

How to Get the Internal Comms Resources You Need by Showing Leadership the ROI They Want— In 5 Steps



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The Job

You did it! You landed that new job as a leader of Human Resources, or as we're seeing more recently, People Operations. As you're settling into your new office, the CEO comes in to welcome you. She says the whole team is looking forward to improving the company's employee experience. She's prepared to give you what you need to start. All she needs is for you to tell her what resources, information, and people you need to succeed. Cue internal doubt and panic. Where do you begin?



The Easy Option

As you consider how to best lead your organization's HR efforts, you debate whether to start off with the easy, quick wins. Create team-building events. Show off the great benefits and perks the company offers; remind everyone about planned vacation days; make flashy flyers for the corporate holiday party.

Let's be honest, though. Things of this nature are fun, but not essential. You will not receive the support you need when your function is not helping the company succeed. Your function may even be on the short 'cut' list when tough decisions need to be made. As you begin to assemble the list of resources you need to succeed in your new role, you know that the easy option will not produce the impact you desire. It will not give your business and employees what they deserve. You need a different approach.

The Better, But More Challenging, Approach

As an HR leader, you face two main challenges:

1. Your department can be mistaken as the administrative or the "scary" department: the one people go to when they are in trouble, or having personnel issues.
2. You must prove that your department is part of the organization's culture and experience. You need to demonstrate that HR has the power to improve the company's performance strategically. You also need the data to show that your efforts have been effective.

Luckily, you can solve both these challenges together.

Where You Want to Go

(For the Visual Learners)

It Begins With a Plan

After deciding to use this opportunity to put your HR function on the company's radar, you need to make a plan. There are five steps to follow:

Step

1

The Data

To demonstrate your strategic value, you need to start with data. Any information the company can provide on the following areas will help you know where to focus your early efforts:

- Employee retention rates
- Performance metrics by location
- Best and worst performing products/services
- Customer service satisfaction
- Recruitment stats (cost per new hire, average length of recruitment time, average training time, difficult-to-fill positions, etc.)
- Employee feedback (collected during exit interviews, survey, and other HR exercises)
- Safety and quality KPIs
- Employee engagement/satisfaction/experience scores

After receiving the data above, you can assess which of the company's immediate needs Internal Comms can get to work improving.

Step

2

Business Goals
and Leadership

Along with the data, Internal Communications needs to know leadership's business goals. The data may show a considerable customer satisfaction issue with a specific service, but executives may plan to end that service before the year's close. Without knowing the company's goals, where it is headed, and its values are, your efforts will be isolated, perhaps even misguided.

One of your jobs as the new Internal Communications Director is to help the leadership team realize that you're an integral member of the team that helps them achieve their goals for the business. By asking about the company's direction and ambitions, you can pair that with the data you collected in Step One. Then, you can start to form a solid idea of exactly where your help is needed, perhaps with unique insights that the leaders themselves can't easily see.

Before you start framing your strategy, though, you need to know your neighbors.

Where You Want to Go

(For the Visual Learners)

Step 3

HR, Marketing, and the Brand Persona

As the Internal Communications Director, you will be communicating with the company's employees through your various channels and incredible content. HR and Marketing (especially Sales Support) are likely in the habit of communicating with employees in different ways. HR will have specific guidelines about what can and can't be said. They will also have rules about when, where, and how to share information. Marketing will have a distinct brand voice it has developed for the company.

You will be developing a unique brand persona for the company, tailored both to the employees and the company's general persona. Your neighbors in HR and Marketing will have some insights into these things. So, take some time to dig in and talk to them. Share some of your goals and be passionate about them. Remember also to be humble as you ask for information and insights. If you want your suggestions taken seriously, acknowledge your place as the new employee on the block. You're there to partner with them, not replace them.

HR will tell you about employee demographics, which should inform the content you create. Marketing will share the company's current brand guide, voice, and any employee-centric content that has proven effective. From there, you can create an Internal Brand Persona that makes sense as a piece of the existing puzzle. It also sets itself apart as an essential and individual element of the overall employee communications and culture activation system.

