ragan
Communications
— LEADERSHIP COUNCIL —

COMMUNICATIONS BENCHMARK
REPORT

2022 EDITION

Essential data and analysis for
forward-thinking communicators

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Table of
Contents

Introduction

While the pandemic may not be over, the communications sector appears to have weathered the worst of the storm and emerged stronger in overall internal and external value to their organizations.
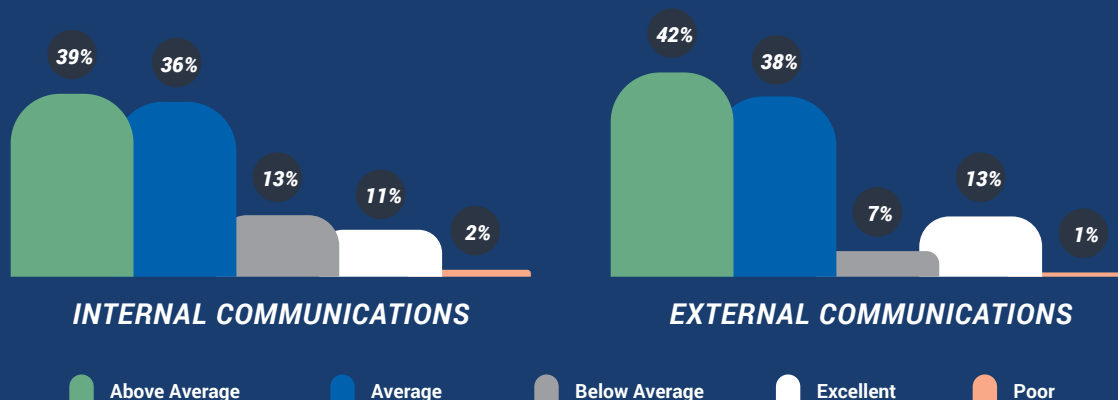
Over the past two years, the role of internal and external communicators was crucial in guiding organizations, employees and clients to remain focused on their primary missions, helping them adjust their messaging and strategic initiatives to maximize effectiveness in the short-term while readjusting plans for long-term success.

Clarity about the value of communications has emerged from the extensive findings discussed in Ragan's annual Communications Benchmark Report, an exclusive research project from Ragan's Communications Leadership Council. This year's Benchmark Report, sliced and diced from entries approaching 1,000 respondents, presents a solid representation of the state of communications in 2022 and the longer-term trends and changes to watch closely during this decade.

Some issues remain: ongoing concerns over staffing, turnover, budget shortfalls, decentralized communication structures, an expanding remote workforce, the technology needed to perform remote work effectively, lack of access to senior executives, exclusion from strategic planning sessions, major initiatives like DE&I falling under direction of other departments, and better ways to access executive thought leadership.

Most respondents still view their organization's internal and external communications as above average, just slightly beating out average in both categories, so there remains some challenging work ahead to improve communications performance.

RATE THE OVERALL STATE OF YOUR ORGANIZATION'S COMMUNICATIONS

INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

- 39%
- 36%
- 13%
- 11%
- 2%

EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

- 42%
- 38%
- 7%
- 13%
- 1%

🟩 Above Average   🟦 Average   ⬜ Below Average   ⬜ Excellent   🟧 Poor

Introduction

Although successful in adjusting programs and strategies through the pandemic turmoil, and hopeful for much better days ahead, communicators still face numerous challenges—even many perennial ones that continue to serve as strategic barriers to achieving better and more focused communication.

Adding to the problem are professionals jumping ship, with **36%** of respondents reporting department turnover higher in 2021 and a similar percentage saying turnover matched the levels seen in 2020 as the pandemic burgeoned. As in any business, onboarding new talent and bringing them up to speed on organizational practices and missions takes time, money and training efforts, necessary steps that can further hamper ongoing and new departmental strategic initiatives.
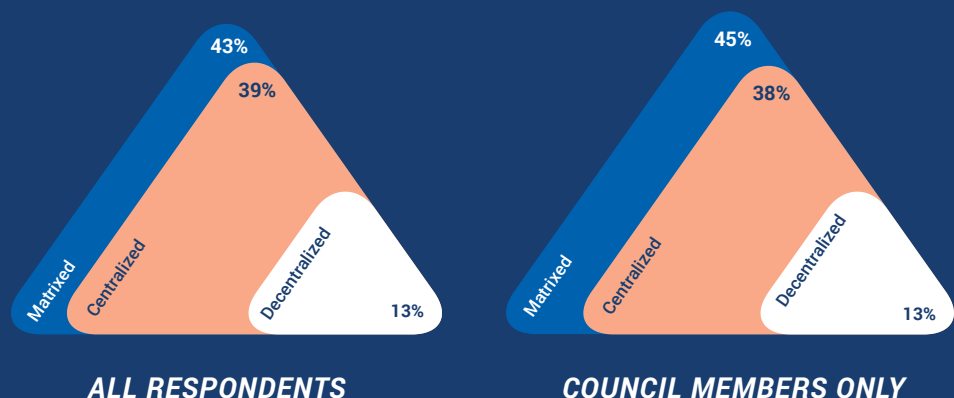
Measuring for Success Top to Bottom

A recurring complaint noted by respondents concerns frustration over the lack of input into C-suite strategic initiatives—putting it another way, the lack of a seat at the table when new decisions and directions are being considered.

Beyond closer involvement in strategic decision processes, many comms also take issue with the fundamental communications structure within their respective organizations: Centralized, handling communications for the entire enterprise **(39%)**; Decentralized, controlling enterprise-wide communications but leaving individual departments to operate their own communications **(13%)**; or Matrixed, operating with some combo of the two structures **(43%)**.

Although the matrixed structure outpaces the two other options, comms prefer the centralized approach as all messaging is handled from the same unit.

HOW IS YOUR COMMUNICATIONS TEAM STRUCTURED?

43%
39%
Matrixed
Centralized
Decentralized
13%

ALL RESPONDENTS

45%
38%
Matrixed
Centralized
Decentralized
13%

COUNCIL MEMBERS ONLY

Introduction

Communicators are measuring their work more frequently. This year, there was an increase in monthly measurement efforts to **39%**, up from **37%** last year. Also, the number of those who described their measurement efforts as ad hoc dropped to **14%**, down from **17%** last year. Communicators are using data more strategically, focusing on identifying the most effective communication channels **(73%)**, making better editorial/content decisions **(70%)**, and benchmarking performance against best practices **(55%)**.

Ragan's Communications Benchmark Report is based on responses to an online survey conducted between Dec. 2, 2021-Feb. 16, 2022. The survey yielded qualified responses across the globe from internal and external communicators at organizations of all sizes.

Key Findings

Current state: Overall, communicators are pleased with the state of their organization's communications, but raise several issues standing in the way of producing more effective messaging.

Hybrid workforce: Organizations large and small continue to contend with hybrid workforces staying in close touch while operating from scattered locations. The good news is that communicators now have the necessary technology tools to engage teams onsite or remotely.

Email power: Despite the ever-expanding universe of communication modes, tried and true email continues to be the preferred method of messaging, including individual contact and newsletter delivery. The C-suite also relies firmly on email communications, but there is acknowledgment that town hall sessions are becoming more valuable as an upfront and personal method of listening and communicating effectively.

Most effective channels: Press release use at 45% still registers as a top channel for external communications, but has sharply declined from the 56% in last year's survey. Surprisingly, influencer marketing, which has experienced significant YoY growth in marketing expenditure, only bumped up slightly and languishes at 5% in the category. Meanwhile, brand storytelling gained steam, jumping up to 24% from 17% as an effective channel for getting the word out.

Social media down: Use of social media continues to be regarded as the most effective channel for external communications at 73%, but it represents a 10-point drop from the last survey. Only 38% of respondents expect greater reliance on that messaging technology in their communication roles over the next three years, possibly a reaction to censorship concerns raised over social networks in 2021.

Key Findings

Crisis management: The comms team remains the primary leader (58%) in crisis management, but it represents a 9-point drop from our last survey. A dedicated crisis team (20%) dipped 10 points from last year. CEOs as primary leaders in crisis comms (28%) increased by 5 points from our last survey.

Retaining talent: Even as many organizations have stepped up their efforts to keep valuable employees satisfied, ongoing talent and budget concerns continue to present significant barriers to meeting and exceeding organizational and business goals.

DE&I initiatives abound: Communicators are spending more time on the importance of promoting DE&I initiatives, but acknowledge that other departments aside from communications often head up such efforts. Some 74% of respondents identify DE&I as a top priority and 40% say their organization has created a DE&I leadership position. Despite that, nearly 30% of participants admit that they do not know if their organization has measurable DE&I goals.

ESG opportunities ahead: Initiatives around Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG), while receiving enthusiastic support from leadership and welcomed by communications talent, tend to get a bit less notice than the peripheral strategies to boost DE&I across participating organizations. There lies an opportunity for comms to jump in to boost ESG knowledge and activity, as organizational mission, purpose and socially responsible business strategies play a significant role in retaining and hiring talent, and overall company standing with other stakeholders.

Wellness beyond meds: Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) have become a top priority among organizations and departments (74%), with wellness benefits expanded (60%) and increased mental health support/resources (63%). Company-wide mindfulness activities/programs (56%) also were noted.

Work/life balance: Attention also is being paid to other non-traditional plans that benefit wellness, including the incorporation of flex hours, and, to a lesser extent, physical health, work/life balance initiatives, and increased paid time off.

Measuring for success: With the overall changes developing in social, political and communication circles, more attention is being paid to measuring effectiveness in getting proper messaging across to diverse targets. Comms indicate that key performance indicators (KPIs) should be better established, more time should be allotted to the measurement task, and 65% are planning further investment in measurement training.

Training and tech investment: With WFH or work from anywhere here to stay at a growing number of organizations, many executive leaders plan to increase investment in state-of-the-art communications technologies, along with more dollars spent on investment in training initiatives.

Survey Respondents

Communicators who participated in this year's survey come from a broad cross section of the economy. Led by the education and non-profit sectors **(18%)**, and healthcare-pharmaceuticals-biotech **(16%)**, other industries represented include financial services, government, CPG, manufacturing, technology, energy, media and a range of other sectors with robust communication departments.

Of the respondents, nearly **40%** come from organizations with 1,000 or fewer workers, while just over **13%** are with companies of more than 30,000 employees. Their job titles range from manager and analyst to VP and CCO. The majority are mid- to senior-level professionals. The split between internal and external communicators was close to even. Far more come from smaller teams, so it's not surprising that their top priority, if able to increase budget, would be to add fulltime staff.

COMMUNICATION TEAM SIZE

40% 1-5	18% 6-10	12% 11-20	5% 21-30
	6% 31-40	8% 41-99	9% 100+

IS YOUR COMMUNICATION FUNCTION INTEGRATED OR SILOED?

- 59% Integrated
- 35% Siloed
- 6% Other
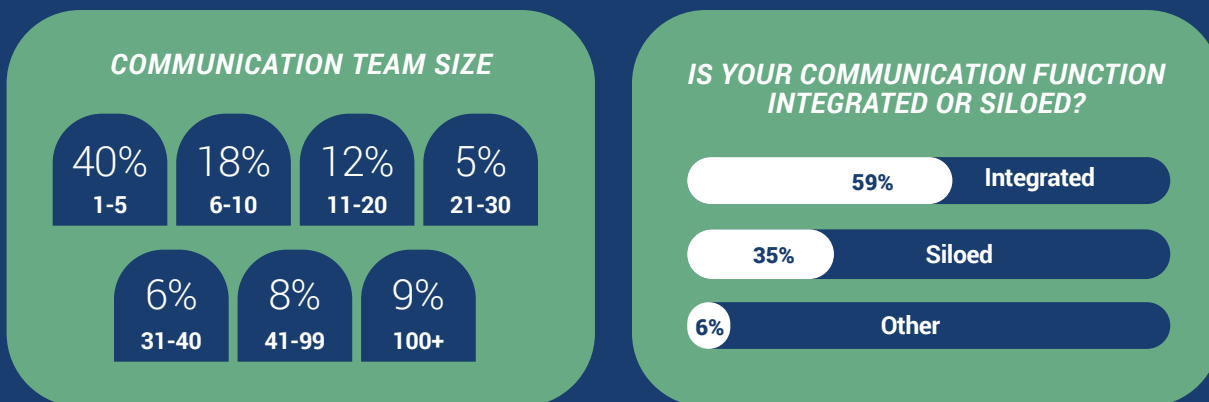
The majority of respondents perform in integrated communications settings where internal, external and other functions meet regularly and coordinate strategy and content, while a fair number are in siloed operations where those functions remain largely separate with some coordination.

