theEMPLOYEEapp®

A PRIMER ON
Communicating With Deskless Employees

2.7 Billion Workers Don't Need to be Left Behind

Communicating With Deskless Employees

PRIMER

Contents

Who Are Deskless Workers?

80% of the global workforce is made up of deskless workers—those who are part-time and hourly, don't have a company email address, and certainly don't have easy access to their company's Intranet. They are the healthcare professionals, assembly line workers, hotel staff, miners, truck drivers, restaurant servers, and cashiers. As a result, this huge population is often left to fend for themselves and rely heavily on their frontline manager, without communication or engagement from the companies they work for.

...And they are burning out, quitting in record numbers, and demanding change.

an estimated

2.7
BILLION

people worldwide don't sit behind desks in traditional office settings, don't use a computer for work, don't have corporate email addresses or access to intranets

"
The deskless worker comprises a significant percentage of the global workforce and tends not to receive the same attention when it comes to communications and engagement as compared to their 'white-collar' counterparts...

— Amy Jenkins, Director Client Strategy

Key Communication Challenges:

- Limited access to traditional internal communication channels like email, in-person meetings (town halls), and Intranets.
- Heavy reliance on the cascade of communication, which results in things being lost in translation and the message varying based on the individual manager relaying it.
- Without a direct line to employees (and vice versa), it can be difficult to get their feedback and include them in employee engagement initiatives that often favor a deskbound employee.

Trust is Local: Businesses Still ONLY Trusted Institution

[Edelman's annual Trust Barometer](#) is an invaluable resource for companies trying to glean what will be important for businesses and communicators to focus on in the coming year.

Each year, they share a key theme of trust:

- **2020: Competence and Ethics.** This was predicted to be the year of competence and ethics — which eerily was more accurate than anyone could have predicted with the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, political tensions, and violence sweeping across the country.
- **2021: Declaring Information Bankruptcy.** Trust shifted to businesses. "My employer" was the most trusted source of information to the public. But with that trust comes responsibility...organizations need to take a public stand on key social issues.
- **2022: The Cycle of Distrust.** 2022 feels like a palpable shift...and a closing opportunity. As trust declines across all other sources (Government, Media, NGOs, etc.), businesses have the chance to prove themselves worthy of trust. With employees quitting at record rates, gaining and keeping the trust of your frontline workforce is critical. How you choose to reach and engage your deskless employees is key to winning in the marketplace.
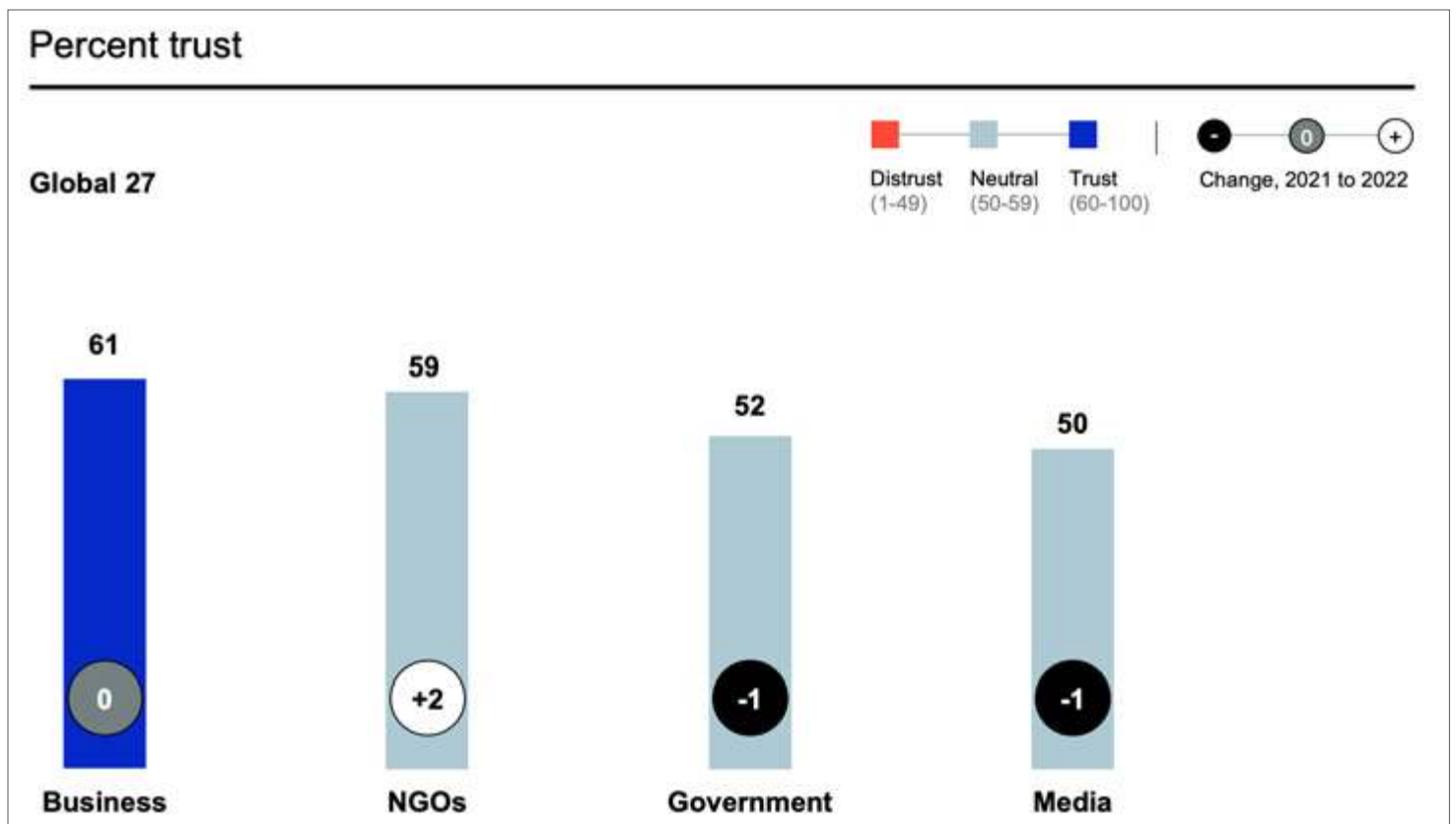
Trust is Local
CONTINUED