After speaking with HR, Marketing, and leaders, you may believe all three need to make tweaks to their approaches. However, the best way to have them listen to your opinion is to make a good first impression. So, use the information you have now to get started and jot down your ideas to come back to in the future. People are always open to new suggestions AFTER you do great things with and for them.

Where You Want to Go

(For the Visual Learners)

Step 4

The Strategy

It is a fact that there will be multiple areas of the company where Internal Communications can help. You need to ask yourself: which areas can be measured on a shorter-term basis that will have the most impact? Short-term does not mean days. Ideally, you will find a specific issue that you can attack one section at a time or has multiple layers that you can take care of one by one.

Why is this important? Is Internal Comms only good at short-term solutions? Not at all. This motion is significant because you are still starting and may have to use a lean team and minimal resources to make a big impact before your function's strategic value is established. Imagine you are able to find a small problem with a measurable solution that can be achieved in a relatively short amount of time. Then, you can have a nice demonstration of the greater impact your department can have when used effectively on a grander scale.

Suppose the company's employee retention rate is dropping more than it should every year, don't try to fix that for the whole company all at once. Instead, find a particular location or that is performing even worse, which can be addressed. Maybe leaders are unhappy and turn over faster than other leadership roles, and they can be helped first. Maybe there is a city where the company performs significantly worse than the surrounding state or region. Start smaller. Then you will be encouraged to develop from there.

Once you know the projects you're tackling first, you can start to assemble your team.

Step 5

The Team

What kind of team do you need to build for a great internal communications department? You need to 'grow' a team of people with complementary strengths. Yes, grow! Each member of your team should have individual specialities. However, they must also have the ability to work with others, fill in for the areas they lack and contribute to overall team success. By having these people work together, you will have a solid talent pool to dive into when planning each project's success.

Some skill sets can be performed by the same person. For example, some copywriters will understand SEO best practices, while some project managers can also create. Your team may start small, but over time you will be able to add on through other hires, contractors, and agencies. Because your team might start small, you need to use your IC strategy and goals to identify and prioritize which skills are the most influential now and which you can focus on in the future.

Where You Want to Go

(For the Visual Learners)

Here's a breakdown of the types of skills people on your team will need to succeed:



The Data Heads

- Systems strategists
- Data scientists/analysts
- SEO specialists

The Techies

- Web/mobile/intranet developers
- Instructional writers
- UX and instructional designers
- Videographers
- Video editors

The Creatives

- Narrative writers
- Video directors
- Digital and print graphic designers

The Strategists

- Content managers
- Content strategists
- Project managers

The Crowd Pleasers

- Events producers

You may also need a couple of communications assistants who are responsible for interactions between HR and Marketing. Your internal communications efforts must all comply with HR's guidelines and on-brand with the company brand voice and visual identity that Marketing created.

When Internal Comms, HR, IT, and Marketing all learn to play nice and see each other as assets and partners instead of silo-defending competitors, they can all achieve even greater success.

How to Start Strong

Write Down Your Goals and Measurables

Here is a small checklist of what you should have accomplished thus far:

- Reviewed all the data
- Learned more about the business goals
- Developed or honed a unique Brand Persona
- Decided on a couple of key areas where you think Internal Communications can make a measurable impact
- Chosen whom you need to hire

Now, you can turn all of this in to the CEO, who approves it (immediately, of course!). But don't be surprised if she's still a little skeptical. After all, she expected "content creator" and "graphic designer" to be on your hiring list, but "data analyst" and "instructional writer" were unexpected. As you hire your team, you know the C-suite is watching closely to see if the investment is worth it.

To start strong, you have one last behind-the-scenes step.

Write Down Your Goals and Measurables

To start your first weeks as Internal Communications Director right, you need to take your strategy and pair it down to SMART goals. These will become the means to take the next steps. What are SMART goals? They are:

SMART goals are:

- **Specific:** The goal is very clearly defined.
- **Measurable:** You can accurately track your progress towards achieving the goal.
- **Attainable:** The goal is not overly ambitious but a feasible stretch to accomplish.
- **Relevant:** The goal relates to the project and the overarching business goals you strive to achieve for the company.
- **Time-Bound:** You have rooted your goal in a timeframe rather than leaving it open-ended.