Several respondents selecting the 'Other' category say they are trying to move from siloed to integrated, but continue to encounter growing pains along the way.

> **We are working VERY HARD to become an integrated communications capability. There are still siloed moments,"** says one participant, while another indicates that old habits die hard, saying, **"Trying to be integrated but historically siloed and still slip into old habits. It's about culture change.**

Section One

What's New for '22

Emboldened by lessons learned dealing with COVID

Majority expect hybrid arrangements to expand

Social media is a less effective tool, but still relied upon by many

Town halls are a big hit, but artificial intelligence reliance is way down

The communications sector has adjusted well to the challenges presented by the pandemic during the past two years. The operational lessons learned during COVID-19 have helped expand the significant role communicators play in keeping stakeholders up-to-date on developments.

A majority of the respondents **(69%)** expect return-to-office plans to rely on a hybrid arrangement, either by mandate or personal choice, while **8%** view fully remote as a permanent option and **23%** say plans as yet are undecided or they already are back to the office full time. As for CLC members, far fewer are undecided, with **77%** indicating that some form of hybrid arrangement likely would be in the mix.

> *Some will be designated fully remote, some hybrid, some fully in-office—decided by job position and responsibilities,"* according to one respondent, while another says, *"About 1/5 of the staff have the option of being remote or in a hybrid situation. Others must be in person, but we are evaluating more flexibility in those roles.*

While there's a general understanding that the hybrid workforce situation is here to stay, there's also uncertainty over workplace arrangements this year and beyond and how to effectively maintain close involvement with team members working remotely.

WHICH BEST DESCRIBES YOUR NEXT 12-MONTH RETURN-TO-OFFICE PLANS?

ALL RESPONDENTS

- 38%
- 31%
- 8%
- 23%

COUNCIL MEMBERS ONLY

- 44%
- 33%
- 10%
- 13%

- ■ Hybrid, up to the employee
- ■ Hybrid mandate
- □ Fully remote as a permanent option
- ■ Undecided
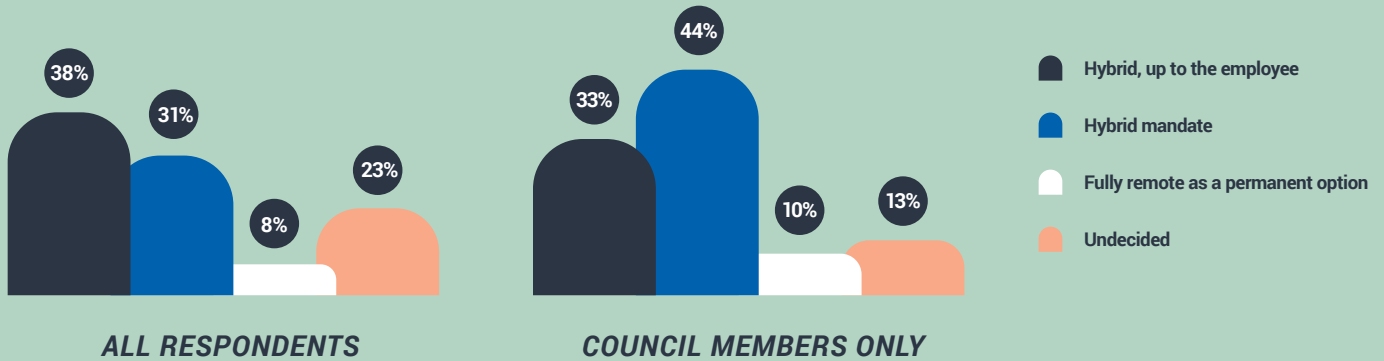
In fact, **49%** of comms identify communicating with remote or non-desk workers as one of the top two changes they expect in their role over the next three years, closely following increased focus and investment in DE&I at **56%** and ahead of greater reliance on social media at **38%**.

On the technology front, fewer respondents envision changes in their communicator roles via mobile **(33%)** and virtual **(21%)** tech within the next three years, both down from **41%** who anticipated such changes when asked in our previous survey. The most significant decline was in expected use of artificial intelligence at **8%** versus **23%** previously.

WHAT CHANGES DO YOU EXPECT IN YOUR ROLE OVER THE NEXT THREE YEARS?

Increased focus and investment in DE&I
56%

Increased focus on ESG
30%

Increased focus on communicating with remote workers
49%

More brand journalism storytelling
30%

Greater reliance on social media
38%

More personalization
29%

More thought leadership
33%

Virtual communication
21%

More communications via mobile
33%

Increased importance of employee advocacy
20%
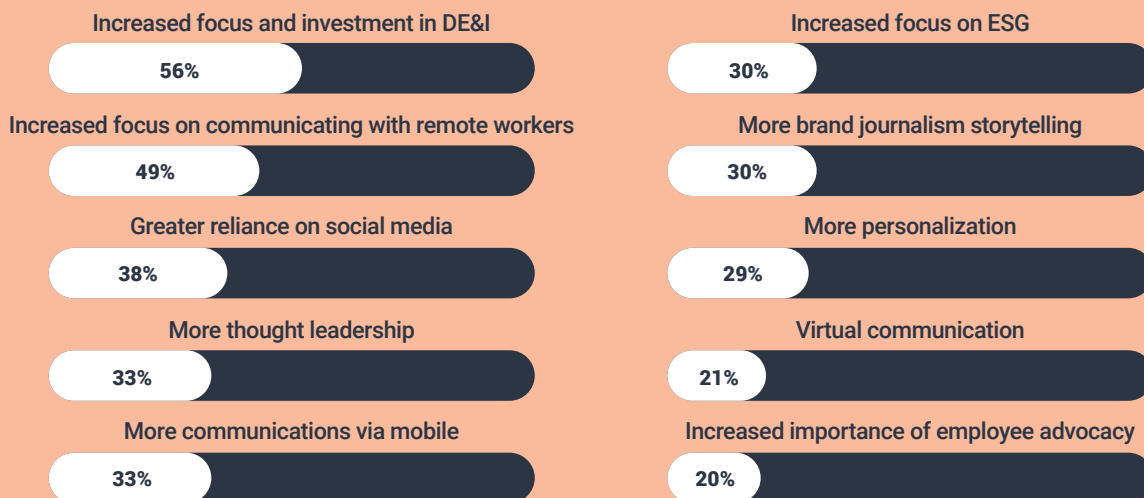
Respondents in general do not anticipate organizational moves to place communications under marketing **(10%)** and even fewer see a trend to consolidating the function within human resources **(4%)**. One survey participant clearly considers such actions as detrimental to the mission, putting it this way: *"Communications should NEVER be under HR nor under marketing. Comms is a distinct and important function that needs autonomy to be objective."*

Also high on the list of day-to-day communications hindrances are excessive distractions and an overabundance of ad-hoc messaging, each coming in at **34%**, lack of enough data metrics to produce real value **(31%)**, and no involvement in the strategic decision process **(30%)**, at least partly attributed to a poorly defined organizational business strategy as cited by **24%** of respondents.

See Section 4 for more results on what's standing in the way of effective communications

This year, communicators expect to continue spending more time on DE&I and, to a lesser extent ESG, but the biggest challenge on messaging will be more involvement in the strategies since the programs tend to come under the direction of HR, investor relations and other departments.

Greater support is growing for wellness initiatives, with **67%** of all respondents saying that they've increased ways to support employee well-being, with an even stronger showing at **74%** among CLC participants. Overall, employee assistance programs (EAPs) scored high in wellness support among both Council **(79%)** and Non-Council **(72%)** respondents.

Expect email to continue as a primary mode of communication in the year ahead. There will likely be further investment in intranets as organizations adjust methods to communicate with dispersed workers on executive thought leadership and other key messaging.

Meanwhile, beyond email use, some changes developed this year in ways to effectively communicate with managers. Most likely an effect of having fewer workers in office through the pandemic, meetings **(69%)**, although still strong, were down 9 points, while training sessions **(21%)** and videos **(12%)** were also off slightly.

Communicating with managers

Emails
74%

Videos
12%

Meetings
69%

We don't regularly do so
11%

Trainings
21%

Blogs
1%

Newsletters
12%

Other
6%

For internal communications, use of email is considered to be the most effective channel at **78%**, followed by virtual/team meetings and events such as town halls. While respondents saw intranet effectiveness drop to **40%** from **54%**, it is still viewed as a strong method for employee comms and engagement moving forward.

Use of social media leads the preferred method of external communications at **73%**, although slipping 10 points from the previous survey. Press release use continues to be strong at **45%**, but slipped 11 points among all respondents.

Specifically intended for connecting senior leadership's messaging with employees, respondents gave the highest marks to town halls **(64%)**, but email jumped significantly to **60%**, up 17 points from the previous survey. The use of print or digital newsletters also showed strong gains at **16%**, but one-on-one meetings dropped significantly to **12%** from **21%**, not a big surprise given the pandemic impact on office attendance. Given the circumstances, though, the 10-point drop in video/virtual use to **37%** for leadership messaging to employees was somewhat surprising.

Section Notes:

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Section Two

Talent Dilemma, Exec Access
Challenge Communicators

C-suite continues to wrestle with keeping valuable talent on board

Hybrid workforce engagement now the biggest culture challenge in 2022

Comms want clear thought leadership and organizational vision from the C-suite

Lack of access to C-suite executives remains a big problem

Unreasonable expectations often passed down from above

Getting a seat at the table remains a big challenge

Top execs less hesitant to use social media and now are talking more to employees

Even as many organizations have stepped up their efforts to keep valuable employees satisfied, ongoing talent and budget concerns continue to present significant barriers to meeting and exceeding organizational and business goals. In addition, many survey respondents claim they are not provided with clear thought leadership of organizational vision from the C-suite and feel that the lack of access to the top decision-makers often leads to unreasonable expectations from the execs. Getting a seat at the table or simply getting the attention of the C-suite remains challenging.

In addition, as the pandemic raged, communicators have been asked to take on **increasing workloads and complex responsibilities**. It's not necessarily a new development for the C-suite to add comms to new projects, but many respondents express hope that senior leadership in their organizations will **engage more closely** with professionals in each department to discuss and **clearly communicate** developing organizational goals.

Access to executives was cited as the biggest obstacle to effective leadership communication, bumping up to **30%** after dropping by 3 points in the previous survey. It was followed by executive hesitancy to use social media and execs exhibiting uncharismatic traits, both at **25%**. Interestingly, Council members have a different view on the obstacles, downplaying executive access as an issue at **16%**, but placing lack of exec charisma as the top obstacle at **33%** followed by social media hesitancy at **32%**.

Biggest obstacles to more effective leadership communications?

	All respondents	Council Members
Access to executives	*30%*	*16%*
C-Suite executives are hesitant to use social media	*25%*	*32%*
Executives are not charismatic	*25%*	*33%*
Capturing executives' voices	*24%*	*20%*
Executives are reluctant to communicate with employees	*17%*	*21%*
Executives lack media training	*20%*	*21%*
Employees do not trust the organization's executives	*21%*	*18%*
Executives do not trust insights from comm departments	*18%*	*11%*
Other	*23%*	*33%*

In our latest survey, **30%** of all respondents identified lack of involvement in the decision process as a significant element standing in the way of producing more effective communications overall. That's roughly the same as in the prior year **(29%)**, but a 9 point bump up among CLC members who registered it at **20%** the prior year.

Such a jump among Council members might indicate a gradual trend at upper levels to closely monitor and fix potentially negative factors as part of increased efforts to retain top talent.

