EMPLOYEE BENEFITS

From Chaos to Clarity
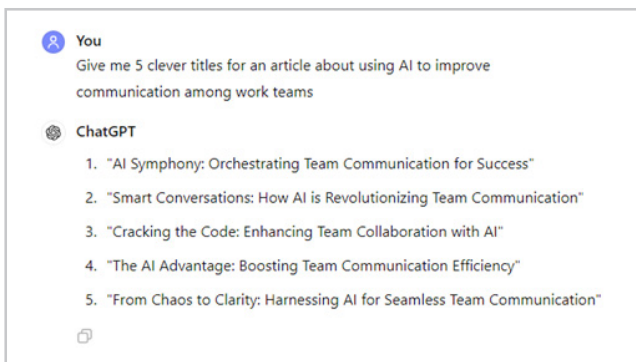Using AI to Adapt Your Communication Strategy and Drive Engagement

By Brett Gilcreast, *Senior Consultant, Communication Practice* and Erika Illiano, *Partner, Communication Practice Leader*

Communication dominates our work life more than ever. According to a recent Grammarly[1] report, employees spend an average of 88% of their workweek communicating and nearly 19 hours a week completing writing tasks. With the explosion of artificial intelligence (AI), employers are wondering how they can use AI to improve the quality of communications to engage employees. Our team identified three ways our customers are integrating AI into their engagement strategies and considerations to make when utilizing this technology.

1 Supporting effective content development

AI can be a great antidote for writer's block. By typing in a question or a few keywords, ideas are instantly generated as a springboard. For example, with some creative assistance from AI, we came up with the title for this article. Sometimes, all that's needed is a jumping-off point to get the juices flowing, and AI programs can help. If your organization is apprehensive about using AI, take it for a test drive first.

> **You**
> Give me 5 clever titles for an article about using AI to improve communication among work teams
>
> **ChatGPT**
> 1. "AI Symphony: Orchestrating Team Communication for Success"
> 2. "Smart Conversations: How AI is Revolutionizing Team Communication"
> 3. "Cracking the Code: Enhancing Team Collaboration with AI"
> 4. "The AI Advantage: Boosting Team Communication Efficiency"
> 5. "From Chaos to Clarity: Harnessing AI for Seamless Team Communication"

Here's an example

One customer expressed feeling intimidated by AI because of the vast amount of data that feeds it and the level of functionality it can provide. Our team suggested they start small by using it for a simple message, like a thank you note to a colleague or an email recognizing an employee for an accomplishment. They quickly became more comfortable with AI and found it helped save hours of frustration.

Considerations

Before you copy and paste an AI response into your communication, it is important to note that while AI can provide an excellent starting point, it lacks nuance and emotion. It does not know your audience's level of understanding, their feelings about the message or your workplace culture. Be sure to infuse your organizational tone of voice and knowledge. Otherwise, you risk sending your workforce a generic, impersonal message that may come off as tone-deaf or inaccurate.

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1. Grammarly: https://go.grammarly.com/2024-state-of-business-communication-report

2 Helping employees make benefits decisions

Our customers frequently express how much time they spend answering the same few employee benefits questions each year. This inefficiency distracts HR professionals from their day-to-day responsibilities and frustrates employees who must take the initiative—and extra steps—to have their questions answered.

To combat this, several customers have developed AI-driven "chatbots," which leverage in-house benefits content to provide the information employees need. For employee questions, a chatbot offers answers in a conversational, straightforward way. For HR professionals, having the chatbot as a first stop for questions saves time that can be repurposed for strategic work.

Here's an example

A customer in the biotech space has a 24/7 workforce and needed a way to answer employee questions around the clock during open enrollment. To accomplish this, they built an on-demand, self-service capability that allowed employees to type in benefits questions and receive responses within seconds through the power of AI.

It was a tremendous success. During their two-week open enrollment period, the chatbot:

- Answered over 1,500 prompts from nearly 18% of the customer's U.S.-based population for everything from procedures and timelines to insurance options and coverage

- Led to 84% of employees actively electing or confirming their benefits in 2023, which was an increase from 60% in 2022

- Generated a 33% year-over-year reduction in service tickets to the benefits team

Considerations

If developing a chatbot-like capability is on your benefits enrollment roadmap for the coming year, consider the following:

- The tool is only as helpful as the data used to build it. If the information is not robust enough to answer a wide array of questions, employees will quickly lose trust in the tool, even if it is improved over time.

- No matter how efficient the self-serve capability is, be sure to maintain an easy way for employees to get in touch with real people. A chatbot's end goal should be to enhance the employee experience, not become a barrier.

3 Informing personalized messaging strategies

When communicating with an employee base, each person has their own needs and goals, so it's important to develop varied messaging to resonate with your organization's many demographic and psychographic segments.

Some organizations use AI to analyze their population's HR data to effectively target messages. This could mean using data to determine which employees have not taken a vacation day in several months and sending them a targeted message about the importance of prioritizing mental health. It could also mean identifying employees who took parental leave in the past 12 months and sending a promotion of the company's family-focused benefits and resources.

Here's an example

A retail organization wanted to deter emergency room (ER) utilization across its population, given the high volume of unnecessary and costly ER utilization among its plan members. Using AI, they created personalized mailings that listed the three urgent care clinics closest to each employee's home address. They also included helpful information comparing the cost of doctor's offices, urgent care centers and ER visits. Using AI saved the customer from hours of manually identifying and consolidating the urgent care centers closest to each address.

Considerations

When leveraging AI to analyze employee data, results will only be as accurate as the data provided. Ensure the information you use includes the right sample size and data points to effectively inform your strategy.

Additionally, if you are considering utilizing AI in your organization, be sure to adhere to company policy. Some organizations have limited the use of AI due to privacy or copyright concerns. And, never input employees' personal data into an AI engine, as this could create a significant data security problem.

An important note

Regardless of how you plan to use AI, be sure to keep your organization's cybersecurity top of mind when using AI. **NEVER** enter proprietary business information or confidential employee information into AI programs, as it will then become public domain. Additionally, know your organization's rules and policies governing AI use and make sure to adhere to them whenever you use it.

AI is a powerful resource that can help deploy effective communication campaigns to boost productivity, efficiency and collaboration. Like everything in life, the key to getting maximum impact from AI is moderation and thoughtfulness. If you view AI technology as a support tool instead of the answer, you can significantly improve the quality of your employee communications.

About the Authors

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Brett Gilcreast is a Senior Consultant in Brown & Brown's Communication Practice. Brett works closely with customers to develop and execute creative communication and content strategies that engage employees and drive action. Prior to Brown & Brown, Brett spent over six years at Staples in a variety of marketing roles. He earned his BA in Communication and English and MBA from Boston College.

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Erika is a Partner and Communication Practice Leader with Brown & Brown. In her role, she guides client strategy and relationships and develops intellectual capital and thought leadership in the areas of communication, change management and the employee experience. Erika helps her clients address a full spectrum of employee communication, with a particular focus in employment value proposition (EVP) and branding, total rewards and total well-being, DEI and benefits. Prior to joining Brown & Brown, Erika spent 20 years in the Consumer Experience and Communication businesses at Alight Solutions, Aon and Hewitt Associates, including six years as a Partner. Erika graduated from the University of Rochester with a BA in English and Political Science. She also received her MBA in Organization Studies and Business Law from Boston College and her Leading Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion certification from Northwestern University.

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