The overarching goal behind the SMART strategy is outcomes, respectable, measurable outcomes that make a difference in the company's ability to succeed. If you notice yourself planning around vanity metrics and things that are "pretty" but not necessary, stop, go for a walk, take a few deep breaths, and then tackle it again. Do not be afraid to create goals that have compelling reasons behind their importance constantly.

Three Great Options for Test Projects

Though your specific company's goals may vary, you need about three great "test projects" that will help your team learn to work together while providing the results of measurable outcomes you need to prove your strategic value to the C-suite.

How to Start Strong

Three Great Options for Test Projects

1

Test Project One:

Localized Overall Improvement

This option is great for businesses with varying performance levels from different locations. Pick a city with a couple of sites that are generally underperforming. Next, carve out three to six months to roll out general improvements using your intranet to encourage teamwork, collaboration, and communication.

Work from the top down:

- Create an online space for managers to benefit from training modules and instructional videos addressing current concerns for those locations. For example, if product quality is down, add modules that address how to improve it.
- Include personal support resources with the help of HR so they feel professionally and personally supported.
- Through ongoing content, encourage open discussions and best/worst practice sharing about issues experienced at each location and ways each may have found to handle them.

Once your leaders are communicating better amongst themselves:

- Bring the remaining employees in their own functional area with their leaders, using the same strategy.
- Make sure to account for their specific demographics if they are noticeably different from your leaders. For example, if there is a substantial age difference, the content that effectively communicates to each group will differ.
- Once everyone is comfortable, create space for leaders and employees to talk amongst themselves. They can share, learn, troubleshoot, and appreciate one another.



Hint

This same strategy works with an app or with face-to-face meetings if not everyone has access to your digital channels.

How to Start Strong

Three Great Options for Test Projects

2

Test Project Two: Start with Middle or Senior Leaders

No matter the size or structure of the company, leaders make all the difference. Good leaders and managers keep your teams happy and running smoothly. In fact, many people point to their managers as the most critical deciding factor when considering staying in or leaving a job.

For this project:

- Identify which tier of leaders is experiencing the highest turnover or has the least effective teams, then bring that tier into the intranet first.
- Create content around their shared common pain points and encourage team building and collaboration between the managers. Help them learn to see each other as support and resources.
- Host modules or events around specific exercises that will help them work through the biggest issues within their teams.

3

Test Project Three: Solving a Micro Problem That is Company-Wide

This option is great when you feel very inspired by leadership's goals and want to find a way to contribute to them while showcasing your team's capabilities directly. To do this, first, you take a general goal, KPI, or company value. Then keep breaking it down until you find a small subsection of it that keeps it from being achieved. Now, get to work fixing it!

For example, leaders have set a goal to better support their employees' personal health and wellbeing in the coming year. They added gym memberships, telecounseling, two mental health days, and a couple of additional health insurance providers to their benefits package^e. But three months into the year, only 1% of employees have even looked into the new benefits, and less than half of those employees have used them.

Based on your team's desires and demographic data, it seems that additional health insurance providers would most interest the majority of employees. The data shows that most of the company's employees have families, and HR has explained that both new providers have more competitive family rates than the previous options.

So, you make it your goal to increase the percentage of employees who have at least looked into the new health insurance providers.

How to Start Strong

The Results

The Result:

The Metrics Behind the ROI They Want

You know that everything comes with a price. Anything you ask for will be expected to yield measurable results and outcomes. These kinds of outcomes must be converted into graphs and numbers to serve as evidence of your company's Return on investment (ROI).

