



# Strategic Corporate Communication

## 5 Steps to Overcome the Noise and Increase Impact



# In This InfoBrief



IDC conducted an online survey of 300 organizations in the U.S. across a broad range of industries to examine the hypothesis that U.S.-based employees are barraged with corporate communications — possibly hundreds of campaigns and thousands of messages per year per employee.



Sometimes the messages are business-critical—for example, strategic initiatives, or important business process changes. Sometimes they are for more routine activities—e.g., health and wellness events, employee rewards and recognition, or internal events.



However, two facts emerged from the survey:

- Strategic messaging fails to generate the desired consistency of effort or action.
- Non-strategic messaging fails to achieve targets for participation or engagement.



The organizations surveyed varied in size, with one-third having between 500 and 1,000 employees, and two-thirds having more than 1,000 employees.



Respondents must have either received internal email communication or have knowledge of sent internal email communication.

# In the Era of Digital Transformation, Employees Receive **576 Billion Emails** Annually: *Why Is Strategic Corporate Communication (SCC) So Important?*



**\$2.3 trillion/year**  
spent on Digital  
Transformation by 2023.

- Billions of dollars are spent on business and digital transformation; effective processes and behaviors are essential to success.
- Communicating the essential transformation strategy and expected procedures and behaviors is critical to successful transformation.



Employees at U.S.  
companies receive  
**576 billion emails**  
per year.

- Every critical message of change competes with more than 576 billion emails that employees in the U.S. receive every year.
- Email overload causes employees to ignore, overlook, or misunderstand what they are supposed to do.
- Important messages must be communicated well, or the benefits of key strategies or initiatives can be lost.

*Strategic Corporate Communication is essential to successfully generating action and achieving business objectives.*

## Benefits of successful communications

- Promote adoption of strategic programs
- Accelerate change
- Improve employee engagement and productivity
- Increase enterprise agility/responsiveness

## Risks of unsuccessful communications

- Reduced alignment and coordination
- Increased employee frustration
- Reduced employee performance from unclear or conflicting expectations

# Change Is Hard, Strategic Communication Can Help



**Change is necessary** for organizations to thrive and achieve their objectives in today's competitive market. It can range from the simple, like a new expense reporting process, to complex, like launching a new employee program, to critical, like digital transformation.



Important messages might simply be trying to change employee perspective or inform the employee. However, **employees sometimes resist** change because they fear they won't adapt to the new ways and may lose something they value—comfort, status, or even their job.



For change to be successful (and less stressful), strategic communication can align the activities of various functions and individuals. **Good communication helps organizations successfully change** by crafting messages that range from “information only” to critical urgent actions.

## When Discomfort Seems Like Resistance

The announcement of an office move might initially be met with excitement and positivity—especially if the building is newer and brighter and better located.

But what happens if some employees must commute longer distances to get there? What happens if some employees must give up their private offices for an open seating plan, and believe it will affect their ability to focus and get the job done?

During meetings, or around the water cooler, employees who raise their discomfort are seen by colleagues as reluctant to change. And that discomfort can spread.

Communication and explanation can go a long way to reducing their discomfort and increasing the motivation of all employees.

# Getting the Message through the Noise:

## Good Strategic Corporate Communication



Organizations are complex, with dozens of important functions occurring simultaneously.



Each function competes for employee attention at different frequencies and with different levels of urgency.



However, communication overload is having a negative effect on performance



Many messages are unimportant, resulting in wasted time.



Many communications are overlooked, reducing an enterprise's ability for timely execution.



While email is most common, there are many channels of communication.

### Key

Communications overload is having a **negative effect** on performance.