With this shifting dynamic where businesses come out on top and government/media figureheads are seen as "divisive" all eyes are on the CEO. But if your deskless workers don't have access to executive leaders and communication channels, it can be difficult to build trust. But that's exactly what people want: they want to see their CEO publicly speak on issues that matter to them.

CEOS EXPECTED TO BE THE FACE OF CHANGE

Percent who say

CEOs should be personally visible when discussing public policy with external stakeholders or work their company has done to benefit society

Global 27

81% (net)

When considering a job, I expect the CEO to speak publicly about **controversial social and political issues that I care about**

Global 25, Among employees

60%

+5 pts

Change, 2019 to 2022

2022 Edelman Trust Barometer. CEO_VIS. How visible do you think a CEO should personally be in these different types of business situations? 9-point scale; top 4 box, visible. Question asked of half of the sample. General population, 27-mkt avg. Data shown is a net of attributes 2 and 10. EMP_IMP. When considering an organization as a potential place of employment, how important is each of the following to you in deciding whether or not you would accept a job offer there? 3-point scale; top 2 box, important. Question asked of those who are an employee of an organization (Q43/1). General population, 25-mkt avg. *Nigeria is not included in either global average.

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The Three Keys to Engage & Connect With Your Workforce

The 2022 Edelman report covers a wide range of data on global shifts in trust, but these three key takeaways will influence how organizations can connect with and engage their workforce—specifically, their frontline workers.

Key Takeaway 1: "My Employer" is the most believable source of information.

MY EMPLOYER MEDIA MOST BELIEVABLE
Percent who believe information from each source automatically, or after seeing it twice or less

Communications from...	My employer	National government	Media reports, named source	Major corporations	Advertising	Media reports, anonymous source	My social media feed
Nr. of times they need to see the information repeated before believing it: Once or twice	52	45	47	46	41	40	32
If I see it here, I will automatically assume it is true	13	13	10	8	8	8	6
Total	65	58	57	54	49	48	38
I will never believe it is true if this is the only place I see it	9	15	13	16	21	21	27

