Mobile-First: How Cox Communications Delivers Consistent Messaging to Its Workforce

As the nation's third-largest US cable TV company, Cox Communications provides advanced digital video, Internet, telephone, and other services to around six million residential and business customers. So it's no surprise that a large portion of its 21,000 employees spend most of the time in the field, working on job sites.

When Chris Harrer, Director of Internal Communications, joined Cox Communications in 2012, his mandate was clear: create a consistent internal brand identity throughout the company, make information updates easy to digest for workers on the go, and track and report on readership and employee engagement.

Transforming Internal Communications at a Technology Enterprise

"When I arrived at Cox, email was Outlook only, and there were no metrics. Regional teams were sending out their communications, using a variety of different email newsletter services, which was creating branding and messaging inconsistency," says Harrer.

"We needed to bring everything together under an initiative we called Cox One, so we could communicate as one company," Harrer states.

Mobile-First Communications for a Workforce on the Go

"In addition, our internal communications need to be mobile. The majority of our employees are out in the field, they're going into people's homes installing cable, and they're never in the office," says Harrer. "They're always on tablets and their phones. Even our office-based employees are reading our newsletters on their iPhones. So a mobile-ready email newsletter solution was key."

"I had worked with EmailOpen previously at IHG. I loved working with the team and knew what the email newsletter solution could do," says Harrer. "We created internal

brand guidelines and gave them to EmailOpen, so that no matter who they worked with at our company moving forward, they would be able to create employee newsletters that looked similar."

Harrer piloted EmailOpen in 2013, creating a branded email newsletter for headquarters staff in Atlanta. The impact among his fellow communicators was instant. "When we sent out the first newsletter, everyone was calling me, saying, 'What platform is this on? How are you doing this? It looks fantastic.' And then I mentioned, 'Well, we're doing this because we get metrics, and we can create newsletters that are mobile-responsive.' And it just kind of expanded from there. We did a national newsletter, and then demand truly exploded."

A Viral Communications Solution

Cox Communications currently has more than 30 users who create 45 internal newsletters for regional, function, and role-based groups. In fact, demand for EmailOpen has been so great, that Harrer now vets requests closely to make sure teams really need to produce newsletters. "I'll get calls from people who want to produce a newsletter for 100 employees, and I'll ask them if they really need a newsletter for such a small group."

Cox Communications uses EmailOpen tools to promote employee engagement. The national newsletter features "A Day in the Life" video which highlights an employee and enables others to comment on the piece. "The last one we did received more than 80 comments," says Harrer. "Promoting two-way communications is a major focus for us now: listening to our front-line employees, who are the heart and soul of our company, and being responsive to their needs."

Analyzing Data to Keep Engagement High

Harrer says that his national newsletter averages a 55% to 65% weekly open rate, while the regional newsletters average 60% to 65% readership. Meanwhile, messages to the Executive Forum, a group of all senior leaders, averages 85% to 90% open rates.

Harrer analyzes results each month to see what's popular. "You have to know what people want to be able to give it to them. Right now, we've shifted into product communications, but if we need to do more people-related content, we'll do that, too."

Harrer shares employee newsletter metrics with the public affairs team on a monthly basis, and provides data on executive messages to the president and COO. "It's obviously critical to let our senior leaders know who is reading their content. We have never had the ability to get that data before, except for our intranet. My ability to create an analytics culture was one of the reasons I was brought into Cox," he says.

Working Around Intranet Challenges

EmailOpen also helped Harrer solve a critical technology challenge. "Our intranet is very old, and it's not mobile-ready. So instead of linking articles to our intranet, we link them to landing pages so our mobile workforce can read them. This has been extremely helpful, because creating a new intranet is a huge undertaking. We're working on it right now, but it's a multi-year process. EmailOpen is helping us work around that issue."

Harrer says that the company also did workarounds to make Cox's employee newsletters work with Internet Explorer 8, even though it was built to work on Google Chrome and Internet Explorer 11. "Other companies might say, 'Too bad, this is how we're built. Either upgrade, or we can't help you.' But the EmailOpen team is always willing to make it work, which is fantastic," he says.

Using EmailOpen for Self-Service Product Information

Harrer is also using EmailOpen's landing pages for an unconventional purpose: employee self-service. When employees access the EPICenter (employee product information center) and click on a product, such as broadband, they can access its core information updates on an EmailOpen landing page. "EmailOpen helps us make our product information accessible to our mobile workforce," says Harrer.

emailopen

Harrer says EmailOpen turns around new branded newsletters within three weeks that communicators can then take forward and use. "The tool couldn't be any easier to use. I always explain to people that it's like using Word, but once you're done, the tool generates all the HTML and creates a beautiful newsletter," he says.

The EmailOpen team is also responsive to client input for new functionality. "Obviously, every company has different needs, but when I suggest upgrades or enhancements, EmailOpen makes it happen. A prime example is landing pages. I needed metrics on my product landing pages within my intranet, not just the newsletter. And I'm able to get that data now," says Harrer.

Harrer says he recommends EmailOpen to his communications peers at Cox Communications and other companies constantly. "I tell them that they may have marketing and email tools, but EmailOpen is a communications solution. The templates, landing pages, and functionality – everything can be pushed to the limits. EmailOpen is a killer system and I love using it."

Meet Chris Harrer

Chris Harrer oversees all internal communications for Cox Communications, managing a team that creates digital and visual communications, events, and internal social media for the company's 21,000-person, highly mobile workforce. Previously, Chris served as Electronic Channels Manager for InterContinental Hotels Group, the Americas.