HURDLES TO MORE EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATIONS

30% 24% 24% 18% 17%

● **Communications team is not involved in the strategic decision process**

● **Poorly defined organizational strategy/business plan**

● **Burdensome approval process**

● **Ineffective manager communication**

● **Lack of leadership support**
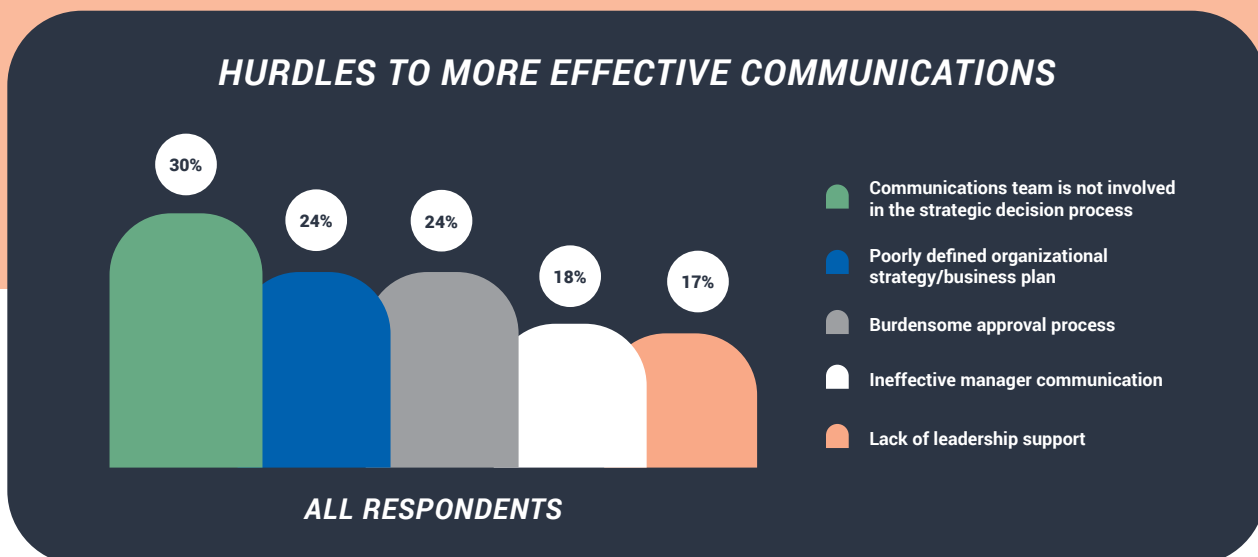
ALL RESPONDENTS

> *"Executive teams need to pull in communications sooner rather than later,"* says one respondent. *"Communications is much more than writing; more often than not it's operational in nature and requires cross departmental coordination to execute.*
"

Meanwhile, the C-suite continues to wrestle with higher than usual turnover among communications talent, possibly exacerbated by the heavier workloads triggered during the pandemic, lack of access to executives, the option to work from anywhere, and frustration over ongoing exclusion from strategic initiatives.

Some **36%** of survey respondents said turnover in communications was higher during the year, with an equal number saying it has remained at the same level in their organizations. The large but somewhat mixed results overall are perhaps attributed to the wide range of organizations from health care to retail with operations affected very differently as the pandemic wore on.

> *"Executives forget the strategic role communications must and can play in decision-making/goal setting,"* says one respondent, while another claims, *"Some execs aren't able to focus their comms priorities and often integrate ad-hoc tactics that have nothing to do with the strategic plan."*
"

In terms of culture, what will be your biggest challenge in 2022?

	All Respondents	Council Members	Non-Council Members
Engaging a hybrid workforce	32%	42%	30%
Creating a positive culture for a remote workforce	17%	15%	17%
Improving DE&I efforts/creating a more inclusive culture	13%	10%	13%
Fostering employee well-being	12%	7%	13%
Effectively communicating with deskless workers	11%	11%	12%
Onboarding remote employees	3%	2%	4%
Social justice issues impacting employee satisfaction	3%	1%	4%
Other	9%	11%	8%

Respondents see hybrid workforce engagement as the biggest culture challenge in 2022, along with creating a positive culture for those working remotely. Council members rated hybrid workforce engagement at **42%**, 12 points higher than Non-Council members, but were slightly less concerned (**15%** vs. **17%**) about assuring a positive culture for remote workers. While **13%** of respondents say they would encourage senior leadership to focus more time and effort on social justice issues, very few seem worried about how those issues impact employee satisfaction.

Among those commenting further on workplace culture, some mentioned the need for transparent conversations and employee appreciation. One respondent is keeping an open mind, saying **"engaging employees in a new future, whatever it ends up looking like."**

A number of survey participants expressed an understanding of the challenges senior leaders contend with on a regular basis and viewed the executive messaging as adequate and appropriate given the unusual times. **"During the pandemic, our leadership was engaged and actively reached out via video embedded in electronic newsletters and virtual town halls,"** says an appreciative respondent.

Section Notes:

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Section Three

DE&I, ESG Initiatives Advance

Respondents identify DE&I as a top priority

*Many say their organization has created a DE&I leadership post*

Nearly a third do not know if their organization has measurable DE&I goals

At least one-fifth would like senior leadership to focus more time and effort on ESG

Storytelling is becoming an area of development this year

Communicators are spending more time on DE&I and ESG initiatives, but acknowledge that other departments aside from communications often head up the strategic initiatives. Some **74%** of respondents identify DE&I as a top priority and **40%** say their organization has created a DE&I leadership position. Those results were even stronger among CLC members at **89%** and **52%**, respectively.

DID YOU INCREASE DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION (DE&I) INITIATIVES IN 2021?

74%
18%
8%
Yes
No
Don't Know

ALL RESPONDENTS

89%
8%
4%
Yes
No
Don't Know

COUNCIL MEMBERS ONLY
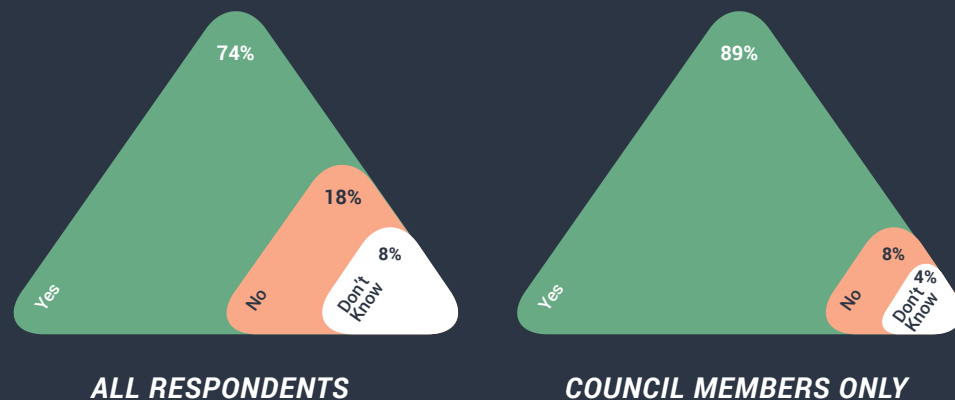
New DE&I initiatives were plentiful in 2021 as a large number of organizations continued building upon the significant progress made the previous year. Major moves were led by the establishment of organizational strategic plans setting the course for the years ahead, along with internal discussions, CEO-led conversations, town hall-style meetings, employee training sessions and outside consultant presentations.

Increases in some initiatives involving in-person sessions were slowed because such initiatives already had been established in previous years and workers spent more time working remotely due to the pandemic. Yet, given the circumstances, many organizations used the opportunity to initiate alternative strategies, such as creating ERGs and increasing supplier/vendor diversity selections to continue DE&I acceptance and growth even as COVID kept many workers away.

Which best describes how you increased your DE&I initiatives in 2021?

Developed organizational strategic plan on DE&I
60%

Created new position to lead DE&I efforts
40%

Held open conversations within the organization
59%

Changed talent, retention and advancement policies
33%

Unconscious bias/anti-racist training for employees
57%

Increased supplier/vendor diversity
23%

Brought in outside speakers
57%

Launched DE&I ambassador program
14%

Created and/or expanded the number of ERGs
44%

Other
13%

In addition, organizations used a variety of methods when introducing new initiatives, including establishing scholarship programs, introducing whistleblower and anti-harassment programs, and other creative ideas.

Among respondent answers to the question of increased DE&I initiatives at their organizations were:

Created regional DE&I Councils

Assessed our DE&I for 2022 strategic planning

Launched DE&I calendar to recognize new DE&I topics monthly

Increased communication on DE&I, established scholarship

Tons of communications, storytelling, experience sharing, empathy interviews

Whistleblower and anti-harassment programs

Engaged with consultant to review next steps to make biggest impact in movement forward

But, of course, not everyone surveyed was onboard with their organization's response so far, as indicated by this response by a survey participant who complained activities, thus far, have not been data based: *"DE&I is managed by HR through a Supervisor of Equity. There have been NO practices that have resulted in MEASURABLE outcomes as aligned to the equity goals the organization shared with the public very ceremoniously four (4) years ago."*

Perhaps the best indication, though, that DE&I has caught on in the communications field are the reactions to our follow-up question, where the largest response by far was **58%** in the 'Other' category. The vast majority, **roughly 80%**, of those who added 'Other' comments, said the question did not really apply to their organizations since they already had increased their DE&I initiatives during the year or even prior to this year. And, clearly, DE&I is a high priority, with only **9%** of respondents identifying it as "not a high priority," compared with **27%** last year.

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING BEST DESCRIBES WHY YOU DID NOT INCREASE YOUR DE&I INITIATIVES IN 2021?

12% No consensus on what actions to take	**4%** Unsure of what to say/do
9% It's not a high priority	**4%** Fear of alienating customers and/or employees
6% We shy away from difficult conversations historically	**2%** Executive team doesn't listen to comms counsel
5% Waiting to get expert, outside counsel on what changes to make	**1%** CEO doesn't want to be the messenger
58% Other	

Beyond such comments, **some others said:**

There was nothing in our way - it is a strategic objective that every employee has as part of their annual performance reviews	We have several active DE&I initiatives that have remained constant the past few years	Priorities of COVID in 2020 and 2021	We already have a strong DE&I culture and continue to add new DE&I initiatives

In last year's survey nearly one-quarter of respondents said they did not increase DE&I programs in 2020 due to COVID priorities and/or already having had existing programs in place. Since much, if not most, of 2021 continued to exist under pandemic concerns, there's a good chance that 2022 will be the year of major DE&I expansion across organizations.

That said, there still remain many questions about communication's role in the DE&I strategy, but certainly also an opportunity for the most creative professionals in every organization to step forward and pitch why communications, by its very nature, should be gathering input from other departments and become the primary lead in the messaging.

Who owns most DE&I initiatives in your organization?

	All respondents	>10,000 employees
HR	40%	34%
Diversity and inclusion executives	23%	35%
Other	16%	10%
Jointly owned by HR and comms	13%	17%
I don't know	6%	2%
Communications	3%	2%

To that end, communicators' ownership of DE&I may be a huge climb from the single percentages where it resides today, but keep an eye on respondents at companies with more than 10,000 employees, where current leader HR this year took a 10-point dive to **34%**. It wasn't a reflection on the ability of HR to do a stellar job on DE&I. It's more an indication that HR and the C-suite needed more time and energy to deal with the current talent dilemma and other critical challenges. It also gives current DE&I executives an opportunity to continue as top strategy approvers, while expanding their own roles within the organization.

It is a good bet that if comms present well-conceived business plans with supporting data, such initiatives would be received very well at the top and may lead to a proper seat at the table on DE&I going forward.