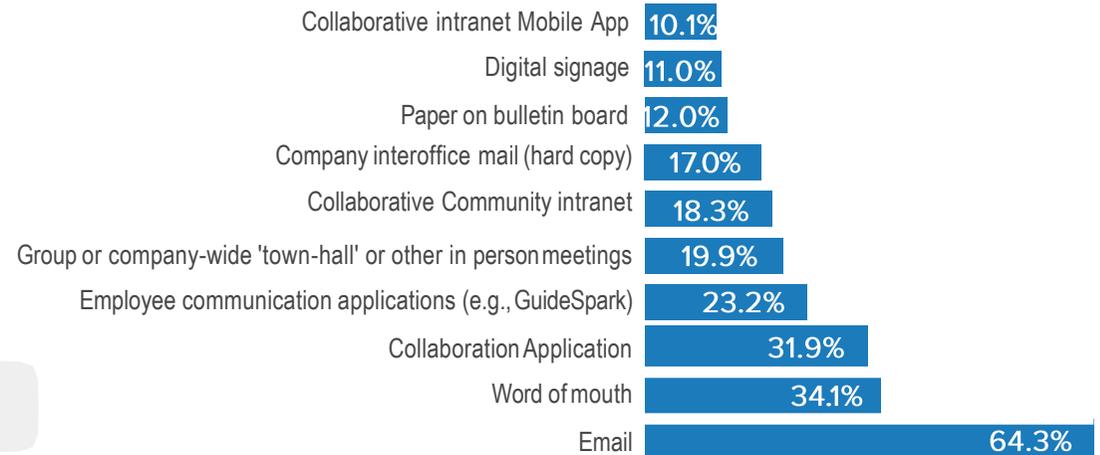


Employees receive **106 billion** Strategic Corporate Communication emails

Each enterprise in the U.S. generates an average of **5.4m emails** annually for SCC



### Respondents get Strategic Corporate Communications from Multiple Sources



Multiple responses accepted

# “I didn’t get the email.” Stand Out Among 576 Billion Emails a Year

Chances are, your important message **isn’t** getting through to your employees.



Each day, employees receive about **50** work related emails

Every employee receives about **9 SCC** emails per day

**40%** of those emails are “not important” (**44b** emails per year)

Of those, **34b** are automatically **routed to trash** (by email rules or other process), without being read or action taken by receiver

Out of dozens of messages employees receive each day, a large share of messages are “lost” in the shuffle.

When messages are not received, missed, or not acted upon, important initiatives are not getting the attention they deserve.

**Good corporate communications** practices help orchestrate messages, so every message receives the appropriate attention.

**Good communications** increases relevance of messages by making the importance and purpose of the message clear to the employee

## Key

Make the importance and purpose of the message clear to the employee.

# SCC Covers a Wide Range of Topics

IDC researched more than 20 topic areas, representing between a dozen or so emails a year, to more than 100 emails per employee per year.

To illustrate both the important issues and the complexity of the problem, we considered communications related to:



## Corporate Performance

– representing more than 150 emails annually per employee.



## Security

– typically sent to almost 30% of the organization.



## Corporate Culture

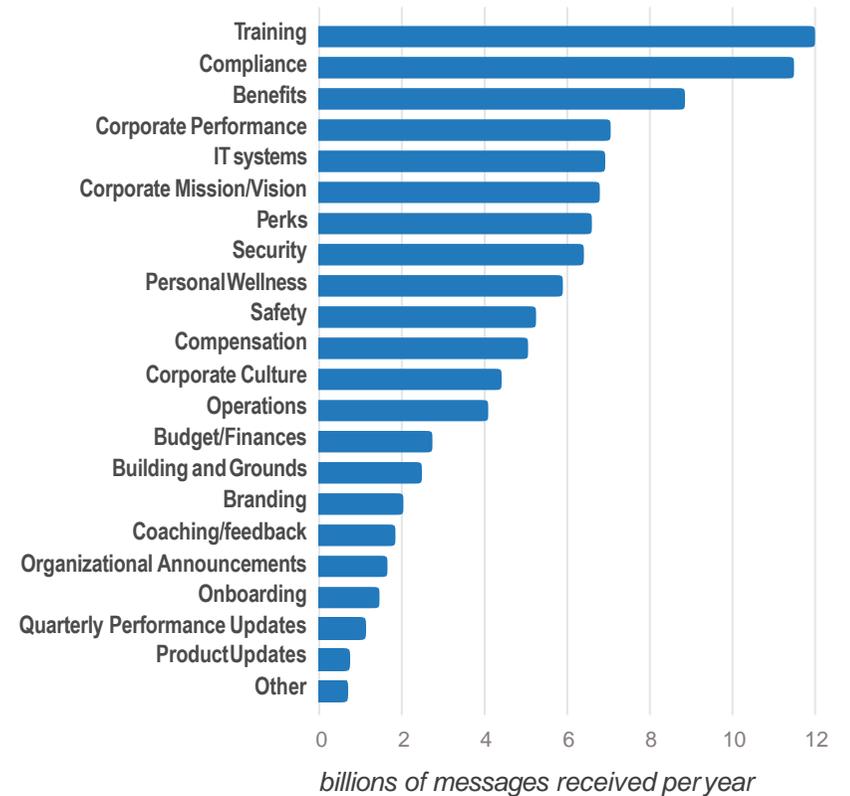
– only 28% of these campaigns are successful.



