec, Liberty, Multichoice, FNB, Standard Bank, Momentum, Anglo American.

The role of a specialist internal communication agency

Every employee has the potential to live and sell your brand. To leverage this, you need a dedicated team and resources focusing on internal communication, where internal communications work closely with HR, marketing and external communications to engage employees and drive compelling employee experiences. Specialist internal communications



agencies deliver this by aligning a company's big-picture goals, plans, and strategies with the needs of the employees on the front line. It's a big and complex role, which is why you need to make sure the agency can deliver. Here is a basic guideline. If your agency doesn't tick all these boxes, they shouldn't be ticking yours.

Seven services every specialist internal communications agency should offer:

1. **Indepth audits and research**, from engagement surveys to internal communication audits, culture and value audits.
2. **Full suite of strategies**, from internal communication to engagement, leadership communication, employer brand, and best practice.
3. **Facilitate conversations and integration**, between leadership and staff, communicators, external and internal, HR, communication and marketing.
4. **Defines**: employee experience journey mapping, value and culture frameworks, internal narratives, internal brand guidelines, internal communications policies and guides.
5. **Creates and delivers**: internal communication channels, internal campaigns, employee events, roadshows, branded content and programmes.
6. **Manages** projects, employee events, implementation of campaigns.
7. **Measures** effectiveness and impact of internal communication initiatives.

If you think about it, the whole employee capital is a bit of an "inside" joke. Most companies are currently sitting on a resource that is more precious than rhodium and easier (and faster) to mine. Companies just need to know how and where to extract this precious metal from its more shiny, but much less valuable, platinum family group. Even the king of consumers, Sir Richard Branson, knows that clients are not the gold standard: "Clients do not come first. Employees come first. If you take care of your employees, they will take care of your customers."

Don't get caught sitting on a piece of rock you can't mine. Partner with a specialist internal communications agency, like [icandi CQ](#), to build your brands from the inside out so you can always take care of your employees, your clients and your bottom line.

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