Comments from responders on who owns DE&I initiatives, **pro and con:**

PRO — "We have a DE&I Council made up of employees from around the world, representing every function and career level."
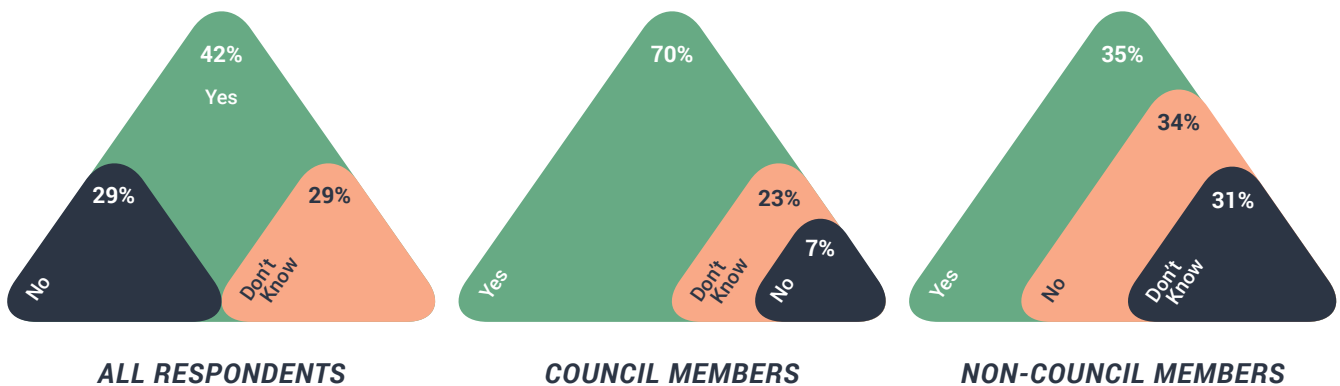
CON — "Our managers [own DE&I], which is part of why the rest of us don't know what's going on."

Stay tuned through the year as even more organizations likely will incorporate DE&I strategies, and those that are well along with their initiatives continue to keep a close eye on the effectiveness of the programs and goals already in place.

CLC respondents **(70%)** are way ahead of non-members **(35%)** in recognizing that their organizations have measurable DE&I goals. There also was a wide gap—**65%** of non-members; **30%** of CLC respondents—selecting 'No' or 'I don't know' to that question.

DO YOU HAVE MEASURABLE DE&I GOALS?

42% Yes	70% Yes	35% Yes
29% No	23% Don't Know	34% No
29% Don't Know	7% No	31% Don't Know
ALL RESPONDENTS	**COUNCIL MEMBERS**	**NON-COUNCIL MEMBERS**

With increased focus on DE&I goals and less attention needed on COVID's impact on operations, it may be likely that organizations will spend more time on how the current initiatives are successfully providing results expected by employees and required by leadership.

Over the next three years, Council members expect more pronounced changes regarding the initiatives in their communications roles: **63%** of CLC respondents vs. **55%** of non-members.

It will be interesting to watch how internal and external communicators react this year, as **51%** of internal comms said they had measurable goals while external goals lagged at **32%**.
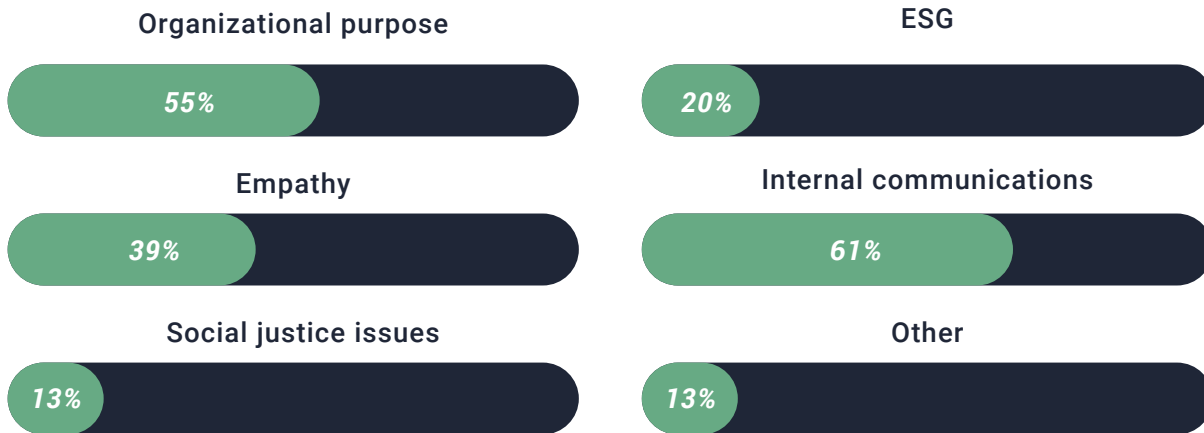
ESG is Heating Up

ESG initiatives, while receiving enthusiastic support from leadership, being welcomed by communications talent throughout the ranks, and destined for major growth in the next decade, tend to get less notice than the attention paid to strategies aimed at boosting diversity.

CLC members more than non-members expect changes to their roles in that regard as interest continues to heat up for ESG: **40%** of CLC respondents vs. **30%** of non-members.

That presents a golden opportunity for comms to take a leadership position in the ESG mission and goals, perhaps with the use of increased storytelling, which **56%** of survey respondents identified as one of the two top areas of development where communicators should focus training efforts in the next year.

Which would you encourage senior leaders to focus more time and effort?

Organizational purpose

55%

ESG

20%

Empathy

39%

Internal communications

61%

Social justice issues

13%

Other

13%

The vast majority of CLC respondents **(77%)** say they know the comms team helps to promote ESG efforts, ahead of non-members **(56%)**.

When respondents were asked to name one major change they would like to make in communication structure or strategy, one said, *"An effective platform for engineering storytelling and community building."* Similarly, when asked about changes expected in the communicator role over the next three years, another responded simply, *"Increased storytelling."*

Section Notes:

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Section Four

Comms Strengthened Roles Built on Trust

Skepticism over perceived media bias has helped divide public sentiment

Comms professionals are among the most trusted conveyors of critical messaging

Opportunity exists to gain a seat at the big table or get attention from the C-suite

But there are obstacles that must be dealt with and overcome

As mentioned earlier in the report, the communications sector overall has adjusted well to the challenges encountered during the pandemic years. The experience has served to further emphasize the enormous role comms play in keeping professionals up-to-date on organizational developments and making certain that all stakeholders have accurate information presented in a clear and engaging manner.

More than ever, communications professionals have become widely recognized as among the most trusted conveyors of critical messaging both internally and externally. They are best positioned to focus on delivering substantive points and serve as the primary contact points for Q&A on issues.

Growing sentiment that today's news outlets are biased left or right has given way to widespread media distrust but also has increasingly led stakeholders to turn to America's organizations to impact positive change. This thrusts communicators into the critical role of ensuring that all information is accurate and transparent and stories are compelling.

In the recent 2022 Edelman Trust Barometer, the media was viewed as a divisive force by close to half of surveyed respondents, with more than three-quarters also expressing concerns over fake news and **65%** selecting communications from 'my employer' as most believable.

"Against this backdrop, CEOs face a new challenge: they must both navigate a dangerous epidemic of misinformation and deliver stabilizing, unifying information to the variety of stakeholders they serve," according to Lisa Osborne Ross, Edelman's U.S. CEO, in a post-survey report titled, "Distrust and the Media: What Business Can Do."

Still, even as public trust in communications grows for its honesty and message reliability, more can be done to clear internal hurdles.

What is standing in your way of producing more effective communications?

	All respondents	Council Members
Too many last-minute requests	57%	53%
Lack of staff	53%	48%
Lack of budget	35%	23%
Too many distractions	34%	38%
Lack of consistency (too much ad-hoc messaging)	34%	29%
Lack of metrics (not enough data to provide value)	31%	33%
Comms team isn't involved in strategic decision process	30%	29%
Poorly defined organizational strategy/business plan	24%	24%
Burdensome approval process	24%	25%

So, what can communicators do to further strengthen that existing internal and external confidence as a trusted leader? For starters, it might help to proactively produce a series of strategic and quantifiable ideas to present to the C-suite.

Other ways include: creating messaging that is consistent with an organization's unique goals and pursuits, reaching out with targeted communications to help further bond with those who may have related, but different viewpoints to educate stakeholders as to why and not alienate and drive away.

Proactive counsel to help the organization craft its messaging from the department that ultimately will deliver it can increase awareness about what its most powerful communications asset can bring to the table. Consolidating the strategy and execution away from other departments and into the comms function could also position communicators for new opportunities to expand their influence and deliver more effective results.

Yet, there are obstacles that must be overcome to bolster communications' role as most trusted .

For example, many comms contend that they already handle too many organization objectives—often presented with last-minute assignments or unaware of strategic initiatives being discussed—so we asked questions about what is standing in the way of more effective communications and, if given the budget resources, what would be the best use of the extra bucks.

If you won an increase in budget how would you spend it?

	All respondents	Council Members
Hire more full-time staff	55%	56%
Improve communications metrics	37%	34%
Invest in team training	24%	18%
Give raises and/or bonuses to existing staff	22%	20%
Technology	21%	26%
Roll out an employee communications app	21%	28%
Conduct a communications audit	19%	19%

Council member responses were aligned with total responses, with a few notable exceptions, including investing in team training (**18%** vs **24%**), technology (**26%** vs **21%**), and rolling out an employee communications app (**28%** vs **21%**). All seem to register about the same high marks for hiring more full-time staff.

Other communications obstacles, according to respondents, include executives who are hesitant to use social media **(25%)**, a technology clearly chosen as the most effective channel **(73%)** for external communications, access to leaders **(30%)**, capturing leaders' voices **(24%),** and lack of leader charisma **(25%)**.

Beyond that, participant comments were varied, **including:**

Invest in video storytelling content creation and campaigns for enrollment and community building

Hire a graphic designer just for the comms team; hire a digital multi-media expert (photography, video etc.)

More video production/ marketing

Overhaul our entire communications infrastructure

More integrated communications marketing work

New corporate website with translation ability

Increase social/ marketing ad spend to grow email list/ followers

As mentioned in the introduction, **43%** of respondents said their communication operations were matrixed, surpassing those with centralized structures **(39%)** that handle communications for their organization's entire enterprise. Matrixed **(13%)** include some combination of centralized and decentralized communications operations.

Several back the centralized structure, which may help solve another hurdle that seems to hinder many of those locked into matrixed or decentralized structures.

According to one survey participant operating in a blended structure:

"

Combo, but in a disorganized way that I wouldn't describe as 'matrixed'," while another commented, *"The decentralized model is frustrating for team members who continue to run into road blocks. The strategic plan outlines how to remain focused in our lane but I wonder if a more detailed strategic plan would help."* One simply barked, *"It's a mess.*

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Section Notes:

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Section Five

Internal and External
Communication Strategies

Email is increasingly the main mode of communication

Only 7% of respondents feel managerial communication is not challenging at all

Press releases are down, but about half still use them as a top message channel

Is there a gradual shift away from cascade systems for reaching employees?

Per usual, strategic planning in communications is an ongoing process requiring a combination of proactive planning to meet long-term organizational objectives, continual revisions along the way to stay on course, and a swift reactive approach for tackling developing issues at any given time. In all cases, clear and consistent messaging is critical up and down the line to stay focused and on track.

In our latest benchmark survey, respondents indicated a slight change toward tactical planning sessions taking place more often—week to week—and somewhat fewer one-to-three-month strategic meetings.

Which of the following best describes how often you plan communications strategies?