## Onboarding

– Typically 65% of messages are acted upon, but overall success lags.

Strategic Corporate Communication Traffic by Topic (106b total message per year)



# Actions Speak Louder Than Words: What Matters Is How Receivers Act

Communications generally fall into one of two categories:



**Information only:**  
no specific action required



**Action required:**  
some specific action was indicated by the email

IDC research shows there is a **disconnect** between senders and receivers.

### Senders



The originators of messages want “action” in one-third of messages they send.

### Receivers



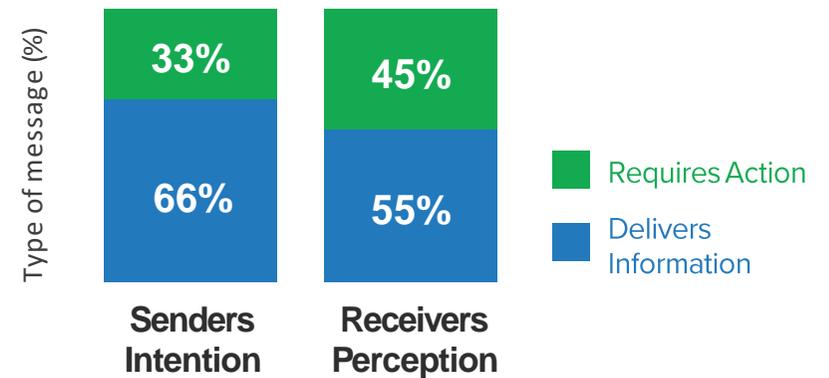
But employees receiving these messages believe 45% of the messages require “action”

This disconnect suggests both a problem and an opportunity.

**The problem** is that receivers are misinterpreting their responsibility and **overinvesting their time** in a large share of emails.

**The opportunity** is for senders to more **clearly inform** receivers of the expectation to act, helping receivers give each message the proper attention.

### Message Interpretation



**Key** Increase the clarity of the “**call for action**” to allow receivers to properly prioritize their response.

# Actions Speak Louder Than Words: Take Advantage of Momentum



IDC also compared reactions to messages that are **part of a series** versus those that are “stand alone.”

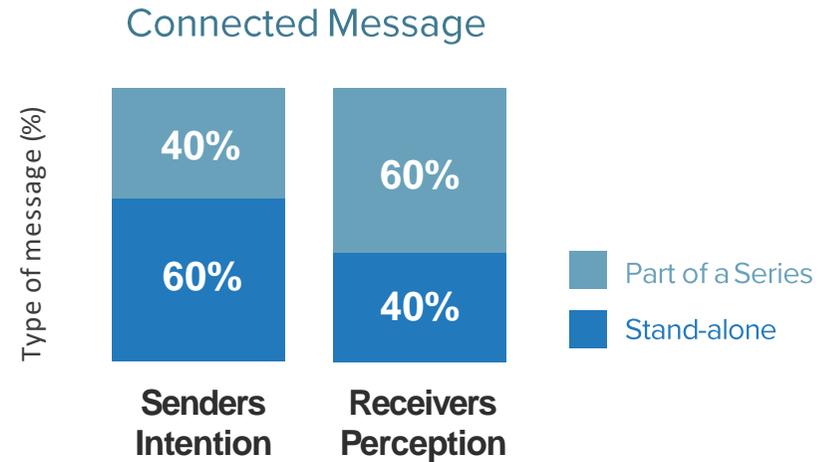


Employees tend to believe most messages are **part of a series**, even though **only 40%** of messages actually were.

This suggests **employees are making connections** between emails, even when the sender thinks of the message in isolation.



Senders can take advantage of the receiver’s perception by **intentionally connecting** related messages to broader themes to aid in understanding and increasing motivation.



