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by APPrise mobile

Field Guide to Communication with Frontline Employees in Healthcare



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As an internal communications professional at a healthcare organization, you know that your role has undergone a significant shift as the healthcare industry itself has moved through the digital transformation era. Once, your only mission was to broadcast important internal messages to the workforce. Today, these messages must inform, engage, and hopefully, retain all employees.

But even as hospital systems around the country have made significant structural changes to support the digitization of records and improve both face-to-face and online interactions between clinicians and patients, frontline healthcare workers are too often left behind.

They do not reap the benefits of all of these changes, because they often don't sit in front of desks with convenient or private access to computers - and some may not even have email addresses.

The healthcare organization's deskless employees are the outward representation of your brand. They work long hours caring for patients. They are drowning in paperwork and their inboxes are inundated with "important" messages. The last thing you want is for your internal messages to be seen as more work, or worse, ignored completely.



This is the ultimate quandary for an internal communications professional serving the healthcare industry. You are tasked with sending important employee messages that may require timely action, or at the very least, must be interesting and engaging if they are to be read or paid attention to by your staff. In this economy, it is far too easy for disengaged frontline workers to find jobs elsewhere. Not attempting to communicate with staff is no longer an option.

It is for this reason that theEMPLOYEEapp has been deployed by so many hospital systems and is being used by thousands of healthcare workers on a daily basis. What sets theEMPLOYEEapp apart is that it was created by a team of communications and human resources professionals with decades of experience consulting for organizations with real communications challenges. We moved quickly to develop a customizable solution that allows for the implementation of a mobile communications strategy that doesn't require heavy IT involvement, is cost-effective, and keeps employee data secure. We did so based not on our own experiences, but on what our clients told us they needed.

This Field Guide identifies some of the frontline employees in the healthcare industry who are hardest to reach and explores why it's never been more important to engage them. Additionally, we have included success stories from three very different healthcare organizations that came to us at APPrise Mobile with the same challenge. They were looking for a better way to communicate with, engage and retain their important frontline and "deskless" employees.

We hope you find this eBook useful as you plan your employee communications and engagement strategies for 2020. And, we hope to see you at one of our upcoming communications and healthcare events and conferences.

All the best,



Doug Pierce
COO
APPrise Mobile

Frontline healthcare employees are difficult to reach but need to be informed

Who are frontline workers? They are the people who drive your organization's patient experience. They are literally the face of your healthcare enterprise. Today's frontline healthcare employees are multi-generationally diverse, operating at different levels of experience and technical proficiency, but there is one thing that brings them together: their passion for delivering the best quality care to patients. Most of these employees are, by the very nature of their job descriptions, not working at a desk on a regular basis. And they are a force to be reckoned with. Of the estimated 2.7 billion deskless workers around the world, healthcare workers make up nearly 150 million of them— that's nearly 5 percent of this significant and all-important group.¹

This Field Guide identifies some of the common deskless employee roles in healthcare and explores some of the challenges of reaching these valued employees while also keeping them engaged. It also provides tips on how best to communicate with them.

Why is it important to reach and communicate regularly with frontline workers? Human resources leaders in healthcare know that it's never been a more crucial time to keep frontline staff engaged, with record-low unemployment across the U.S. and a national shortage of healthcare workers. Disengaged workers can negatively impact morale, with 37% higher absenteeism, 18% lower productivity and 15% lower profitability compared to highly engaged employees.²

As more healthcare organizations achieve their digital transformation goals, it has resulted in a fundamental change in the way we connect with employees. Most face-to-face communication between employees, human resources and management has been replaced by tools such as email and corporate intranets. However, frontline workers who don't spend their day behind a desk have been left out, missing many of the benefits of the digital transformation taking place. In fact, many do not even have a corporate email account.

This presents a growing dilemma for those charged with communicating with frontline employees. How can you get important internal information to them in a timely way? How can HR, communications and senior leadership make sure frontline employees feel included in the company culture, and keep them engaged so they don't leave? Further, how do you encourage these employees to take a required action?

Let's explore some of the frontline employees often seen in a hospital system or healthcare practice.