One to three months
32%

Annually
14%

Week to week
26%

Other
7%

Quarterly
15%

Six months
6%
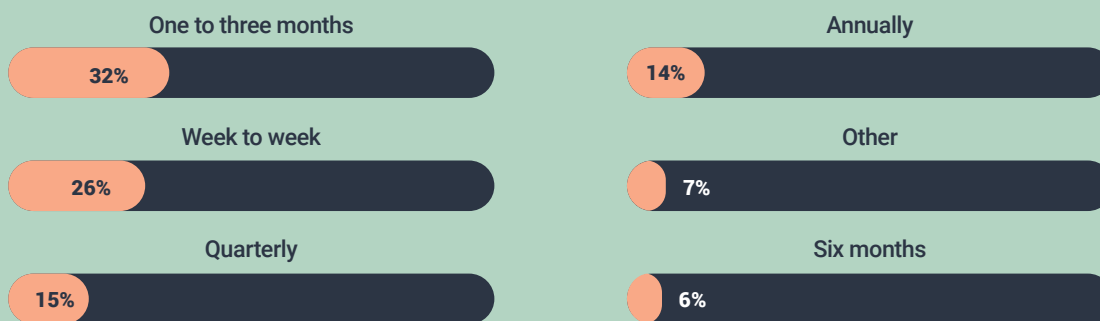
Most respondents report that their organizations use a cascade system to distribute internal messages down from top execs to frontline managers who then disseminate the information as needed. It's a longstanding method, especially and understandably more prevalent in very large operations.
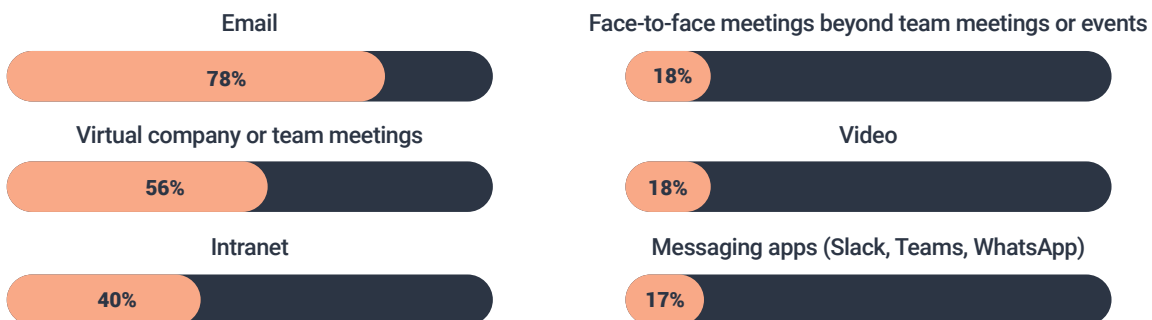
Respondents this year indicate that some changes away from using the cascade approach seem to be taking place. Most notably, CLC members reported a 15-point drop year on year, while the biggest organizations—those with 10,000 or more employees—showed a 9-point decline. Overall, factoring in responses merged from all respondents, **51%** reported use of the cascade method, a drop from **54%**, that Non-Council participants **(48%)** and smaller operations with less than 5,000 workers **(41%)** registered few or no changes in their cascade practices.

DOES YOUR ORGANIZATION EMPLOY A CASCADE SYSTEM TO DISTRIBUTE MESSAGES TO EMPLOYEES?

61%
33%
5%
Yes
No
Don't Know

COUNCIL MEMBERS ONLY

69%
23%
8%
Yes
No
Don't Know

>10,000 EMPLOYEES

51%
39%
10%
Yes
No
Don't Know

TOTAL RESPONDENTS

As for communication channels, internal and external communicators rely on different methods to get their messages across, with email remaining prevalent in internal communication operations, and social media the mainstay in external functions, although both methods slipped year on year. Also slipping this year was the tried and true press release for external purposes, down 11 points to **45%**.

What are the top channels you use for internal communications?

Email
78%

Face-to-face meetings beyond team meetings or events
18%

Virtual company or team meetings
56%

Video
18%

Intranet
40%

Messaging apps (Slack, Teams, WhatsApp)
17%

While email remains king, newer technologies and services slowly but surely have been making significant communications inroads, perhaps partially because of perennial complaints of distractions caused by email overload. *"Over reliance on broadcast email,"* is the way a respondent referred to what's getting in the way of more effective communications.

What are the most effective channels you use for external communications?

Social media 73%	**Press releases** 45%	**Brand journalism storytelling** 24%	**E-newsletters** 23%
Paid media 16%	**Conferences/ other speaking opportunities** 14%	**Video** 14%	**Blog** 14%
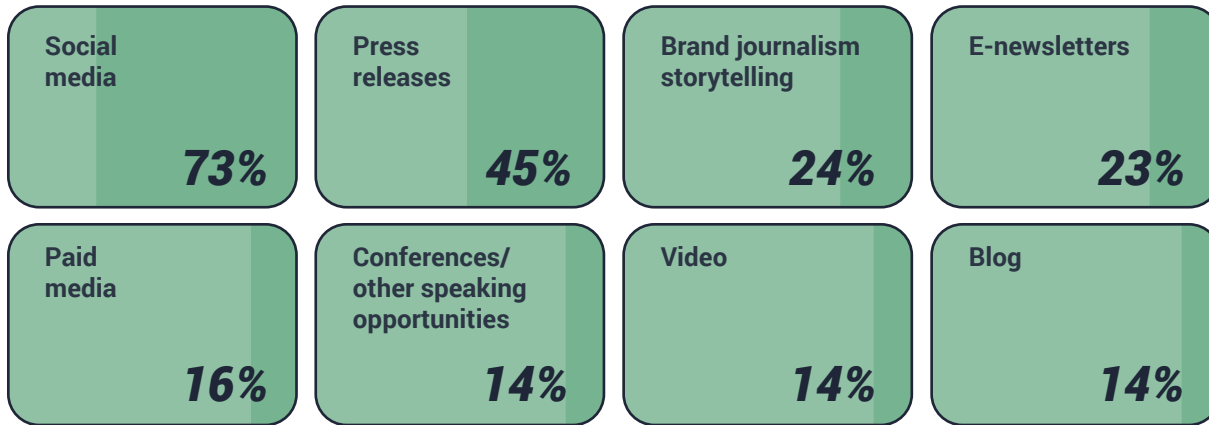
Although slipping 10 points, social media remains the most effective form of external comms. Brand journalism storytelling got a 7-point increase year-over-year, while the rest of the channels remained flat from our last survey.

Some sizeable changes were evident in responses from CLC members, on connecting senior leadership to employees with email use and walk-about opportunities up considerably, while video/virtual meetings and webcasts slipped in this messaging category. One can surmise that some of the ups and downs were related to more personal access as professionals began to emerge, at least on a limited basis, from working remotely as pandemic concerns eased toward year-end.

Effective ways to connect senior leadership's messaging with employees.

	All respondents	*Council Members*
Town halls	*64%*	*67%*
Email	*60%*	*54%*
Small group meetings (e.g., brown bag lunches)	*40%*	*38%*
Video/virtual	*37%*	*43%*
Intranet	*19%*	*19%*
Walkabouts	*18%*	*18%*
One-on-ones	*12%*	*6%*
Newsletters (print or digital)	*16%*	*11%*

While there are many effective ways for leadership to get messages across to employees, **79%** of respondents find manager communications to range anywhere from moderately to extremely challenging, with a mere **7%** saying it's not challenging at all. That's a rather concerning number for a profession that's built upon communication.

That said, it's certainly something that organizations may want to focus on fixing in the months ahead. In particular, training managers (upskilling) to deliver relevant information to their teams, developing FAQs for managers and their teams, and offering newsletters or other communications for managers to stay abreast of organizational announcements and responses.

How challenging is managerial communication in your organization?

44%

25%

14%

10%

7%

● Extremely challenging

● Very challenging

● Moderately challenging

● Slightly challenging

● Not at all challenging
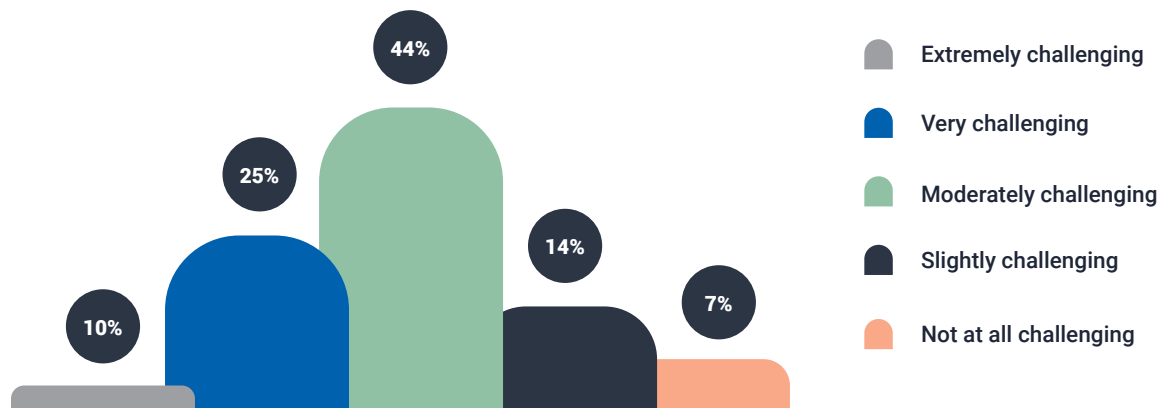
Respondent comments indicate it's not necessarily access to and from managers that's the problem, but more a frustration over seeing any *follow-up:*

"Communicating with managers is easy, getting them to take the information and positively share it with employees is not so simple"

"They have so much coming at them and never enough time to do it"

"We have too many silos so enterprise comms for managers is nearly impossible to do"

"Introverts or poor communicators/ lacking people skills comprise 50%+ of our managerial population"

Section Six

Who's Leading
Crisis Communications?

CLC members are more confident about the comms team's leadership role on crisis strategy, as compared to non-members

69% of CLC respondents vs. 56% of non-members believe the comms team is the primary leader

10% of CLC respondents vs. 31% of non-members believe the CEO is the key authority

When asked about crisis management, few indicate their organization has a dedicated crisis team on board, and crisis leadership by members of the comms unit fell to **58%** from **67%** year over year. Interestingly **28%** of respondents say the crisis leadership falls directly on the CEO.

Experts suggest that while CEO involvement is a must in a crisis situation, most agree that an entire crisis management team needs to be developed and trained in advance so that calculated decisions are made quickly and proper messaging from the top executive begins to flow as soon as possible. That's where it is critical to have strong involvement from the outset by the organization's communications team.

" *Structuring the team in advance is critical, particularly identifying who will be in the lead.* "

Since not all crises are of the same nature, the crisis team involved may include other departments. For example, a major technical disruption certainly should involve key IT personnel, a negative social dilemma might need involvement by senior HR officials, etc. That said, aside from the CEO, many say the critical team always should involve legal and communications professionals, regardless of the crisis at the moment.

Who at your organization is the primary leader of your crisis communication strategy?

	All Respondents	Council Members	Non-Council Members
Communications team	58%	69%	56%
Chief Executive Officer	28%	10%	31%
Dedicated crisis team	20%	26%	19%
HR team	14%	10%	15%
Legal team	14%	11%	15%
PR team	13%	11%	13%
Marketing team	9%	4%	10%
Other	9%	7%	9%
We don't have a crisis strategy	6%	4%	7%
Operations team	5%	6%	5%
Outside agency	5%	5%	4%
IT team	2%	2%	2%
I don't know	0%	0%	0%

At times, crisis issues pop up that are completely unforeseen—COVID-19 and the Ukraine-Russia conflict being perfect examples—thrusting organization leadership into a nightmare scenario of uncharted territory and a need to update their crisis communications playbooks.

Comms Must Be on Crisis Strategy Team

During the past two years, CEOs were forced to be on the front lines of communications around the pandemic, and amid the severe health crisis, a number of social justice issues surfaced that also required attention from the top. In such cases, it becomes necessary for the comms team to cede the messaging to the CEO, but it remains critical for them to still be part of the crisis strategy team.

However, when asked in our benchmark survey about crisis management, few indicate their organization has a dedicated crisis team on board (dipping 10 points year-over-year), and crisis leadership by members of the comms unit fell to **58%** from **67%** year over year. Interestingly **28%** of respondents say the crisis leadership has fallen directly on the CEO. Again, such results in the current assessment may have been skewed by the impact of the second year of the global COVID-19 crisis.

Going forward, it appears there's no clear strategy in place across most organizations, as highlighted by the vast number of responses to the question of who is in **charge during the inevitable next crisis**:

Comms/Marketing Director, reporting to Chief Development Officer	**Corporate Communications team for organization**	**Dept of Public Safety**	**Media team**
MarCom and Safety	**Executive on call**	**Chief Strategy Officer**	**COO**
Investor Relations	**I work at a school that is part of a university. If a crisis arises for the school, I call in the University crisis manager.**	**External Affairs**	**Risk team**

... and then there's:

I'm not aware of specific strategy	**We don't need a crisis strategy for our scope of work**	**No clue**

The COVID, social justice and related crises of the past two years may serve as an alert that such developments can occur almost overnight, so it will be interesting to see when we examine this topic for our next benchmark report how many organizations are placing a greater focus on crisis strategy.

