Seven ways HR teams can learn from today’s savvy marketers

Engage your employees with these smart marketing techniques
Invest in employee engagement

Marketing, customer acquisition and customer relationship management have always been major drivers for investment and innovation.

It’s universally accepted that the customer is king, and that customer-centricity breeds sustainable growth. Put your customers first, provide an excellent customer journey and experience, and success will surely follow.

But what about your employees?

Just like your customers, they’re people – with one big difference. They’re your people. They build your go-to-market strategies, they manage your budgets, and they’re the ones delivering that all-important customer experience. Every aspect of your business, and your success, depends on them being aligned and engaged with the work they do. You know this. But the disconnect with the rest of your organization could be hindering the growth of your company.
Invest in employee engagement

The question for organizations is how to bridge the divide between HR and other departments, teams, and employees across the business. How can you communicate seamlessly with employees and support them in every aspect of their lives and careers? How can you get them to choose benefits that will fulfil their financial and health needs, as well as the needs of their families? And how can you make them feel part of something bigger and align their own personal goals to the goals of the business?

It’s all about good communication, or should we say “marketing”

Supporting employees effectively and helping them through their myriad of decisions is every bit as complex as acquiring, supporting, and engaging new customers. In fact, the parallels between customer engagement and employee engagement are striking, which is why the latest marketing techniques and technologies can be very useful for HR teams looking to connect with people across divisions and teams. And with organizations competing hard for skilled people like never before, your employee engagement and support strategy (read marketing and communications strategy) needs to be truly exceptional.

In this eBook, we’re going to look at some key lessons from the best marketing tactics, techniques, tools and technologies, and then apply them to employee engagement.
Learning from the latest marketing approaches
In the past, the world was simpler. Marketers interrupted broadcasts and plastered messages on billboards, and we all took notice (or not). Now, though, we live in an “always-on” world, where organizations are constantly competing for our attention online, on the web, on social media, and on our mobile devices. We’re all adept at filtering out a mass of messages every day, and “content” has to be truly exceptional to get our attention. If it’s not great, impactful and, above all, relevant to us, it just doesn’t get noticed.

While getting people’s attention is harder than ever, though, marketing has evolved to these new, highly competitive times. The focus now is on delivering messages and content that truly add value to customers. In this way, marketers are earning the right to enter into dialogue with customers – a principle that can be applied equally HR and employee engagement.

Here are just a few of the defining features of today’s innovative marketers:

**They’re getting personal**
Instead of using a megaphone on a crowd, the best marketers engage with the individuals in their audience, delivering highly personalized and contextualized offers and messages that really resonate. Marketers have always segmented their audiences. But technology and data have allowed them to really zoom in and get relevant.

**They’re using new channels**
You customized the message, now you need to customize the channel. Instead of interrupting the channels their audiences go to, social media means marketers can really engage with their audience where, when and how they prefer (e.g. the choice of media for delivery for a baby boomer will be different than that of a millennial). The big difference is that now marketers have to earn the right to participate in conversations, and customers will only listen to organizations they trust.

**They’re making communications two-way**
In the old days, marketers pushed messages out to customers: end of story. Now, customers want to have meaningful interactions with organizations, and they want their say on new product development, service delivery, and a whole host of other things, which means two-way dialogue is now essential.

**They’re using data to learn and optimize**
Today’s best marketers are constantly using data analytics to assess the quality and impact of every customer-engagement investment. To get this right, they’re curating disparate customer information and creating a single view of what really matters.
Learning from the latest marketing approaches

Applying the latest marketing principles to overcome pressing HR challenges.

This new marketing paradigm can teach modern HR teams a lot about what it takes to successfully connect and engage with employees more effectively at all levels of the organization.

The good news is that if you’re like most HR practitioners, transitioning towards a more personalized and contextualized, data-driven model, you’re ideally positioned to leverage all these new marketing concepts in your employee engagement campaigns.

You already have the understanding and focus on the individual needed to serve your employee audience. Now it’s just a matter of getting the right strategy in place to engage your people.

Let’s look at how you can get there.
Seven ways that HR teams can learn from today’s savvy marketers.

Seven ways HR can learn from the New Marketing – putting the theory into practice.
Seven ways that HR teams can learn from today’s savvy marketers

Connect with your audience

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Connect with your audience

Raising awareness isn’t enough; you need to encourage your people to engage with you.

What you’re aiming for:

- Benefits are only part of the solution. Sure employees need to know exactly what benefits are available to them, how they work, and what the benefits are. But they also need to be more proactive by participating in biometric screenings, making smarter lifestyle choices, modelling their future retirement needs, etc.
- They’re excited about their options, and optimistic about their futures.
- They make decisions that are right for them and regularly consider new options as they arise.