Frontline Employee #1: The Physician

Average age: 51³

Why they're hard to reach: On average, physicians work 51 hours a week and see 20 patients a day. Almost 25% of their time is taken up with nonclinical paperwork.⁴ The workload and demands on their time are just some of the causes that lead to physician burnout -- a phenomenon that the Harvard Global Health Institute calls a "public health crisis."⁵

How to best communicate: When it comes to engaging with physicians, these employees prefer to lead by example because these employees are highly experienced and tenured. This makes getting internal buy-in from physicians incredibly important to ensure they are on board with initiatives and encourage their staff to follow suit.

The Physician



- **Avg. age:** 51
- **Avg. hours worked:** 51h per week
- **# of patients seen:** 20 per day

Daily tasks include nonclinical paperwork



Frontline Employee #2: The Nurse

Average age: 50⁷

Why they're hard to reach: Like physicians, nurses are at the forefront of patient care, work long hours and are required to complete voluminous paperwork. However, they typically see more patients per day than physicians, especially in hospital settings. Nursing burnout and high turnover rates are common across the U.S., with a national turnover rate of 16.8 percent.⁸ Nurses come and go in hospitals and then there are home care and traveling nurses who comprise remote staff. No wonder it can be a challenge to stay on top of who is and isn't working for your organization.

How to best communicate: Though the average age of today's nurse is 50 years old, it's important to recognize the generationally diverse makeup of the nursing field. There are still plenty of Baby Boomers working as nurses, as well as Gen Xers, Millennials and even Gen X nurses who are just starting their careers. Engaging and motivating so many generations can be challenging. Nevertheless, there is a common thread among nurses. Research shows that equity, fairness and encouraging a work/life balance are important messages when communicating with nursing teams.⁹

The Nurse



- **Avg. age:** 50; generationally diverse makeup
- **Avg. hours worked:** 46h per week
- **# of patients seen:** 20+ per day

Total % of all U.S. hospitals with an RN vacancy rate higher than 7.5%



Frontline Employee #3: The Non-clinical professional

Average age: Unknown

Why they’re hard to reach: Because non-clinical roles are so vast and can cover so many different areas of healthcare, these frontline employees fall into many different categories and departments, making it difficult to communicate across all the areas they touch. Roles include receptionists, patient care coordinators, schedulers, food-service, medical interpreters - any healthcare staff member who interacts with patients but does not provide clinical care. An estimated 42% of the healthcare workforce is made up of these non-clinical frontline employees. These jobs are becoming increasingly difficult to fill. In fact, 61% of medical management leaders said that they struggle to recruit non-clinical staff.¹⁰

How to best communicate: As often as possible. This is a group that needs information to successfully implement practice changes with patients, but they often feel overlooked. A 2019 survey conducted by the Medical Group Management Association reveals that 40% of non-clinical workforce said “communication” was the most important factor in building a positive corporate culture.¹¹

The Non-clinical professional



- **Typical job titles:** Patient Care Coordinator, Patient Navigator, Scheduler, Patient Advocate
- **Average hours worked:** 60h per week
- **Important skills:** Teamwork, Customer service, Ability to think fast in an emergency

Total % of healthcare workforce



Deskless Teams Need Modern Tools

Now that we have identified some of the most commonly-seen frontline workers in healthcare, let's examine why traditional internal communications tools don't work for them.

Email is the dominant tool for internal communications. However, many frontline employees are overwhelmed by the volume of email in their inbox. This presents a significant challenge for HR and communications professionals who are tasked with getting important information and messages to their staff. Almost 61% of employees admit to skipping over internal emails.¹² It's difficult to help improve employee work satisfaction and workplace culture if the main communications channel for doing so is email. And for hospital systems with a large percentage of frontline employees not sitting in front of a computer, email is even less effective.

Corporate intranets were built as an internal communications vehicle and a knowledge repository. But maintenance is costly and often not accessible to staff who do not use a desktop computer or have reliable access to the internet. Most corporate intranets are not regularly updated and lack a search function, forcing employees to waste time hunting for the information or documents they need. And the user experience of most intranets on a mobile device is sub-standard, difficult and, in many instances, not even an option given firewalls and other security obstacles.