2022 Edelman Trust Barometer. HEAR_TIME1. When you see a new piece of information or a news story in each of the following information sources, how many times do you need to see it or hear it repeated in that same type of information source before you believe it is really true? Question asked of half of the sample. "Once or twice" is a sum of codes 2 and 3. General population, 27-mkt avg. "Employer communications" only shown to those who are an employee of an organization (Q43/1).
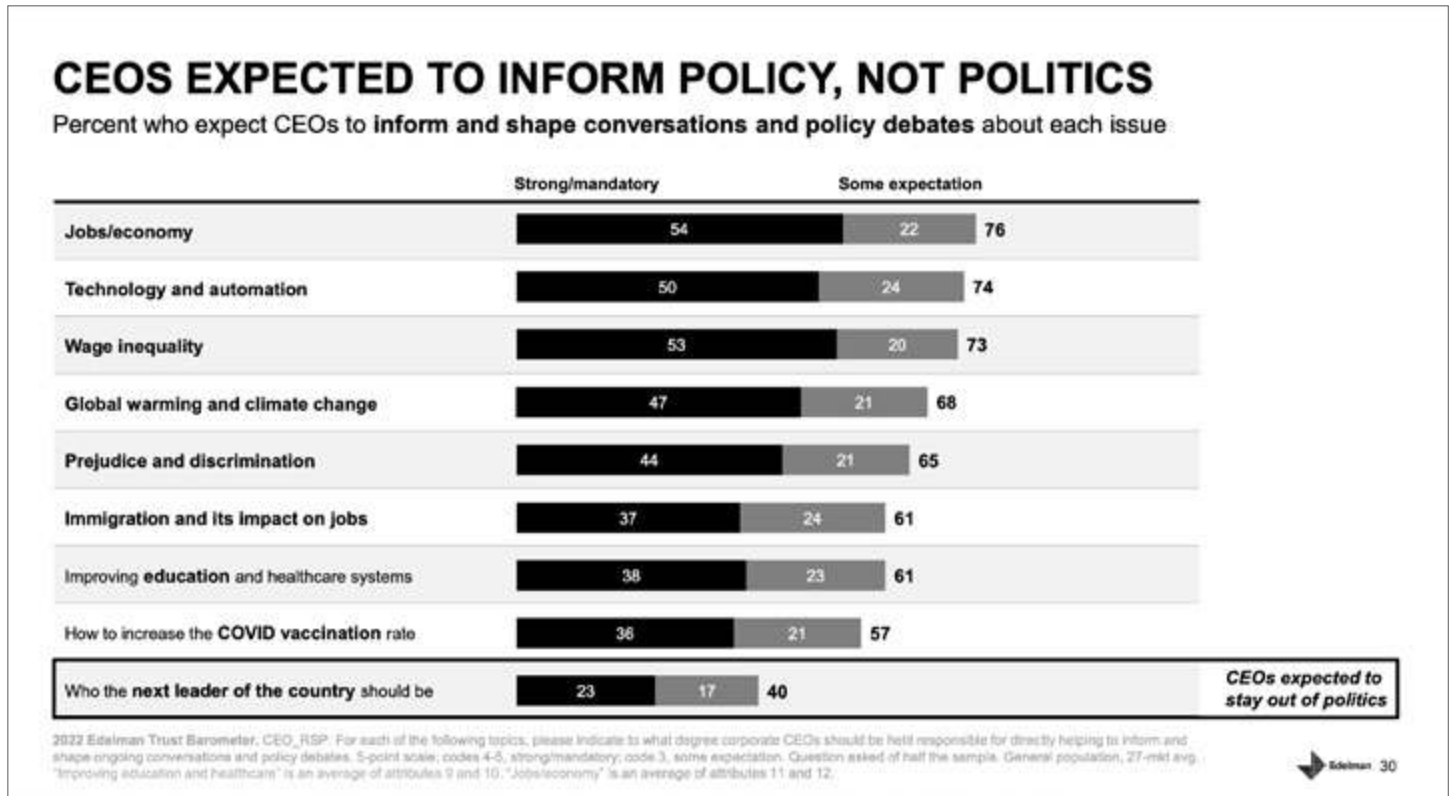
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More people are losing faith in government, media, and NGOs, but gains are seen in trust in business. This trend indicates a shift in responsibility—there is a hunger for honest information out there that businesses can help fill.

But with 80% of the global workforce being deskless and lacking access to traditional communication channels, this poses a problem. If you aren't able to reach everyone in your organization with communication, you're missing a huge opportunity. And it's likely that your frontline workers have more trust in their manager than in the greater organization. To shift this and help meet the needs of your employees both in their jobs and in their lives, you need to begin looking at new methods of communication to communicate directly and open the door for two-way communication with all employees.

The Three Keys
CONTINUED

Key Takeaway 2: CEO's must take action, especially on social issues, or risk losing employee engagement and loyalty.