Why it’s hard:

- Managing health, wealth and career choices is seen as a chore: a whole lot of paperwork for little return.
- Choices are complex and employees struggle to understand which are right for them.
- Communications from HR are seen as boring or irrelevant.
- Employees often take no action on benefits, increasing the risk of health or wealth issues in the future.
Connect with your audience

How new marketing concepts can help:
Grab their attention

To really connect with employees, and to ensure they take positive action to select benefits, HR needs to aim for the kinds of high-visibility, creative campaigns the best marketers invest in.

Great design and messaging isn’t just about making prettier emails. It’s about giving your people better information and easier ways to actively participate. It’s about:

- Capturing employees’ imaginations and encouraging them to take positive action
  With messages and design that resonates with them – personalized and contextualized.

- Keeping top of mind
  With frequent communications via a mix of their preferred media (online, social, mobile, etc.) to maximize awareness of options and reasons for choosing them.

- Collecting and acting on employee feedback
  To find out what’s driving intended behaviors and what’s not, and to improve the success of future campaigns.

- Incentivizing employees to take action
  Through events, competitions, and “gamification”, with rewards for attending events or responding to campaign communications.

- Cutting through the clutter
  With communications that are clear, short, actionable, and conversational.
Seven ways that HR teams can learn from today’s savvy marketers

Case Study

Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC)

Driving employee engagement.

HBC, Canada’s oldest corporation and largest general merchandise retailer, wanted to communicate with employees more effectively, while reducing the cost of paper communications. To do this, the company created a secure online portal – MyHBC – where employee payslips are posted every week.

As well as cutting HBC’s payslip distribution costs by half, the portal provides a platform for enhanced employee communications. When employees log in to check their payslips every two weeks, they can also access a wealth of other information, including total compensation statements, guides for new employees, and scheduling information for work shifts.

HBC’s Executive Vice President of Human Resources, says, “My HBC provides a secure, easy-to-use vehicle that empowers associates to view their earning information anytime, with 24/7 online access. This has allowed us to significantly reduce operating costs while providing associates with easier access to information, benefits, and services.”
Personalize the employee experience
Personalize the employee experience

Deliver advice and support that’s right for individual employees and their families.

What you’re aiming for:
- Employees feel that HR is talking to them, in their own language with only information relevant to them.
- All communications come through the employee’s preferred communications channel.
- Employees feel “in-touch” with HR, and valued as net contributors to the success of the business.
- The number of employees taking positive action on benefits increases.

Why it’s hard:
- HR uses the same communications, and channels, to contact all employees.
- There’s no segmentation based on employees’ ages, preferences or cultural backgrounds.
- Communications are seen as irrelevant or “not for me”.
- Engagement is negatively affected, and fewer employees take positive action on benefits.
HR teams can also select the most appropriate communications channels for different types of employees:

- **Printed communications and emails**
  These can be effective for older employees and more formal documents.

- **Digital channels**
  Social media, texts and emails are great for sending out regular benefits updates to the digital natives joining your workforce.

**How new marketing concepts can help: Contextualize communication**

The best marketers don’t just personalize customer communications, they use contextualization. This means customers get offers that are appropriate to their age, gender, buying histories, and more, which helps to drive engagement and loyalty.

HR teams can also apply this customized approach to optimize their employee engagement strategies. It’s possible, for example, to personalize benefits offers and updates for employees based on demographic criteria like age, role, existing benefits and even cultural background. So Steve, the 42-year-old father of two, sees benefits offers about investments for retirement, while Sarah, the 26-year-old, sees offers about gym memberships.

Personalize the employee experience
Seven ways that HR teams can learn from today’s savvy marketers

Case Study

Telefonica O2

Engaging employees with a personal touch.

Leading mobile operator Telefonica O2 reaped the benefits of personalized employee communications strategy during an innovative flexible benefits campaign. For instance, the company used Instagram messages to send HR updates and benefits offers to younger employees with great success.

As a result of the campaign, benefits take up increased for all age groups and across all locations, with 74.9% of Head Office workers making benefits selections.

“It was the first time we have created an original communications campaign supported by eye-catching imagery and some innovative ideas such as the use of Instagram. It’s also the first time we have really embraced the targeting of communications to specific groups of employees.”

Kirsty Read
Reward Manager at Telefonica
Overcome inertia
Overcome inertia

Help employees take action on difficult issues, from retirement and healthcare, to life insurance.