Frontline workers shouldn't be excluded from important company news, alerts and information just because they don't spend their day behind a computer with regular and convenient access to their organization's intranet. And, by the nature of their job, they should have easy and instantaneous access to the information they need, as well as answers to the questions they have.



Meeting Frontline Employees Where They Are

Since email and intranets aren't cutting it in healthcare, what's the best way for communications and HR leaders to reach these groups? For one, it must be a method that allows for a dialogue instead of a one-way conversation. Essentially, an effective employee communications method must address what Gartner calls an operational challenge: "Internal communication is often treated as a one-way publishing exercise (due to mounting frustration with email and aging intranets), rather than an opportunity to have a continuous dialogue among and with employees."¹³

Mobile devices are becoming the dominant form of communication across the World. In the U.S., the majority of consumers own at least one smartphone. In 2017, 67.3% of the U.S. population used a smartphone. By 2021 the U.S. will have a 72.7% smartphone penetration rate.¹⁴

Recognizing the transformation that was taking place, Northwell Health, the largest private employer in New York and one of the largest healthcare systems in the U.S., decided to meet their employees where they are: on their iPhones and Android devices.

The communications team at Northwell knew that in order to effectively reach their more than 60,000 employees, taking advantage of mobile via a customized app was an ideal approach. And they were one of the first to do so.

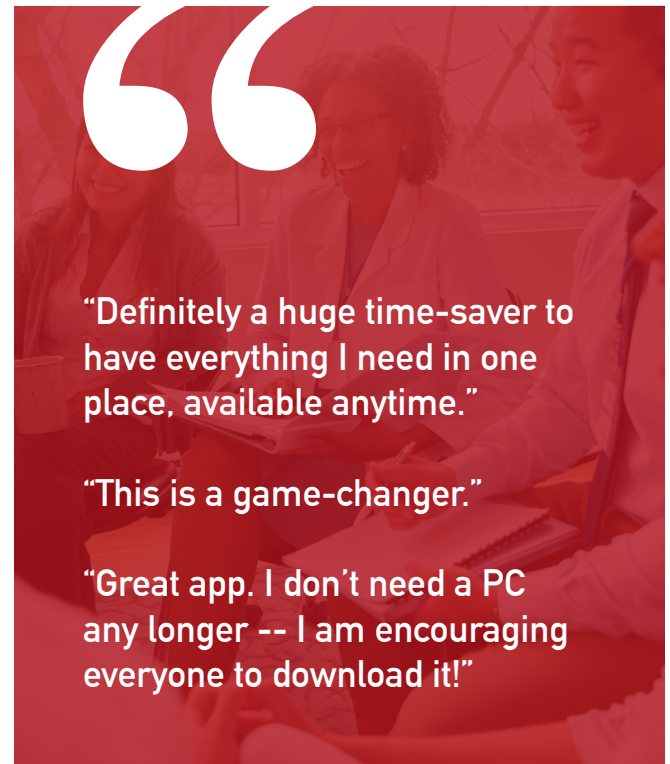


Meeting Frontline Employees

Working with the team at theEMPLOYEEapp and as part of a major rebranding initiative, Northwell Health created the “myNorthwell” app that provides a mobile experience to reach all of the organization’s employees, especially the frontline ones who were missing out on important information.

Some of the key features of myNorthwell include:

- HR self-service and employee wellness portals allowing staff to log in anytime, anywhere and check on benefits information, payroll and other resources
- On-demand video messages from Northwell’s CEO giving important company updates
- A social media-style newsfeed to engage employees and keep them coming back
- Discount offers for workers from local vendors and retailers
- Surveys, polls and other interactive tools, enabling workers to quickly and easily give feedback



Real feedback from Northwell employees

Not only were Northwell employees sharing positive feedback after the app was launched, but HR leaders noted that they were downloading and using the app in large numbers. Within several months after deploying their new mobile solution, 11,000 employees were using the app. The self-service information and content repository was accessed more than 93,000 times in that same period and the employee wellness portal saw a major uptick with more than 25,000 visits. One physician at Northwell Health said that he accessed myNorthwell on a daily basis since it provided an easy way for him to get important health benefit information through the “mySelfService” portal link.