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Section Seven

Message Measurement **Deepens**

What are your biggest challenges for measuring communications?

	All Respondents	*Council Members*	*Non-Council Members*
Lack of time	*58%*	*40%*	*61%*
Lack of staff	*41%*	*34%*	*43%*
Lack of proper technology	*40%*	*43%*	*39%*
Small budget	*32%*	*21%*	*35%*
Lack of expertise	*37%*	*50%*	*34%*
Analysis paralysis	*19%*	*16%*	*19%*
Lack of leadership support	*11%*	*5%*	*13%*
Other	*6%*	*14%*	*4%*

At a time when the communications sector continues to wrestle with a series of internal and external challenges, it is surprising that measurement often still takes a backseat when strategies are under development. But, as with other operational aspects, examining and addressing the ongoing pain points also presents a huge opportunity to ease burdens so comms can put full strength into their primary strategic efforts, play upon the successes evident via proper measurement tools and review and replace programs that aren't delivering the intended results.

However, unlike the universal measurement services used in broadcasting and other media, the organizational communications structures rely on a patchwork of tools to measure individual success. That's understandable since communications operations are as diverse as the missions of their organizations ranging from health care to retail and everywhere in between. Many of the same social media monitoring and listening tools were used year-over-year with insignificant percentage change.

Most-used media monitoring and social listening tools

Google Analytics	Hootsuite
60%	**28%**

Cision	Meltwater
26%	**22%**

Sprout Social	MuckRack
17%	**6%**

Brandwatch	TYEyes
4%	**4%**

Semrush	Buffer
4%	**3%**

Critical Mention	Other
2%	**25%**
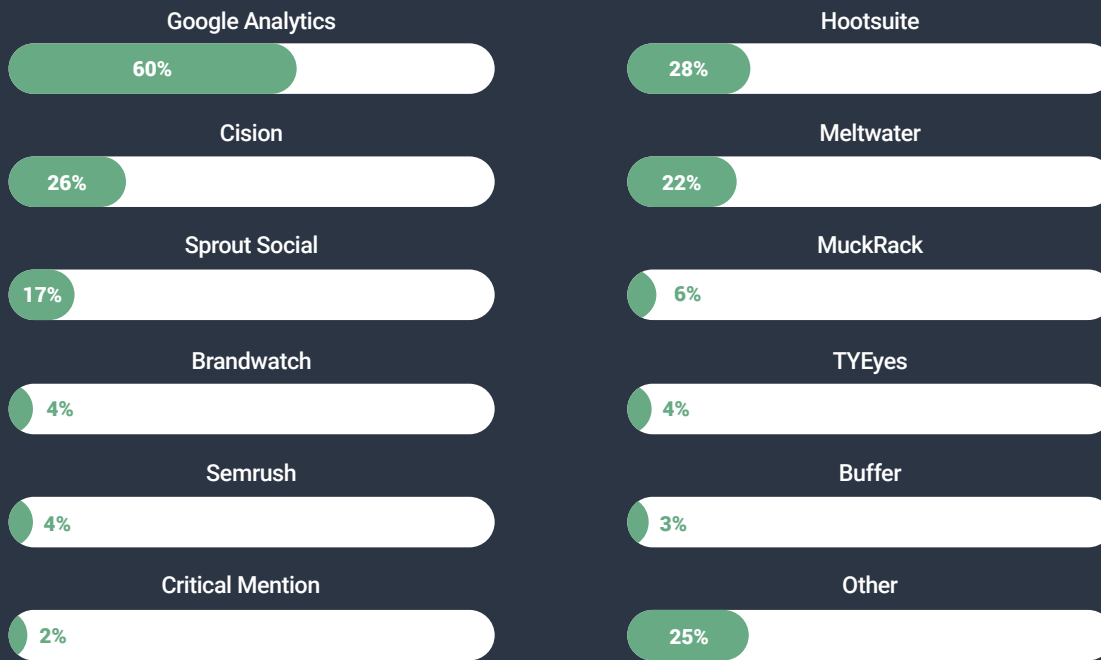
Google Analytics, a "freemium" service available at no-charge to smaller businesses but offering deeper content for a fee, continues to lead the measurement field by more than double, with Hootsuite, Cision and Meltwater picking up a respectable number of users among communications units across for-profit, non-profit, government and agency operations.

Still, a wide range of tools are being employed as evident in the high range of services **(25%)** listed in the 'Other' category, including but not limited to:

PublicRelay	NationBuilder	RivalIQ	Notified	Social Bakers
Netbase/Quid	Reputation.com	Propel	LexisNexis	ListenFirst
Sprinklr	Synthesio	Loomly	Archive Social	Metro Media
Burelles	LinkedIn	Revinate	Newz Group	Built on Twitter
Tygraph	Falcon	Khoros	Talkwalker	Media gofer
FullIntel	Trackmaven	e-clincher	Agorapulse	
GaggleAmp	Sendible	SOCi	Social Studio	

While Google Analytics continues to be the leader among Communications Leadership Council members at **49%**, four points higher than last year, Cision provides a strong showing at **36%** as does Hootsuite at **23%**. Meanwhile, Sprout 4 Social had a big 10-point jump to **23%** among CLC members this year.

What tools do you use to measure/monitor emails?

	All Respondents	Council Members	Non-Council Members
Other (Salesforce, HubSpot, Google Analytics, etc.)	68%	59%	71%
Mailchimp	18%	10%	19%
Poppulo	7%	15%	5%
PoliteMail	6%	13%	4%
Bananatag (now Staffbase)	6%	10%	5%
ContactMonkey	3%	4%	3%
I don't know	0%	0%	0%

Measuring Effectiveness

When it comes to internal communications effectiveness, Communications Benchmark Report respondents overall give their organizations high marks on measurement initiatives with **50%** rating their service as either above average or excellent, while just **13%** described their work as poor or below average.

On the external side, the 'above average' and 'excellent' measurement selections totaled even higher at **55%**, with 'below average' and 'poor' dropping a couple of points to **8%** in this year's survey.

RATE THE OVERALL STATE OF YOUR ORGANIZATION'S COMMUNICATIONS

INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS
39% 36% 13% 11% 2%

EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS
42% 38% 7% 13% 1%

🟢 Above Average 🔵 Average ⬜ Below Average ⬛ Excellent 🟠 Poor
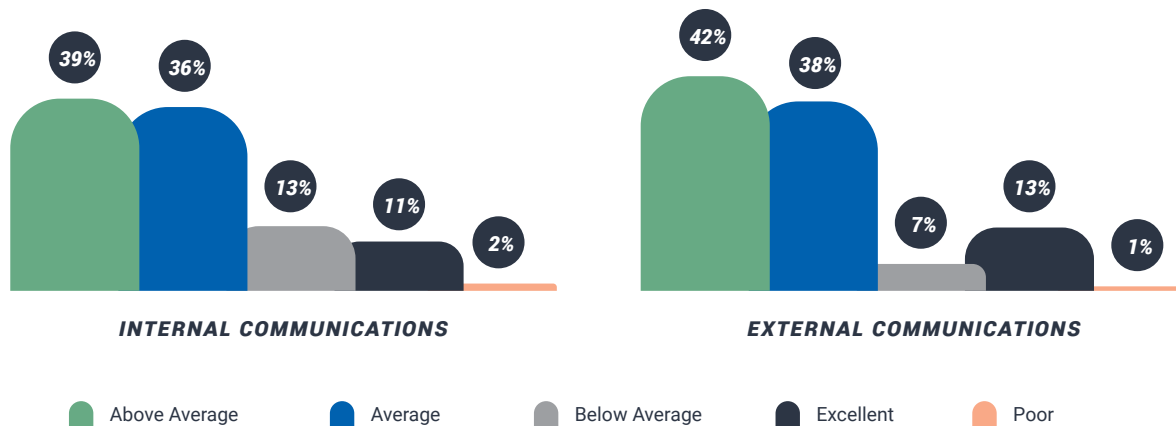
Council members were very pleased with the state of their communications, giving internal operations a combined 'above average' and 'excellent' score of **59%**, 14 points higher than the total offered by Non-Council members. Council members also rated their external communications higher **(53%)** than non-members **(48%)** when adding above average and excellent rankings.

Council Members

	Internal	External
Above Average	45%	42%
Average	31%	41%
Excellent	14%	5%
Below Average	9%	11%
Poor	1%	1%

Non-Council Members

	Internal	External
Above Average	37%	37%
Average	38%	38%
Excellent	8%	8%
Below Average	11%	11%
Poor	3%	1%

Internal communicators gave good grades to their own performance , with **56%** rating their work as above average or excellent. External communicators took a harder view of their accomplishments with only **43%** showing performance higher than average and a whopping **20%** at poor or below average.

How communicators view their effectiveness

	Internal	External
Above Average	44%	33%
Average	35%	36%
Excellent	12%	17%
Below Average	8%	10%
Poor	1%	3%

While the overall state of organization communications gets a commendable ranking in some areas and adequate rankings in others, it also clearly demonstrates why measurement is a critical area that demands closer attention by senior executives and department managers.
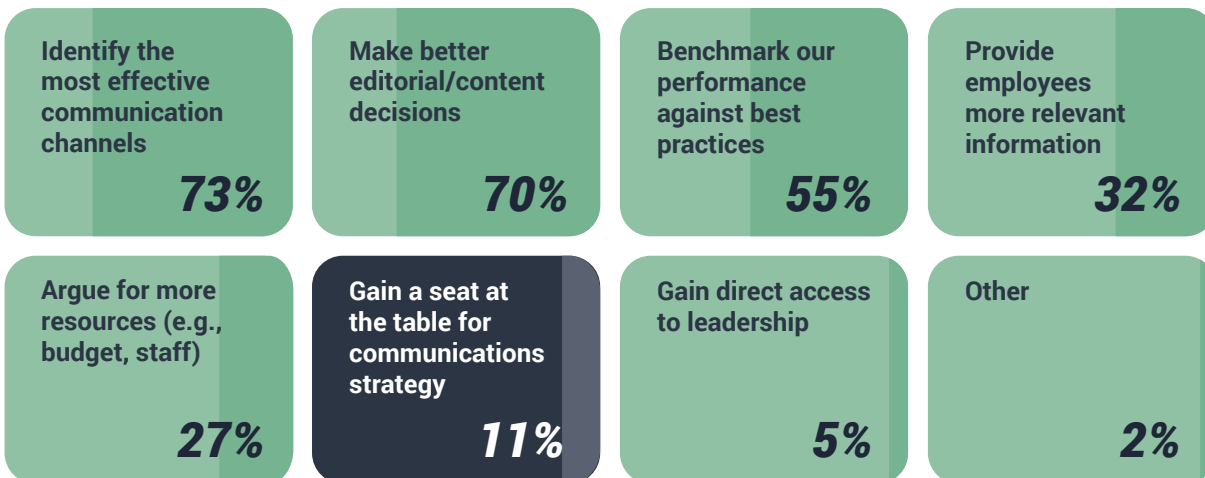
In Section 5, respondents indicated a slight change toward tactical planning sessions taking place more often—week to week—and somewhat fewer one-to-three-month strategic meetings. Yet, weekly measurement of communications slipped to **14%** this year, down from **20%** previously. There was a similar weekly slide to **11%** from **16%** in responses from Communications Leadership Council members. However, Council members upped daily measurements to **24%**, double the number seen in 2021, possibly emphasizing a closer look by leaders to spot developing trends and strategic options well in advance.

How frequently do you measure your communications?