What you're aiming for:

- Employees overcome the “fear factor” of thinking about their futures.
- They think about how their decisions on health, wealth and career can help them – not about disaster scenarios.
- They become optimistic about their futures and HR’s role in protecting them.
- They get inspired to take action and get the best deal for themselves and their families.

Why it’s hard:

- Employees don’t like to think about getting sick and needing expensive medical care.
- They don’t want to think about their retirement, and don’t understand how much money they’ll need when they get there.
- Many desperately need to review their financial wellness to ensure that their basic financial and health needs are covered.
- The paradigm of defined contributions puts a lot of pressure on employees to get this right.
Seven ways that HR teams can learn from today’s savvy marketers

Overcome inertia

How new marketing concepts can help: Nudge, don’t push

When it comes to inspiring positive action on issues that employees don’t want to think about, HR can learn a lot from marketers who use a number of different techniques for overcoming inertia among prospects and customers.

These include:

- **Nudge theory**
  This is a way of helping people think more positively about their careers and personal lives and make better decisions by presenting them with choices that have been designed, from the ground up, to promote those good outcomes. For instance, HR teams that show someone how much their colleagues are gaining from benefits can often tempt them to make the most of available offers themselves. Communications that fully explain the value of benefits, make choosing benefits simple, and show the long-term value of benefits such as retirement plans can be hugely influential for helping employees make better health, wealth and career decisions.

- **Using simple, clear language**
  Decisions regarding health, wealth and career can be complex and difficult to understand, causing some employees to opt out or delay selection decisions. By providing plain-English explanations of how things work, HR teams can prompt people to make quicker, better decisions about their health coverage, retirement plans and more.

- **Testing and optimizing**
  It’s unrealistic to expect all employees to make good benefits decisions at the first time of asking. With A/B testing and campaign performance data, you can assess the effectiveness of your communications. If an employee doesn’t respond first time around, emails can be resent, or information can be delivered via other channels to improve the chances of positive action being taken. Or take it a step even further and use machine learning to continuously improve message content and delivery effectiveness.
Seven ways that HR teams can learn from today’s savvy marketers

**Case Study**

**John Wiley & Sons**

**Supporting employees effectively through pension changes**

Leading global publisher John Wiley & Sons built a multi-channel campaign to support employees through the closure of the company’s previous, final-salary pension plan. As well as meeting each employee face-to-face to discuss the changes, the company built the “Wiley consultation microsite” where online tools were available for employees who want to model their contributions and potential retirement income.

Using the “Pensionsaver contribution modeller”, for example, employees can quickly see what an increase in their contributions would mean for them at retirement age in terms of increased monthly income. The modeller, a salary exchange calculator, shows the impact of the contribution on the employee’s net pay taking into account their savings in income tax, national insurance contributions, and the total amount invested in their pension. This and other campaign tools has really helped John Wiley & Sons bring pensions to life, supporting the company’s goal to foster employee contributions that far exceed the default of 2%.
Put employees in control of their own destiny
Put employees in control of their own destiny

Give employees an easy-to-use single view.

What you’re aiming for:

• Employees can see all their information and benefits in one place, giving them a clear view of how they’re performing, and allowing them to model for the future.

• Poorly performing programs can be easily identified and replaced.

• Employees can immediately see how their choices impact them, and whether they are getting the most out of their choices.

Why it’s hard:

• Benefits come from multiple providers (retirement plans, health insurance, dental cover and more).

• Data on these benefits is stored in multiple systems across the business.

• It’s difficult to see how benefits are performing and the value they deliver over time.
Put employees in control of their own destiny

How new marketing concepts can help:
Build great HR-portals

Marketing has made big strides in terms of providing a unified customer experience across multiple channels, and employees need a similar kind of experience to stay in control of their benefits, and to monitor their performance over time.

To put employees back in the driving seat, the best HR departments are creating portals, similar to commercial customer-service portals, where employees can view all their benefits in one location. By integrating all the latest user experience (UX) features used on corporate and consumer sites, HR teams can make it fast, convenient and easy for employees to access the latest account information, and to reassess benefits options on an ongoing basis. And personalizing the experience means employees will want to come back for more.

The best portals provide:

- **A single view of benefits (at a glance)**
  With the opportunity to generate regular, easy-to-understand Total Reward/Benefits Statements.

- **Intuitive tools for benefits selections and renewals**
  Making it easy to identify and update benefits that are underperforming using user experience best practices.

- **More insight for employees**
  Based on personal financial data for a 360-degree view of their finances, and even health data from things like their fitness trackers to get a better view of their overall physical health.
Giving employees a single view of their benefits.