The ROI of frontline employee engagement

HR leaders and communicators are often challenged with demonstrating return on investment (ROI) data around their programs and purchases. This can sometimes be difficult to quantify. However, it doesn't have to be. A good first step is to establish a baseline before starting a new initiative or launching a new technology solution. Start by taking an honest look at your healthcare organization, its business goals, challenges, mission and values.

Keeping healthcare workers informed and engaged both with patient care teams and the greater healthcare organization improves employee engagement, retention and overall performance. But another benefit is the impact that improved employee engagement can have on patient care quality and safety. This is what Excelsa Health learned when the organization transformed its internal communications strategy.

In the aftermath of a large merger that brought together four different hospital systems, Excelsa was tasked with reaching a complex, multi-generational workforce across more than 100 locations throughout the state of Pennsylvania.

Questions to ask include:

Do you see an engaged and efficient workforce -- both clinician and non-clinician?

Does your organization have a majority of happy, satisfied patients?

Do your most recent safety ratings and patient satisfaction scores make you proud? If not, it's time to make a change to how you are communicating with your staff.

Making matters even more complicated was the fact that 80% of the organization's employees did not have regular, reliable access to email. This included inpatient hospital care workers, outpatient services, and homecare and hospice professionals.

Excelsa had used legacy solutions before concluding that a mobile app was best suited to meet its needs. They turned to APPrise Mobile to create the Excelsa Health mobile app, using theEMPLOYEEapp platform. After deploying their branded mobile app, 94% of Excelsa Health rated patient safety as either excellent, very good or acceptable. That was an increase from 75% from previous years. Excelsa considered this a key metric in measuring employee engagement, which was partially driven by increased communications through the Excelsa Mobile App. Not only did Excelsa achieve ROI internally, but its efforts received accolades from external sources, too. The internal communications strategy surrounding the launch of the Excelsa Mobile App won the Silver award in the Employee Communication Program entry category for the 34th Annual Healthcare Advertising Awards.

Proving ROI on an internal communications program is much easier when you have analytics at your fingertips. Studies of happy, highly productive workplaces show that internal communications can have a big impact on employee engagement and satisfaction.¹⁵ But it's difficult to know which messages are resonating with your frontline workforce without reliable measurement to back this up. Mobile technology now affords HR and communications professionals access to real-time data and analytics to help demonstrate the following:

- Evaluating which content has been viewed and engaged with the most (and least)
- Determining the frequency and quality of content being posted
- Knowing which content has actually been received and read by frontline employees

Analytics can help you see what's working and what isn't, to focus your efforts on the right programs and to make more informed and hopefully better decisions. More importantly, analytics can be used to better understand and demonstrate the direct correlation between communications and business success.

Gaining employee buy-in

Whether it's email, an intranet, a mobile app or something else, technology tools are meaningless if employees don't accept and use them. However, strategies for furthering employee engagement should be something that is welcomed by employees and not forced upon them. Therefore, the tool you implement must appeal to your workforce and they should be able to quickly see the benefit and value of using it. Ideally, it should be intuitive and easy for them to use and not require extra work. To know whether this actually happens, it's necessary to have a roll-out strategy and plan prepared before going live.

For Springfield Clinic in Illinois, an important KPI to measure the success of their mobile app using theEMPLOYEEapp platform, was employee adoption. The internal structure of Springfield Clinic's system made the rollout of any internal communications tool a significant challenge. Springfield Clinic is one of the largest private, multi-specialty medical clinics in Illinois, with more than 450 physicians and advanced practitioners covering 80 medical specialties. The diverse staff at Springfield Clinic conducts well over 1,000,000 patient encounters a year. The 2,200 workers at the Clinic are spread across 50 locations throughout 20 counties in central Illinois.