CEOS EXPECTED TO INFORM POLICY, NOT POLITICS
Percent who expect CEOs to **inform and shape conversations and policy debates** about each issue

Issue	Strong/mandatory	Some expectation	Total
Jobs/economy	54	22	76
Technology and automation	50	24	74
Wage inequality	53	20	73
Global warming and climate change	47	21	68
Prejudice and discrimination	44	21	65
Immigration and its impact on jobs	37	24	61
Improving **education** and healthcare systems	38	23	61
How to increase the **COVID vaccination** rate	36	21	57
Who the **next leader of the country** should be	23	17	40

CEOs expected to stay out of politics

2022 Edelman Trust Barometer, CEO_RSP. For each of the following topics, please indicate to what degree corporate CEOs should be held responsible for directly helping to inform and shape ongoing conversations and policy debates. 5-point scale; codes 4-5, strong/mandatory; code 3, some expectation. Question asked of half the sample. General population, 27-mkt avg. "Improving education and healthcare" is an average of attributes 9 and 10. "Jobs/economy" is an average of attributes 11 and 12.

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One of the great communication shifts of the past few years has been executive leadership teams really stepping up and realizing they need to communicate more often. But moreover, they realize they need to step behind the camera to begin to build more trust with employees by showing their authentic selves.

We have many clients whose CEO's stepped up to do just that, but much of this communication was focused on the pandemic. Based on Edelman, we're seeing an increased need for CEOs to address all social issues—but to stay out of politics.

If you aren't sure how to get your executive leaders more involved in communication or in addressing topics that you likely have avoided intentionally in the past, we recommend creating a focus group to understand the needs of your employee population. This is the kind of data that you can take to your leadership team to prove that your employees want to hear about certain topics and what's at risk if you don't address them.

Key Takeaway 3: Businesses will play a key role in restoring trust.
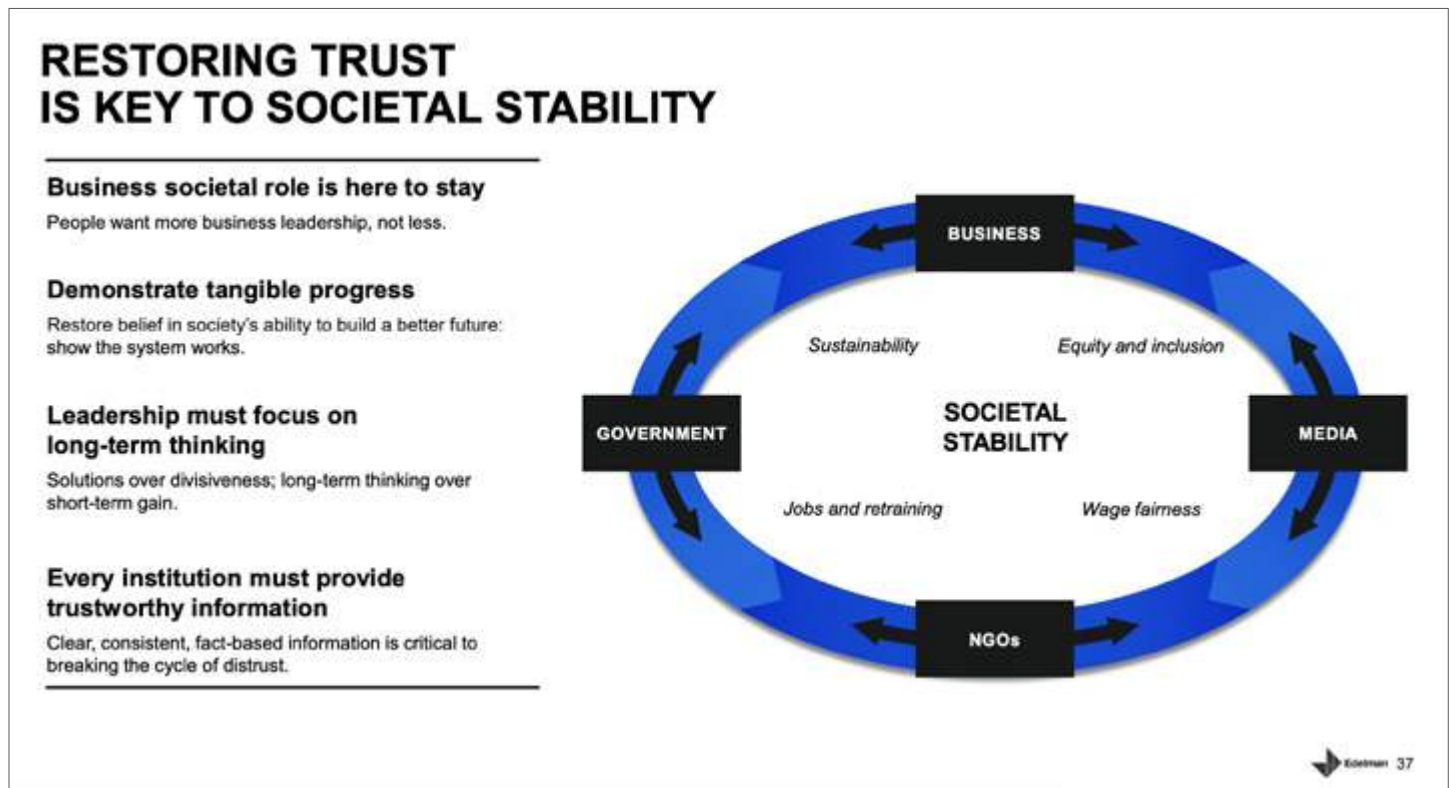
Edelman claims that this is a pivotal moment. If we can't restore trust, we risk ongoing social instability. This is likely apparent within your own organization. Ever since the COVID-19 pandemic began—which was a catalyst for so much change and unrest—you've likely experienced issues with:

- Employee engagement
- Turnover
- Unrest and strained employee relations
- Being stuck in the middle of contentious issues (e.g. mask mandates, vaccines, furloughs, staff shortages)

Where government and policy have failed to give clear direction, organizations have needed to step in and make hard decisions. And that's not about to change any time soon. Edelman predicts that businesses will continue to be expected to take a leadership role in policy and creating solutions to societal issues.

BUT…you'll have to continue to provide trustworthy information. This, of course, heavily impacts internal communications teams, and may be an uphill battle. We are juggling the shift towards hybrid and remote work for deskbound staff, while simultaneously trying to improve the employee experience of non-desk workers who have taken the brunt of the pandemic's negative impacts. With employees quitting in droves, it's the organizations that create a great, transparent employee experience that prioritizes the wellbeing of their teams that succeed. It's the organizations that can build trust with the frontline—the backbone of most organizations—who will thrive.

Why Deskless Workers Are Being Left Behind

The three most used internal channels for communication are email (98%), in-person meetings (88%), and an Intranet (80%) (Ragan, State of Internal Communications Report, 2019).

But deskless, or frontline, employees don't typically have access to these channels. And this hasn't changed much despite a global pandemic that exacerbated the challenges of reaching employees. Why aren't we placing the emphasis on these essential employees as we should be?

The 2021 State of the Sector from Gatehouse found some key trends that are quite alarming:

1   **Lack of resources.** At the start of the pandemic, 1 in 3 communicators were struggling with a lack of human resource, 2 in 5 felt under pressure to deliver, and 1 in 5 felt considerably overworked.

2   **Short-Term Strategy.** Just 40% have an overarching strategy in place to cover a period of more than one year (although this is up from 33% in 2020).

3   **Lack of Awareness of Audience and Channels.** Only 50% of Internal Comms functions have a channel-specific editorial calendar or a channel framework in place. And only 17% of internal communication functions have developed audience profiles or personas, which would enable them to better tailor their messages to their intended recipients.

Internal comms teams are still struggling with budget and headcount deficiencies, making it difficult for them to accomplish everything they are responsible for. But more alarming than a lack of resources, is a lack of strategy and audience awareness. And for many IC pros, a lack of strategy stems from not measuring or knowing what to do with your data.

73% of IC pros said they just don't have time or resources to measure—although we would argue that this is one of the most important things you can start doing to make an impact and make the case for more resources. But note that 51% say that they don't have technology that gives them metrics, 46% don't have benchmarks, 39% don't have measurement tools, and 37% don't feel they have the skills. We're here to tell you that not all measurement is fancy dashboards and crazy math.

What are the main challenges you face in measuring your impact?