Spurred on by significant changes in its performance management and compensation system, Microsoft has launched an online Total Rewards Portal (TRP) for its 100,000+ employees around the world. In addition to “traditional” total rewards information, the TRP features a robust rewards modeller, a comprehensive manager view, and a “snapshot” view.

- In the first hour of the site's launch, 7,300 users accessed the site.
- In the first 9 months, the site served up more than three million pages and was accessed by more than 86,000 unique users.
- Nearly 100% of all annual “snapshots” were released through the site.
- 89% of the site’s visitors rated Microsoft’s total rewards favorably.
- Users now access the site on an ongoing basis, not just at annual rewards time.
Gain a single view of the employee
Gain a single view of the employee

Help employees make the best health, wealth and career decisions.

What you’re aiming for:

- The ability to recommend programs that meet employees’ needs as individuals.
- Taking their demographics and personal situations into account.
- Making them aware of new ways to improve their financial or physical wellbeing.

Why it’s hard:

- Employee data is stored in multiple technology systems across the business, from HR and payroll, to training systems, benefits systems, employee directories and more.
- Data quality may be variable between systems, creating a muddled picture of employees’ situations and needs.
- Mining data across multiple systems is costly, time consuming and often subject to regulatory controls, distracting HR from core tasks.
Gain a single view of the employee

How new marketing concepts can help: Curate, curate, curate!

Marketers are constantly looking for new ways to personalize offers for customers and offer a better customer journey. To do that, they’re curating customer information stored across multiple systems – achieving a “single view” of the customer.

By taking a similar approach, HR can more fully understand what employees need and make the best benefits recommendations. That means being able to:

- Find and aggregate up-to-date employee information from across the business (role, pay, benefits, location, training, performance appraisals, and more).
- See how employees have interacted with HR in the past and what the outcomes have been.

- Update employee information automatically based on changes to operational systems, such as Payroll or IT, making it easy to manage changes and leavers.

- Compare and contrast data from different systems to ensure an accurate view of the employee’s situation and choices.

- Streamline reporting on benefits uptake and other key issues.

Armed with this insight, you’d be able to do a lot of important things:

- Recommend benefits options that are appropriate and timely for employees.

- Ensure that employees with inadequate pension arrangements or healthcare arrangements are identified and contacted quickly and supported to address any challenges.

- Improve the overall employee experience and increase engagement and loyalty with more focused, relevant messages.

- Introduce smart systems that learn from the data to improve behavior and start to be predictive and prescriptive.

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Case Study

Comcast

Delivering an integrated HR experience.

The Benefits Department at leading media and technology company Comcast is charged with delivering benefits for 125,000 employees across the organization’s three core global business entities: Comcast, NBCUniversal, and Comcast Spectacor. While benefits vary across the operating divisions, a common, well-articulated benefits philosophy was needed to bring everyone in the business together.

Comcast conducted a thorough assessment of the situation, reviewing communication materials delivered to the various audiences and conducting key stakeholder interviews (of senior leadership, key benefits team members, and HR). Based on this assessment, the organization:

- Documented a centralized benefits philosophy and guiding principles, highlighting the communication implications.

- Developed a new communication development process flow and supporting management tools.

- Conducted a benefits leadership workshop to gain buy-in from key stakeholders.

- Invested in process training for all stakeholders (communication team members, benefit program managers, etc.) to ensure successful implementation of the new, centralized communications strategy.
Cut out admin and focus on what really matters
Cut out admin and focus on what really matters

Deliver a broader HR remit that includes employee health and wellbeing.

What you’re aiming for:
- HR spends less time on manual and routine tasks.
- The focus shifts to strategic planning and employee engagement.
- Employees feel valued and get the advice they need, when the need it.
- Self-service of HR by both employees and employers.

Why it’s hard:
- Torrents of paperwork (everything from processing vacation requests, to answering employees’ questions about remuneration, benefits, and more).
- No time for strategic initiatives that add real value for employees, including benefits advice and critical health and wellbeing strategies.
That’s something HR can and should be figuring out how to do too. The mountains of “administrivia” you’re buried in stop you from focusing on what really matters – delivering better employee experiences. There are, broadly speaking, two ways to steer clear of the admin and focus on more strategic initiatives:

• **Automation and machine learning**
  Which can be used to identify which employees should receive communications based on their benefits status, previous interactions with the HR department. Campaign deliverables, such as emails and social media updates, can be created and delivered automatically based on “triggers” configured in the system – freeing HR staff for more strategic activities.