With this in mind, Springfield Clinic took a slower, more methodical approach when it launched its branded mobile app, SC Network. The clinic devised a three-month pilot program to a group of approximately 50 employees who tested the new tool and provided feedback. After this test period, Springfield Clinic rolled out SC Network organization-wide, achieving the following results:

- Within five months of launching its branded app, SC Network, nearly 50% of the entire Springfield Clinic population was using the app.
- The Clinic achieved a 100% adoption rate by the organization's senior leadership – reinforced by the CEO.
- By keeping content on the app fresh, relevant and valuable, established a 96% employee return rate after passing the 1,200-user mark.

“Revitalizing our communications strategy with APPrise Mobile and theEMPLOYEEapp has had a tremendous impact on employee engagement, satisfaction and morale.”

Mobile App: Buy, build, or something in between

We have examined some of the barriers that keep frontline workers from being highly engaged, and how some healthcare organizations have addressed this problem. We've reviewed the shortcomings of traditional technology tools such as email and intranets. Now, let's take a deeper dive into mobile apps. Many healthcare organizations are looking to apps to get information to and engage their primarily deskless/frontline employees. But they may struggle with how to determine which features and capabilities matter the most.

The first question when it comes to deploying an internal communications app is whether to build your own or outsource to a solution provider. In many organizations, it is often the IT department that makes the decision on whether to buy an off-the-shelf app or build one that is completely customized from scratch. There are pros and cons to both, and several varying degrees of options in between.

Building your own employee engagement mobile app might seem appealing at first, because you will be in complete control over what the product will look like and how it will function. This path can also be time-consuming and costly. It is estimated that a typical in-house build of a mobile app can take 12-18 months, and can require hundreds of thousands of dollars to develop.¹⁶ And this is to just complete the build. But what happens after? What happens when the next version of the Apple and Android operating systems are launched? Will the same resources still be available? This is precisely the challenge that gave rise to the software industry and cloud-based software solutions.



If your healthcare organization doesn't employ its own mobile development team, it may be faster and more cost-effective to bring in a technology partner. There are various and off-the-shelf solutions now available for employee communications and engagement. Working with a developer doesn't mean you'll automatically relinquish control over features, functionality, and the user experience. Rather, there are solutions that allow you to use their proprietary platform as a starting point, and then customize features, capabilities, and analytics depending on your organization's unique needs.

To help you get started, here are key functions and best practices to consider:

- Turn-key app solution that easily and securely integrates with any employee database and the major single sign-on providers making for an easy and rapid deployment
- Customizable in brand so the app has a look and feel that is consistent with your healthcare organization
- Flexibility in content, including the ability to upload video and audio files, all document and file types, the ability to link to outside resources, portals and other apps
- Available on any mobile or web-enabled device (including desktop computers) and with or without an internet connection
- The ability to segment and target content and messages for different audiences (e.g. clinical vs. non-clinical, different locations, etc.)
- Easy for employees to use and interact with - a familiar app experience especially for those who are not tech-savvy



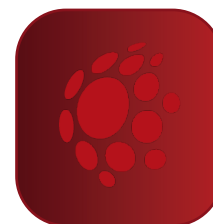
Ideally, your mobile app (or any other new technology solution) should make employee communications seamless for everyone. Engagement is about being timely, targeted and relevant - sending the right information to the right employees at the right time. The right mobile app solution can help you achieve this. It should be an intuitive platform that is easy for your team to maintain and add new content to, but that's also secure, so your employees feel safe using it.

HR and internal communications teams must be able to deliver information to various groups of employees, including different practice areas and locations based on how your organization's employee database is structured. And finally, a successful mobile app should provide you with the important analytics and data to measure success, show ROI to senior leadership, and demonstrate the importance of communications and your newly-found way of engaging with employees to the business success of your organization.

About theEMPLOYEEapp

Developed by APPrise Mobile, theEMPLOYEEapp® is an internal communications and employee engagement mobile platform that allows companies of any size to have their own branded app for Apple and Android devices (as well as a web app). It securely integrates with a company's employee database and allows for the aggregation and distribution of content, access to workplace tools, and the instantaneous push of messages directly to an employee's mobile device.

To learn more about theEMPLOYEEapp and how APPrise Mobile works with other healthcare organizations, request a demo. You can also stay in the know on the latest trends and issues impacting the internal communications industry by subscribing to our video series, ICTV (Internal Comms TV).



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