**Key** Create synergies between similar programs to take advantage of “**momentum**” created by other campaigns.

# Success: It's in the Eye of the Sender

*Counterintuitively, success of a communication is not tied directly to overall level of readership or overall action taken.*

Just reading a message might constitute “success” for some types of communications. Other types require a more active response. That’s why we believe **the program’s purpose determines how success should be evaluated**. For example:

On the other hand, corporate culture and onboarding communications are both successful only about **25%** of the time, but have seemingly opposite response profiles:



Security communications are considered nearly **universally successful** when they are acted upon by **56%** of receivers.



Corporate performance communications are acted upon **more often** than security communications but are considered **slightly less successful**.



Corporate culture messages are acted upon by nearly **50%** of receivers and about **60%** of receivers make acceptable progress.



**65%** of onboarding messages are acted upon by receivers and **half of** receivers make acceptable progress according to senders.

This suggests that “successful communications” depends on **the message type and what the sender expects**. **To judge success**, senders must be able to measure **multiple dimensions** in each specific campaign.

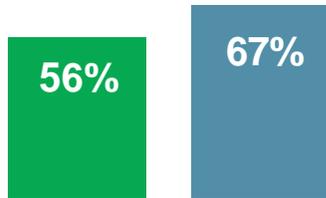
# Success: It's in the Eye of the Sender

*Success is more complicated than who acts and who progresses.*



## Security

100% of MSGs Considered Successful

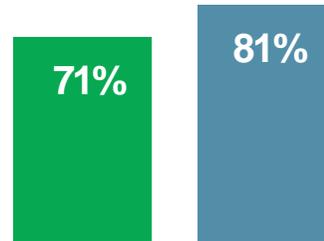


% acted upon % who progressed



## Corporate Performance

92% of MSGs Considered Successful



% acted upon % who progressed

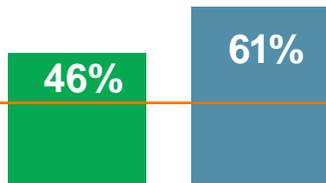
### Key

SCC program success should be evaluated considering program's purpose and expected actions.



## Corporate Culture

28% of MSGs Considered Successful

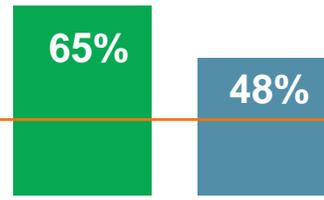


% acted upon % who progressed



## Onboarding

26% of MSGs Considered Successful



% acted upon % who progressed

# Characteristics of Successful SCC: Relevance and Reinforcement Are Essential

IDC examined 15 characteristics of messages. These included message frequency, channel, message length and localization.

**Three characteristics** were most strongly correlated with successful communications:



Localization



Sending a campaign or series of messages



Targeting frequency of messages

## Communication characteristics that influence success (in order of importance)

- Localization (to ensure relevance)
- Series of messages to introduce and reinforce
- Frequency
- Audience segmentation
- Call to action
- Known/respected sender
- Tone
- Establish context
- Appropriate delivery channel choices
- Timing
- Limited or no jargon
- Personalization
- Sequencing multiple messages
- Length of email
- Multiple forms of communication

# Characteristics of Successful SCC: Consider Audience and Content When Designing a Communication Program

Specific communications types had their own characteristics that improved success.

*For example, localization and frequency were both important to the success of security and onboarding communications. But a call to action was important for onboarding, but not for security.*