Monthly	Weekly
39%	14%

Ad-hoc basis	Quarterly
14%	19%

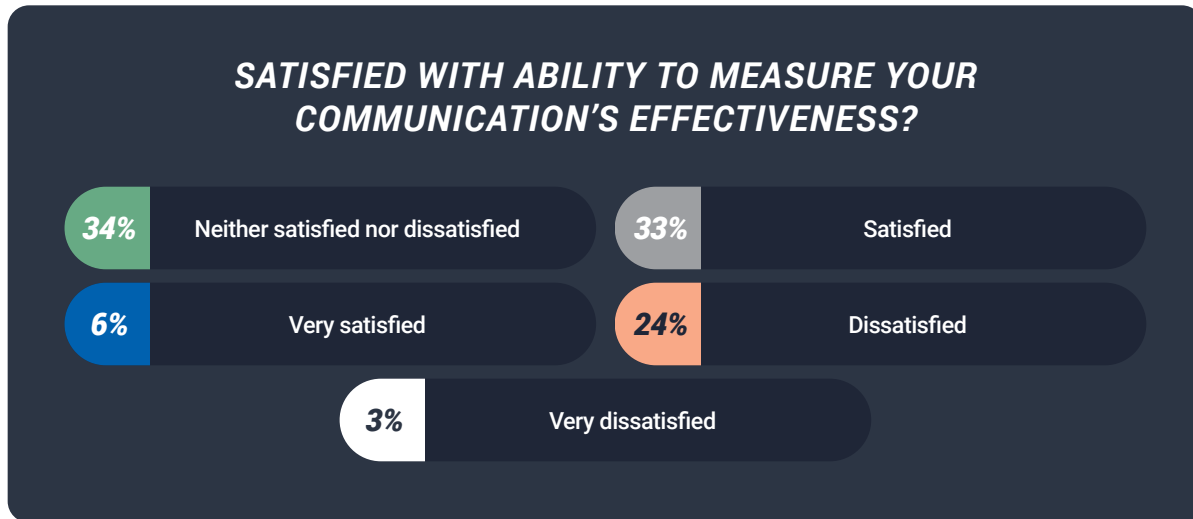| Daily	Annually
11%	3%
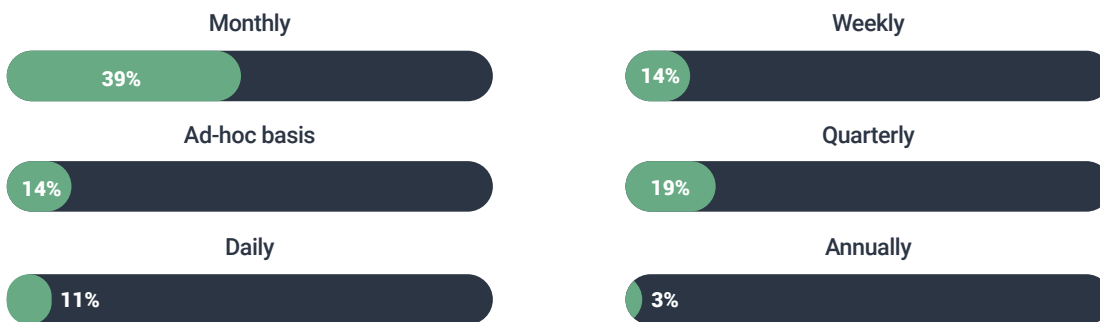
Communications Leadership Council respondents showed monthly and quarterly measurements holding steady at **38%** and **19%**, respectively, but a 4 point decline to just under **9%** in ad-hoc reactive measuring this time around.

How are you using the results of your communications measurement?

Identify the most effective communication channels	Make better editorial/content decisions	Benchmark our performance against best practices	Provide employees more relevant information
73%	**70%**	**55%**	**32%**

Argue for more resources (e.g., budget, staff)	Gain a seat at the table for communications strategy	Gain direct access to leadership	Other
27%	**11%**	**5%**	**2%**

Similar results came across from Council members emphasizing the desire to watch for the most effective communications channels, placing it in the top spot at **78%**, up from **75%** in 2021, benchmarking performance at **60%**, up from **51%**, and doubling interest in securing a seat at the table to 10%. The big drop among Council members centered on making better content decisions, falling to **66%** from **79%**, still a sizeable number and in second place, but something to keep an eye on to see if a trend is developing.

SATISFIED WITH ABILITY TO MEASURE YOUR COMMUNICATION'S EFFECTIVENESS?

34%	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	**33%**	Satisfied
6%	Very satisfied	**24%**	Dissatisfied
3%	Very dissatisfied		

This year, **39%** of respondents overall said they are satisfied or very satisfied with their communications measurement effectiveness, down slightly from last survey. Council members were a bit happier at just over **41%**, but expressed some dissatisfaction at **31%,** higher than non-members who registered the negative reaction at **27%**. Interestingly, the number saying they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied also was up this time among all respondents by 4 points to **34%** and among Council members by 5 points to **28%**.

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Section Eight

Cutting Through
the Tech Fog

More investment in technology coming

IT addressing communications needs more quickly

Increasing investment in intranet development

Significant rise in the use of messaging apps and other virtual tools

The use of video has declined

With work-from-home arrangements becoming common at a growing number of organizations, many leaders plan to invest more in communications technologies. Organizations also have been increasing investment in intranet development to better communicate with a dispersed and sometimes isolated workforce and for conveying executive thought leadership.

In addition, to engage teams both onsite and remotely, there has been a significant rise in the use of messaging apps and other virtual tools, but organizations continue to wrestle with the exact technology needed to more adequately serve their individual culture and environment.

As with any major change in operations, new challenges arise to keep employees and clients fully engaged, requiring new ways to deliver messaging and developing the right mix of compelling content to include in digital workplace platforms such as intranets.

New Virtual Tools Already on Board

When it comes to adding new channels, organizations clearly acted on their 2020 plans by focusing on bringing aboard a slew of new virtual tools, most likely prompted by the need to establish better communications, especially with those working remotely due to the pandemic.

Because of that, the addition of new virtual tools fell dramatically in this year's survey since a large majority had already added them during the previous year.

With the likelihood that WFH and other remote worker options are here to stay long-term, it would not be surprising to see even more new virtual technologies being developed and entering the field over the next couple of years.
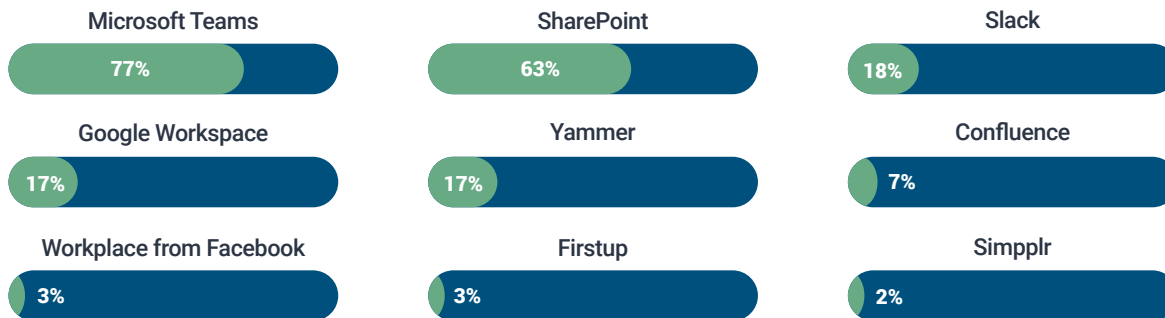
Meanwhile, the use of virtual options like Zoom has become so commonplace that organizations large and small, whether for-profit or non-profit, rely on such services to keep internal and external employees fully engaged in mission and strategic planning. In fact, **37%** of respondents in smaller operations (under 5,000 employees) say they added new channels in 2021, while **19%** also added new messaging tools.

Which new channels or tools did you add in 2021?

	All respondents	Council Members
Small group meetings (e.g., brown bag lunches)	37%	28%
Virtual tools (e.g., Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Webex)	32%	34%
Messaging apps (e.g., Slack, Teams, WhatsApp)	17%	15%
None of the above	14%	19%
Podcasting	7%	10%
Internal social media	7%	13%
Internal video portal	5%	6%
Brand journalism digital platform	5%	5%
Chatbots	4%	3%
Artificial intelligence	4%	5%

One thing is certain. With the growing number of workplace tools on the market and the varied needs by individual departments across all organizations, IT will continue to be a critical area for further investment in new technology and increased staffing. As evidenced recently by general concerns over cyber security and the impact that technical breaches—whether intentional or accidental—can have on operations, the more remote we become, the greater the need to act quickly if there is a breakdown in communications.

What digital workplace tools do you use?

Microsoft Teams
77%

SharePoint
63%

Slack
18%

Google Workspace
17%

Yammer
17%

Confluence
7%

Workplace from Facebook
3%

Firstup
3%

Simpplr
2%

The digital tools category remains wide open, but Microsoft Teams and its sister cloud-based service Sharepoint lead the way, with Slack and Google Workspace behind but used by a large number of survey respondents. As noted in the past, both Microsoft Teams and Sharepoint are bundled with Office 365 and include some free tiers, likely adding to that popularity. Although Yammer still is widely used, it slipped over the past year, especially among CLC respondents where it dropped 12 points to **27%** this time around.

Among the many other digital tools mentioned across all respondent groups are:

SnapComms	*Jostle*	*Webex*	*Igloo*
Staffbase	*HubEngage*	*Mural*	*Meltwater*
TheEMPLOYEEapp	*ClickUp*	*Asana*	*Constant Contact*
LumApps	*Akumina*	*Jabber*	*Simpleview*
Beekeeper	*Limeade ONE*	*Basecamp*	*CrowdRiff*

What are the most effective ways to communicate with deskless workers?

	Council Members	*Non-Council Members*
Face-to-face communication	*48%*	*41%*
Employee app/intranet	*43%*	*38%*
On demand town halls	*24%*	*29%*
Text communication	*23%*	*29%*
Digital collaboration software (i.e. Workplace by Facebook)	*23%*	*34%*
Social media	*18%*	*11%*
Print	*8%*	*7%*
Other	*23%*	*22%*

Council members **(48%)** and Non-Council members **(41%)** prefer face-to-face communication with deskless workers, along with employee app/mobile intranet options. Interestingly, a greater percentage of non-member responders **(34%)** selected digital collaboration software than counterparts in the Council **(23%)**. Text communication and town halls scored better with non-members, while social media came in higher by CLC participants. Not surprisingly in this day and age of communications technology, print lagged in last place for all.

Among overall respondents selecting the "Other" category for deskless-worker communication, comments included:

Digital screens/ bulletin boards (North America, EMEA)... Produced "radio" programming for plants + WhatsApp (LATAM)... WeChat (China)	**Small group meetings with leaders and team managers**	**We only use email**	**We haven't yet cracked the nut on effective communication with deskless workers**
	Digital screens in the workplace	**Digital signage, Bulletin boards**	**Zoom meetings**
Teams and virtual collaboration	**Corporate intranet**	**Live virtual events (vs. on demand)**	

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Section Nine

Retaining Talent Through
Strategic Training

Although video use has declined, comms express concern about lack of video training

Communicators desire coaching in storytelling and management/leadership

65% plan to invest more in measurement training

As in many fields, retaining communications talent has become a key issue for organizations as even longtime employees, burdened with additional work during the pandemic, began to search for greener pastures. Finding ways to retain top talent has become a major challenge for leaders. Termed "The Great Resignation" or "The Big Quit," there has been further demand by talent for higher salaries and better benefits. But the work-from-anywhere movement enabled by the pandemic has allowed companies to hire talent they may not have otherwise, due to location.

In Section Two, we discussed some of the pressing complaints, including lack of executive access leading to unreasonable expectations passed down from above, and less-than-clear thought leadership and organizational vision from the C-suite.

Many talented professionals feel overloaded with busy work and order-taking, preventing them from having the time to handle areas of communications that are more strategic and less tactical. Compounding the issue is the perennial complaint over lack of staffing preventing them from focusing on the larger, more critical issues.

Notwithstanding the various structural and budget restraints that may get in the way, the new reality is that communications leaders are looking for other effective ways to help retain talent—the biggest one appears to involve increased training. It comes down to upskilling, being innovative, standing out within the organization and retaining talent through training.

In terms of training your communications team, what areas of development are most important in the next 12 months?