Lack of time and resource
73%

Technology—lack of metrics available
51%

Lack of benchmarking data
46%

Technology—lack of tools to collate / analyse the data afterwards
39%

Lack of knowledge and skills in data / analysis
37%

If you have no metrics or no clue where to start, we recommend starting with the basics. Conducting an Internal Communications Audit (that will help you set up your channel framework) is a key step in understanding who your audience is and how to better reach them. You might be surprised to learn how many employees aren't receiving key communications, or aren't receiving them in a timely manner or on a channel that is easy for them to access. We encourage you to look at your deskless employees and managers in particular, since they are often the employee population that lacks access to traditional channels.

The 2022 State of the Sector confirms many of these challenges are persisting year-over-year. With the pandemic stretching into a third year, teams are still scrambling to figure out the "new normal" and what the future of work really looks like. But the shift towards remote and hybrid models has taken the spotlight. While this shift is a challenge to be solved, we worry that engaging and improving the employee experience for frontline, deskless teams will, yet again, take the back burner.

Only 12% of internal communication professionals cite "non-wired/non desk employees" as a top challenge in 2022 (State of the Sector, 2022). But when 2.8 billion workers fall into that category, there is a lot to be lost by not prioritizing them in your 2022 communication strategy.

Case Studies
ON ENGAGING DESKLESS WORKERS

The amount of change occurring in internal communications and the workplace at large can be overwhelming. But this is why it's so important to conduct an audit, understand the needs of your employees, cut down on the information overload, and shake up existing systems in exchange for more efficient and accessible ones that will better engage, retain, and inform your frontline employees (and make your jobs easier!).

Learn from a few of our clients who have excelled at embracing change and making key changes to reach their deskless workforce:

Margaret Mary Health

Margaret Mary Health is a not-for-profit, critical access hospital in Indiana, with 12 locations, serving over 65,000 patients. The team at Margaret Mary Health knew their communications were outdated and not reaching their frontline teams. And with a team that was increasingly growing and more diverse, with more employees working remotely, an app was a clear choice to help solve their problems.

"We were in the middle of the launch [when COVID-19 began], but we realized this would be the perfect tool to reach all our employees," said Adam Fischmer. "To get this information to everyone at the same time and to make sure they see it. It was a no brainer to use the app."

Read the Case Study

Waupaca Foundry

Waupaca Foundry is the largest producer of gray, ductile, austempered ductile, and compacted graphite iron in the world. With a primarily non-desk workforce, Waupaca needed a communication solution that was mobile, accessible, and had the operational functionality they needed to meet their business objectives.

According to Marketing Communications Manager Sara Timm, "[Waupaca was] so archaic in our communication channels before that we weren't able to track who received communication. At best we were only reaching half the population." This led them to choosing theEMPLOYEEapp in April 2019, which would allow them to share benefits info, production schedules, outages, and actually be able to track who received that information.

Read the Case Study

Case Studies

Veterans United

Veterans United Home Loans is the nation's largest VA lender. They have over 3,900 employees with corporate offices in St. Louis, Kansas City, and Irving. At VU, culture and employee engagement are incredibly important, so the communications team chose theEMPLOYEEapp as a way to reach and connect with their employees when they aren't at a desk. As a result of their efforts and mobile communications technology, VU has increased many engagement measures including how informed they feel, how they view employee communications, and looking forward to coming to work.

Read the Case Study

United Health Services

UHS is the largest comprehensive healthcare system and leading private employer in the Greater Binghamton, NY region. With more than 60 locations, the system is composed of providers and serves a population of over 600,000 people. To adequately reach their dispersed employee population, UHS partnered with theEMPLOYEEapp in 2019. And within their first year using the mobile app, their communications strategy was put to the test as COVID-19 began to sweep across the United States.

"The app became one of the most important ways we were able to communicate with all of our 6,000 plus employees to keep them up to date, whether they were at home in quarantine, on the front lines, or in an office," says internal and external communication manager Steven Perlin.

Read the Case Study

About theEMPLOYEEapp

theEMPLOYEEapp was created by communications and HR professionals to address the challenges organizations face communicating with a dispersed and deskless workforce. theEMPLOYEEapp is an internal communication and engagement solution that allows workers to have fast and easy access to the information, documents, and resources they need to succeed in their work.

Our app allows you to target information to your employees when and where they need it on their smartphone, tablet, or computer, and empower leaders and frontline managers to engage and activate employees across the organization. Unlike most traditional communications channels, theEMPLOYEEapp creates a customized, branded experience for employees, encouraging your workforce to join together in a single, centralized channel.

Our Mission is to enable the effortless flow of meaningful information for organizations driven by frontline workers.

Request a Demo