

# Increasing Engagement Through Shared Storytelling

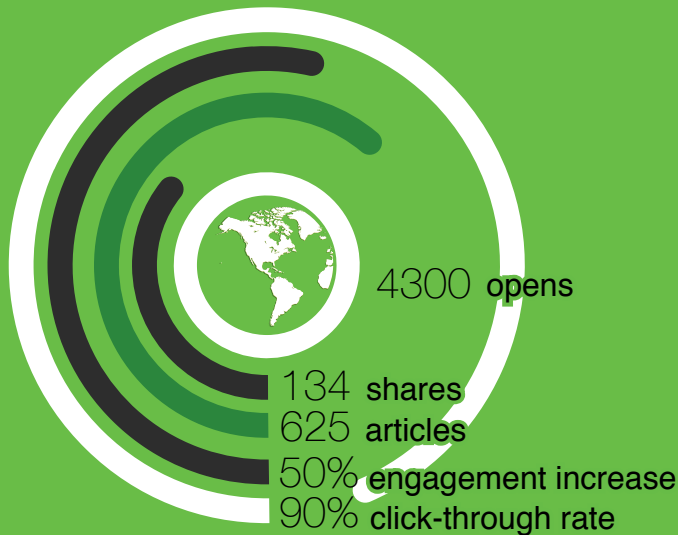


Through a combination of long-term engagement and customized internal communications tools, Carpool was able to evolve the way employees of an international Microsoft advertising agency worked. By providing support and technology, the agency was able to change the way they share information in a more fluid and efficient way.

## The Problem

If you were to look at an old internal newsletter from Microsoft's international advertising group—indeed, most internal corporate newsletters—dig into its guts and really root around to grab hold of the elements that brought it together, you would find an intertwined network of departments and people spanning the group's territories across the globe.

In it would be the remnants of a spider's web of statistics, data, and sales wins encompassing a vast array of global accomplishments.



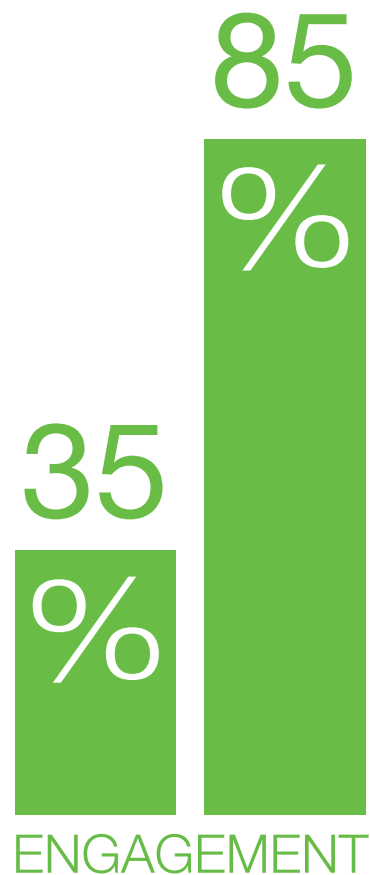
4300 opens  
625 articles  
7 minutes spent reading

The problem is that newsletters typically don't do a very good job of communicating...

And few people pay them much attention. Ultimately, newsletters and top-down emails require a tremendous amount of work that is often met with a dull thud from the internal audience. For this advertising group, the internal communications team wanted to turn the old information-distribution model on its head, and they went looking for a partner that could provide the tools and know-how to help.

They found Carpool, and through that partnership developed a new strategy to develop content from an outside-in approach, which revolutionized the way information flowed throughout the entire organization. This was the key that helped the group increase employee engagement with content from **35 percent to as much as 85 percent.**

Here's how they did it.



# The Plan

Three goals wove through the new engagement model:

1. Information would be generated from the field and curated by an internal team.
2. Content would be delivered through compelling narratives rather than information dumps.
3. The delivery model would shift away from email newsletters to an internal team site.

A team member familiar with the project said, "The story was written from the position of trying to engage somebody versus just trying to update somebody with a piece of information. And it's written from an outside-in perspective. The logic was, 'This was going to be so much more appealing to people.'"

The first step was to find a platform that would facilitate a free-flow of information between employees around the world and help them share best practices in an impactful way. Beginning in 2013, they partnered with Carpool, whose flagship product was implemented to transform the group's SharePoint network into an attractive and dynamic team site. Using live tiles that filter content by topic with an intuitive hash tagging system, Carpool helped drive the new story-focused communications and content strategy, taking advantage of modern tools that encapsulate internal communications in a more effective way.

Rather than delivering mass email newsletters, they were able to upload the latest stories—sales wins, best practices, and critical information—from the field in the form of unique, narrative-driven articles on Carpool's team site framework. Using customizable hashtags, the team site automatically populated and cataloged content into the appropriate categories, such as News, People, or Resources.

The internal communications team also created article submission forms, which allowed employees to push their own stories. A small comms team then edited and polished stories before publishing them for the wider organization. Soon, new strategies and best practices were not only reaching more eyes than ever before, but content was actually going viral.

"Our audience loved it," said another team member involved with the project. "The primary reason ... was because there were people from the field who would have their own story and push people to read it."

# The Results

Between late-2013 and mid-2015, they published a total of **625 articles** to their team site, averaging approximately **33 articles per month** that disseminated business-critical information. More than **90 percent of employees clicked through emails** to read articles posted to the team site. Employees read an average of **four to five articles per visit** and spent approximately **7 minutes** on the site. In other words, employees were no longer browsing company updates, but engaging deeply with content from the field that helped them do their jobs better.

Sectors within the advertising group that were previously cut off geographically soon began to develop and nurture connections they didn't know existed. Field reps could share and consume information that helped enhance their own numbers. With Carpool's help, the internal comms team molded their strategy around emerging business needs, ensuring that new best practices were highlighted in the stories to drive the group forward.

The embedded hashtagging system made it possible to unify content around specific topics and themes. Information no longer existed in silos, or disappeared through attrition. Instead, there was a cohesive story that was accessible throughout all aspects of its business, and by employees new and old alike.

Employees quickly embraced and adapted to the new system, which focused on medium-length (roughly 500 words) articles. The group's leadership was also highly supportive. Whereas leadership previously had to devote significant time and energy to assist with content for the newsletter, the new format allowed the comms team to coordinate brief interviews with executives (about 30 minutes) and develop articles. That content was also highly popular with the rest of the international organization. **The Leadership Effectiveness Inventory (LEI) score increased nearly 10 percent** after the launch of a "Leadership Series."

Even skeptical executives warmed to the new format once they realized how a content-driven team site reduced their time investment as compared to the old newsletter system.

According to those who worked on the site and new strategy, "It showed a whole story—not just disconnected articles—it was a holistic story."

The new comms strategy and tools also led to a dramatic reduction in email usage, freeing up more time for employees to focus on active tasks rather than digging for information.

Overall, according to their executive comms lead, the new strategy paid off: "To develop a strategy and then execute the strategy and see the vision work—and then having people holding us up as a benchmark for best practice—that's fantastic."

## About Carpool

Carpool helps you do work better. We do this through environment design, community management, technology, and a whole lot of internal communications know-how. Founded in early 2010, Carpool is an internal communications consulting agency that provides flexible development solutions and innovative strategy to small, medium, and large organizations.

### Disclaimer

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