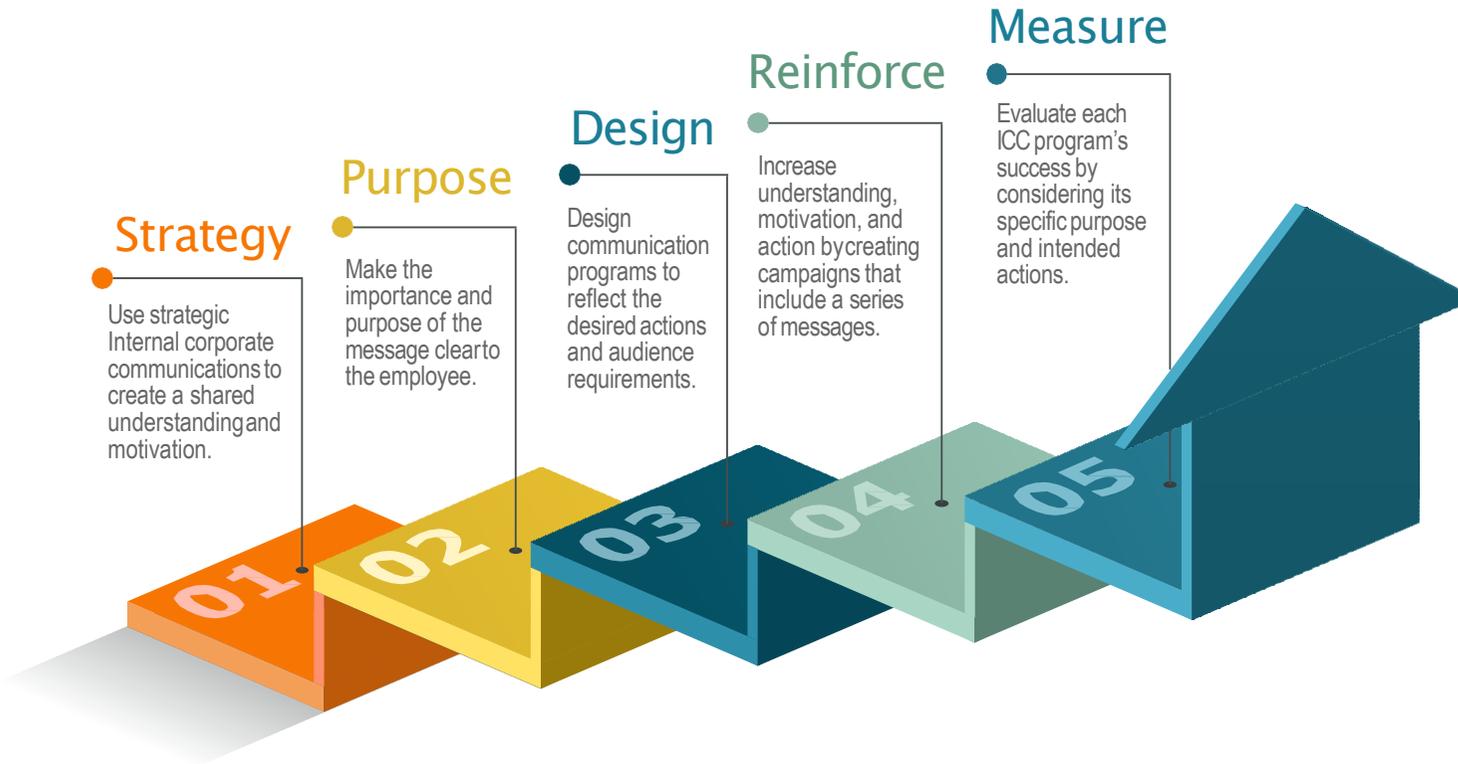
While relevance and reinforcement are generally essential to the success of every program; a combination of content and target audience determine the characteristics that matter to success.



Communication Type	Top 5 communication characteristics that influence success (by Type)				
	1	2	3	4	5
Performance	Series of messages to introduce and reinforce	Personalization	Length of email	Known/respected sender	Appropriate delivery channel choices
Security	Localization	Timing	Series of messages to introduce and reinforce	Audience segmentation	Frequency
Onboarding	Audience segmentation	Frequency	Call to action	Localization	Timing
Corporate Culture	Series of messages to introduce and reinforce	Timing	Known/respected sender	Call to action	Sequencing multiple messages

# Key Takeaways: Pull the Right Levers to Achieve Your Objective

## 5 Steps to Increase Impact through Clarity and Construction



Information overload is having a negative effect on employee's ability to understand change, leading to strategic priorities and programs not getting the attention and action they deserve.



Enterprises undergoing crucial change need to segment their audience and reduce irrelevant communications.



Enterprises must measure communications programs to properly evaluate success.

# Message from the Sponsor

GuideSpark is the leader in change communications, guiding over 1,000 enterprise customers to business success by changing the hearts and minds of employees.

Our GuideSpark Communicate Cloud™ software drives organizational change with communication journeys, targeted experiences that reach, engage and change employee behavior to achieve your critical business goals for Talent Strategies, M&A, and Digital Transformation.

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