• **Outsourcing**
  Which shifts the burden of routine tasks and administration onto a trusted third party. In the same way that marketers partner with agencies on creative and campaign work, outsourcing common HR tasks frees time for higher-value work. These third-party outsourcing partners need to be experts in their field, with expertise and capacity equal or greater than the in-house HR team for the tasks in question. It isn’t enough for your outsourcing partner to take some work away from you. They’ve got to be able to do it better.

How new marketing concepts can help: Minimize manual effort

Marketing is a complex field, and every campaign comprises diverse elements, from creative copywriting, design, and print, to customer segmentation, mailings, and reporting. To manage all that complexity, marketers have had to minimize the manual effort needed to integrate and maintain all these processes.
Providing integrated health, wealth, and career information.

USAA, which proudly provides insurance, banking, and investment services to military members and their families in the US, has implemented a new HR strategy to enhance the employee experience and to automate key HR processes. This uses a portal to provide integrated health, wealth, and career information, with personalized messages delivering appropriate communications to the right people at the right time.

The process of creating and delivering personalized communications is automated through deep integration with the organization’s intranet. To further reduce administrative work, employees can find the information they need quickly and easily themselves on the portal. Based on this targeted communications approach, enabled through automation and a single point of access to key HR information, USAA is empowering employees to improve their benefits choices and outcomes.
Seven ways that HR teams can learn from today’s savvy marketers

Learn from your successes (and your mistakes)
Learn from your successes (and your mistakes)

Harness the latest analytics tools to measure success and optimize.

What you’re aiming for:

- A clear view of how campaigns have influenced employee behaviors.
- Continual improvement based on the ability to analyze performance and make positive changes to how campaigns are run.
- The ability to secure more funding for campaigns in the future.
- Increases in employee engagement and evidence that they are making better benefits decisions.

Why it’s hard:

- Lack of empirical evidence on campaign performance.
- HR departments may be unsure how to collect and analyze data.
- Campaign decisions are often made on “gut feel”.

Seven ways that HR teams can learn from today’s savvy marketers.
Learn from your successes (and your mistakes)

How new marketing concepts can help: Data is king

Marketers are fully accountable for the success or failure of their campaigns. Budgets have to be justified, and that requires in-depth reporting on everything from customer engagement, to returns on investment generated through sales of products and services.

The performance data that marketing teams collect and analyze doesn’t only help when it comes to securing additional budget for future campaigns. It also helps them to maximize the effectiveness of campaigns, and to prioritize activities that have the greatest revenue-generating impact.

By borrowing these data collection and analysis techniques, HR departments can improve employee engagement over time. The latest data analytics technologies and techniques can help you:

- Assess the effectiveness of employee communications across multiple channels and make positive changes to improve employee actions.
- Identify and amend errors in employees’ contact details by monitoring email bouncebacks.
- Use feedback from individual employees to improve communications and delivery channels and to improve campaign deliverables.

With analytics, HR teams can adopt an evidence-based decision-making process that takes anecdotal feedback and gut-feel out of the equation. As a result, you can prove the effectiveness of your employee engagement campaigns in terms of building a healthier, more productive workforce.
Enhancing benefits information with advanced analytics.

To improve the employee experience, CISCO built a robust, comprehensive benefits portal, consolidating fragmented intranets, partner vendor sites and enrolment tools. This provides a comprehensive view of benefits for US and Canadian associates and US retirees, while providing a generic, non-authenticated view for family members.

As part of its employee communications program, CISCO is using advanced analytics. Based on the way users access information, content has been redesigned at page level to increase convenience and clarity. User data has also informed a number of key innovations, from the design of UX-optimized help topics to intuitive “smart search” functionality.

All of CISCO’s investments in its benefits portal are driven by data analytics and the resulting metrics, delivering maximum benefits for staff and HR.
Unleashing the new HR

The companies that take employee experience at least as seriously as they take customer experience will be the ones that invariably win.

Engaging your customers is important, but having an engaged workforce who can get you there has to be the first priority.

For that to happen, HR’s going to have to learn a number of new lessons just like the ones we covered in this eBook.

• Connecting with your audience.
• Personalizing the employee experience.
• Helping employees make tough decisions.
• Putting employees in control of their own destiny.
• Helping employees make the best health, wealth, and career decisions.
• Cutting out admin and focusing on what really matters.
• Learning from your successes (and your mistakes).

The good news is that between HR’s long-running focus on employee engagement and experience and the massive potential for data-driven, technological transformation, there’s a whole new HR on the horizon.

One that’s primed to change the way people engage with their health, wealth and career benefits. That’s exciting for employees and companies. But above all else, it’s exciting for HR.
Further reading

For more topical HR insight, visit the Conduent HR Insights blog.

Put Away the “Spray-and-Pray” Method: Three HR Tools that Really Get their Attention

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