Your evidence will be presented in a boardroom. In there, you need to speak the language that convinces stakeholders and executives, and that language is numbers, data, and outcomes. It is highly critical to provide this type of proof because everyone who is invited to the table brings the same kind of information. You can't go in there with merely words and pictures, no matter how impressive your comms tactics and outputs are. You need numbers, data, and outcomes. Without them, there is only anecdotal evidence.

To prove the return on investment for Internal Communications, you must start your projects with measurable outcomes in mind. Let's begin with how to measure the results from our test project examples.

Test Project One:

The Localized Overall Improvement: Did it Work?

How do you quantify general improvement? In this test project, the goal was to improve a couple of underperforming locations generally. There are several ways to prove this was successful:

Hard Numbers (to show causation):

- Did employee retention steadily improve over the months of the test?
- Did customer ratings go up over the months of the test?
- Did quality control improve (less products returned, sent back)?
- Did sales and/or profits increase?
- Did loss decrease?

Soft Metrics (to show correlation):

- Did the employees report improvements to the work environment or overall satisfaction?
- Did managers of the locations report improvements to their team's morale or satisfaction?
- Did any recurring issues get resolved (inconsistent customer service, repeated product issues, etc)?

How to Start Strong

The Results

Test Project Two:

Starting with Middle or Senior Leaders: How Did They Respond?

In this project, you worked to strengthen the weakest link in the company's leadership structure.

Here are a few success measurements:

- Did turnover decrease?
- Did the teams performing under those leaders show noticeable improvements (see measurables from Test Project One)?
- What percentage of leaders engaged in intranet activities? For those who did, what were their results? For those who didn't, what were their results?
- Did their engagement remain consistent throughout the test time?
- How many times did managers initiate or participate in intranet conversations?

When running tests on a focused group like this, it can be beneficial to survey the team to measure general satisfaction and feelings of support both before and after the project is rolled out. This type of surveying will give you a good baseline to show how things change due to your efforts, and help you improve your actions beyond the project.

Test Project Three:

Solving a Company-wide Micro Problem: Was There Overall Improvement?

Because this one is company-wide, it is best to pick a problem with easy metrics to measure. So, with the HR example, you can coordinate your efforts to line up with an upcoming open enrollment. If a significant portion of the employees choose the new benefits, after showing little interest in it when it first rolled out, you will have precise numbers that speak volumes to the C-Suite.

Other clear things you can measure in the related example:

- Did the percentage of employees who engaged with content focused on highlighting the advantages of the new benefits increase?
- Was there an increase in questions or requests for more info regarding the new benefits?

- What percentage of employees activated or used the new benefits?
- Are there different health-related benefits that are consistently mentioned as being desired, such as paternity leave or more flexible hybrid work schedules?

How to Start Strong

Things to Avoid in Order to Succeed

Things to Avoid If You Want to Succeed

First impressions matter, so here are a few things to avoid when starting out:

Over-promising, Over-asking, Over-hiring:

We know you want to put your best foot forward, look like you're the expert, and act confident. However, changing people's minds takes time. Suppose the company expects you to be arts and crafts. If you surprise them by improving the customer satisfaction ratings at two stores in six months, they will be impressed and want to see more. But, if you came in promising an overall improvement across their 50 locations in six months and hired a full suite of employees to achieve this, you're setting yourself up to fail. Whether they give you everything you ask for right away or not, you need to assume you're facing skepticism by positioning your department as a strategic enabler of positive change. So, run lean in the beginning, and achieve fantastic results. Then, ask for a little bit more because there's magic in earning it.

Saying "No" to All the Arts and Crafts:

In the beginning, it does not hurt to help other departments where you can. This offering is a great way to open conversations with various people within your new company. When a manager reaches out about an online town hall for their location, say yes. However, use it to get to know more about their pain points so you can pitch ways to solve them. When HR needs that party flyer, use that to learn more about how they're trying to engage employees or challenges they're facing. Rather than allow your department to be flooded with these requests, strategically accept them. It will help you get a better pulse on the state of internal affairs in the company. Plus, as the new team member, you have to expect a little of these projects while you work on shifting their perspective on Internal Comms' potential.

Saying "Yes" to All the Arts and Crafts:

It's okay if your department helps a little with the "arts and crafts" requests. But at a certain point, you need to learn when to say "no." If your team is too busy balancing all superfluous things, it will not have the time to focus on bigger goals. Without those, your department will not be able to help the company as much as it should be able. Being overrun with arts and crafts projects is a lose-lose situation for everyone involved.

How to Start Strong

Things to Avoid in Order to Succeed

Rushing Into Action, Without Forming Your Strategy:


Without taking the time to form your strategy carefully, you will not be able to follow through on the promises you make. Do not be so anxious to prove yourself. You may feel the need to rush the results. You know you have a valuable perspective to offer the company, so take the time to form your strategy in a way that allows your viewpoint to shine. This approach will set you apart as a strategic asset and earn you the respect you want. In addition, not only does a strategy define **what you and your team will be doing**. It also explains to everyone else **what you and your team are not going to be doing**, unless they want to swap out some priorities or give you extra resources to do them. There is nothing wrong with using your strategy as a polite way to make the requesters decide what's more critical to them. Show them the impact you are capable of and let them choose one way or another.

Acting Apart from Marketing, IT, HR, & Leaders:

When you first come in, you may feel like Marketing, HR, and even other leaders are against you. Try to work yourself in slowly. Resist the impulse to respond by trying to act a part for them! This is where starting small helps you. With calculated and strategic goals you can be proud and passionate about your desire to help the existing processes. Demonstrate that you want to be a supplement to them and not a replacement for them. If you can do this, you will earn the participation, collaboration, support, and even the respect you want. Be patient. Over time, you will achieve all that you need and deserve. When Marketing, HR, and Internal Comms all learn to work together as indispensable ingredients of a superior recipe, the results are sure to be delicious.

Letting Imposter Syndrome Take Over:

With everything we've said so far, you may feel intimidated. You may be shot down in the beginning and misunderstood for a while. Just remember: any new concept takes time to sink in, especially when you're the one introducing it. Think about the airplane. It was a hard sell in the beginning, and now we can't picture transportation without it. A strategic approach to Internal Communications will be the same. Do not give up, and do not doubt the value you bring just because it takes time for everyone to get on the same page. Focus on your early projects. Apply yourself with care and tact. Construct a great team that shares your understanding of Internal Comms' value. Most of all, keep track of your progress. When you turn in that report, showcasing ROI that cannot be ignored, your uphill battle will start to even out. Just don't give up!



**You Can Do It:
Make Your New Role a Success!**

Maybe you're still standing at your desk, feeling intimidated by the CEO's request for the list of the things you need to succeed. Hopefully, this outline has helped you feel empowered. Now find a couple of good, bite-sized projects to establish a core team around and to aid Internal Comms earn a respected place at the big table.. Feeling intimidated is normal. After all, it's easier to be the sprinkles or garnish that are thrown on top at the end. After you endure the mixing in at the beginning and the baking in the middle, your role as a substantive ingredient will shine in the end result. Then, you will be able to keep being necessary to more significant projects while others are asked to be the sprinkles. Nothing tastes quite as good as a victory. We look forward to watching you achieve it in your new role.

Now go get 'em!

About Simpplr

Who We Are

Simpplr is the leading AI-powered employee experience platform. Organizations use our forward-looking, adaptable products to deliver personalized experiences that inspire and engage their employees. Wherever people work, Simpplr enables them to flourish.

Trusted by more than 500+ leading brands, including Zoom, Snowflake, Moderna, Eurostar, and AAA, our customers are achieving measurable productivity gains, increased employee engagement, and accelerated business performance.

Simpplr is headquartered in Silicon Valley, CA with offices in the UK, Canada, and India, and is backed by Norwest Venture Partners, Salesforce Ventures, and Tola Capital. Learn more at simpplr.com

Benefits

- Designed for the way you work
- Ready to use in weeks, not months
- Built for business users
- Unified, engaging experience across mobile and the web
- Powerful integrations
- Secure and scalable platform

Trusted By