	All respondents	Council Members	Non-Council Members
Measurement/data analysis	65%	61%	66%
Storytelling	56%	64%	54%
Video/multimedia production	43%	39%	43%
Management/leadership	42%	41%	42%
Writing & editing	40%	38%	41%
Business fluency	36%	51%	33%
Media relations	23%	24%	23%
Presentation skills	18%	21%	17%
Graphic design	16%	9%	17%
Other	6%	5%	6%

CLC and Non-Council members give high marks to the importance of staff training in storytelling, measurement/data analysis, management leadership and video/multimedia production. The biggest difference involves developing talent training in business fluency, with Council respondents placing it as number three in importance at **51%**, while non-members put it in sixth place at only **33%**. On graphic design training, non-members at **17%** were a bit more bullish than Council members **(9%)**.

Respondents to the question noted other areas they also would like to see more emphasis on:

"*Digital fluency," said one. "We can't continue to communicate using the same channels and words we do now." Another added, "Communications strategy development; stakeholder engagement strategy and execution; advance corp brand & culture." A third hopes for expertise in "Team building and relationship management."*

Turnover Costly in More Ways Than One

The most recent U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics report placed the voluntary turnover rate across the country at **25%** factoring in all industries, and conservative estimates indicate replacement costs range anywhere from one-half to two-times the annual salary of the exiting employee, not to mention having to weather the loss of valuable talent in the process.

Strictly from a cost perspective and not tied directly to communications, a Gallup report has estimated that a company with 100 employees earning an average of $50,000 each incurring **26%** turnover could cost an organization from $660,000 to $2.6 million per year. *[e.g., 26 employees x $25k salary to 26 employees x 100k salary].* While there is a direct financial cost to turnover, leaders must also be aware of the toll it can take on remaining employees, like increased workloads and loss of institutional knowledge. Retaining talent must be a high priority for overall organizational health.

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Section Ten

Meaning of Employee
Well-Being Expands

Employee Assistance Programs have become a top priority

Beyond workplace stress, a focus on family issues and more

Non-traditional plans that benefit wellness, including flex scheduling

An overwhelming number of respondents in 2021 note that their organizations have introduced new ways to support the well-being of employees, a recognition of the significant value gained through benefits that go beyond medical, dental and vision coverage that are aimed at creating a better work/life balance.

Overall, **67%** of respondents say their organizations increased well-being support in the past year, with CLC members coming in nearly 10 points higher than Non-Council members.

HAVE YOU INCREASED WAYS TO SUPPORT EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING IN 2021?

67% / 20% / 13%	74% / 19% / 7%	65% / 21% / 15%
Yes / No / Don't Know	Yes / No / Don't Know	Yes / No / Don't Know
ALL RESPONDENTS	**COUNCIL MEMBERS**	**NON-COUNCIL MEMBERS**
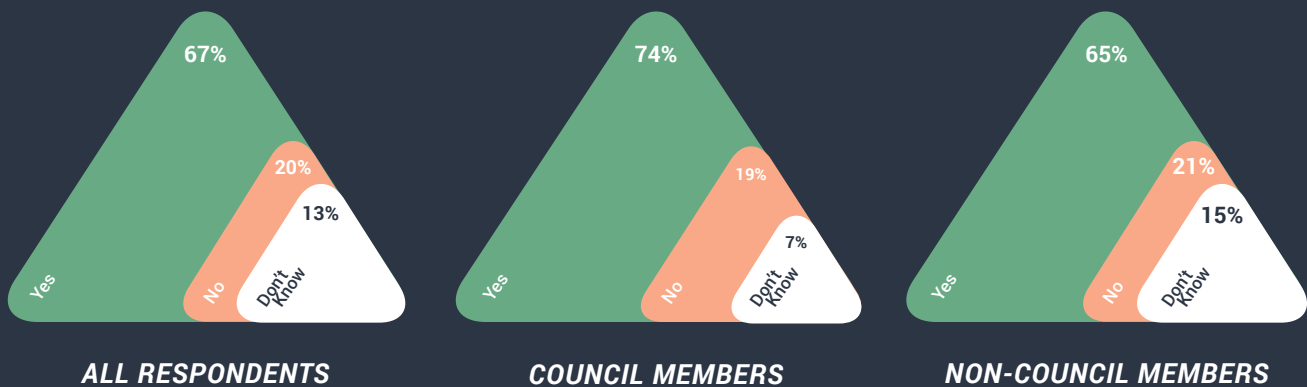
Overall, employee assistance programs **(74%)** led the way in established well-being benefits provided, with its selection by Council members coming in at **79%** versus **72%** by Non-Council members. Perhaps a product of our times mental health support and resources took the second spot in our survey, followed closely by flex hours and expanded wellness benefits. It may fall on communicators to, well, "communicate" such benefits. Interestingly, Council members **(54%)** were less inclined to support flex time, down a full 10 points from Non-Council respondents.

"One participant commented, "2021 was extremely challenging for a health care workforce," while others noted special programs to help employees, including "Company-sponsored lunches and tokens of appreciation," "Social activities (online trivia competitions, online cooking classes)," and "Increased clarity and communication around the variety of well-being things available to all employees.""

"According to another respondent, staff at the organization, "Started an internal support group for staff members dealing with family illness and loss.""

IN WHAT WAYS HAVE YOU SUPPORTED WELL-BEING IN 2021?

74%	Employee assistance program (EAP)	**63%**	Increased mental health support/resources
60%	Flex hours	**60%**	Expanded wellness benefits
56%	Organizational mindfulness activities/programs	**34%**	Leadership models work/life balance
33%	Increased paid time off	**32%**	Physical health activities (i.e. walking meetings/yoga/daily stretches)
16%	Increased financial health assistance	**8%**	Other

Perhaps surprisingly, the response by all participants scored increased financial health assistance at the bottom in employee well-being scenarios, coming in at only **16%**. Such programs usually coach employees on ways to better manage finances, reduce debt, prepare for emergencies, and stay on track to meet savings and retirement goals.

Bank of America's 11th Annual Workplace Benefits Report showed that **95%** of employers registered a "sense of responsibility for the financial wellness of their employees," up from **81%** six years earlier. It appears to be an area of wellness that is likely to be adopted as a benefit strategy by a growing number of organizations going forward.

Conclusion

When asked to select a single change they would make if given the chance, almost 700 respondents jumped at the chance. Not surprisingly, many of those changes revolve around not only better access to the executive suite, but to have a meaningful role at the table when strategic initiatives are being discussed and to become an integral part of the ultimate decision-making process.

Beyond the perennial call for more staff, the comments and ideas were numerous—after all, communicators are not shy about communicating. Below are a range of thoughts from our participants:

"Improve the strategic direction from leadership and define a more effective comms approval process."

"To be brought in for consultation, coordination and planning earlier on confidential matters. Communications does not happen in a silo. It's very operational in nature and requires coordination across multiple system departments for a successful launch."

"Having executives clearly share priorities with the org and set an understanding that comms supports that strategy/priorities. We are confounded by constant requests and 'everyone's baby is the prettiest' needs."

> *"Marketing consumes so much of our dept. leader's time that comms never receives sufficient attn/strategic focus. Comms should be split off from Marketing & given its own function head reporting up to our CEO."*

"It's not often understood that communications does not work in a silo. Communications is much more than writing; more often than not it's operational in nature and requires cross departmental coordination to execute. Executive teams need to pull in communications sooner rather than later."

"The decentralized model is frustrating for team members who continue to run into road blocks. The strategic plan outlines how to remain focused in our lane but I wonder if a more detailed strategic plan would help."

"Be able to have more time to plan real campaigns but leadership waits until the final moment to approve anything making campaign work prohibitive."

"Structure: Add more people internationally so that we could rely less on agencies in places where we don't have staff. Strategy: Not have to go through a second approval process with the parent company AFTER we have executive sign-off within our business unit."

"To centralize into one communications department. We currently have separate internal/external reporting structures, but I often am pulled into external communications as a trusted advisor. It would be a clearer business strategy to have a centralized comms team."

"

"For the organization to listen to the insights from comms teams about what is happening externally so that comms strategy and activity is relevant. Having clear aims and objectives that are measurable and deliver desired impact."

"

"To increase our seat at the senior management level. C-Suite is fine, but our value needs to trickle further."

"I would have the time to spend on developing a thorough strategy instead of being focused only on the numerous project requests that come in daily."

"Embracing more innovative approaches rather than the 'tried and true' tactics and strategies."

"I would like more autonomy to make decisions without undertaking multiple levels of approval for what I would consider inconsequential things."

"The ability to set and enforce decisions and strategies without interference from other parties."

"Get the business to see (the) value of communications and be able to guide and support them more."

"

"More regular communication with Dean/CEO to ensure that we are ahead of things instead of catching up after decisions have already been made."

"

"VP of communications/marketing involved in all organizational decision-making."

"Have service level agreements in place that clearly convey what support we provide and what we don't — and have it socialized at the higher levels for buy in. Too many times we are seen as order takers and get caught up in administrative tasks that could be delegated elsewhere."

"More buy-in from executive leadership team. Many times it feels that social media is an afterthought rather than a critical component of our comms strategy."

"Other departments wouldn't wait until the last minute."

" *"Remove silos between internal and external. It causes a
lot of redundancy."* "

"Reduce number of different communications channels and focus on a few — less distraction and build consistency."

"Internal Communications would be at the table more frequently and earlier when external or internal campaigns are being planned."

"A more planned, strategic, coordinated organizational approach versus brand-level, siloed approach."

"Getting more leadership buy-in and support. We shouldn't rely solely on the info being sent. The comms need to continue within groups."

"More interaction with C-level people to better understand their goals."

"Change staff composition from a team comprised largely of former print journalists to a team of trained communications professionals."

" *"It would be helpful if communications was a higher priority for our IT
team (for web overhauls, apps, technology for employee town halls,
etc.). We often have to wait a year or two (or more) to implement key
initiatives that require their team's assistance."* "

"The single most strategic change that our institution could make would be to give the communications department leader a seat at the table with top administrative leadership…. Some leaders erroneously believe that communications alone can make up for delayed or poor decisions that are not well received by employees or stakeholders."

"Even though communication is a major function in our organization, and I am part of the executive leadership team, our function isn't as valued as others like engineering or programs. I am always worried about our function being absorbed into HR or under sales & business dev. I think it is critical that it is a stand-alone function."

"Incorporate a required Communication Strategy at the start of every potential project using a defined methodology of identifying goals, strategies, and tactics."

"

"Having a rigorous method that is supported by the organization of selecting and executing only those initiatives that are truly strategic — in other words, that support organizational strategy, that are coordinated (so the organization truly speaks with "one voice") and that are on-brand. Currently we are too often at the mercy of people demanding support for their projects, at the expense of the larger strategy/goal."

"

"Spend more time on learning more about metrics of communications to better define and evaluate more efficient outreach and effectiveness of communications."

"Try to get others outside my communications team to better plan so they cut down on last-minute requests."

The bottom line:
Communicators, while eager to speak, desire to actually be heard.

About Us

Ragan Communications has been delivering trusted news, training and intelligence for more than 50 years to internal and external communicators, HR professionals and business executives via its conferences, webinars, training, awards, subscriptions and membership divisions. Its daily news sites—**PRDaily.com** and **Ragan**.com—are read by more than 600,000 internal and external communicators monthly. Its Communications Leadership Council is one of the fastest-growing membership groups for communications executives and its PR Daily Leadership Network is the go-to membership group for PR, marketing and social media professionals. Ragan's Workplace Wellness Insider serves HR, wellness and communications professionals. Ragan is also the producer of **Communications Week**, which is held each November. Ragan is headquartered in Chicago, with team members spanning the country and loyal customers worldwide. Visit us **www.ragan.com**.

Ragan Products:

Through our world-renowned newsletters, conferences, research reports and guides, **Ragan Communications, Inc.**, delivers practical advice, real-world solutions and field-tested strategies for today's corporate communicator.

PR Daily is the preeminent brand for public relations professionals, delivering news, advice, opinions and benchmarking via PRDaily. com, awards, conferences, newsletters and more.

Ragan's Communications Leadership Council is an exclusive membership organization for senior-level corporate and internal communicators. Comprised of the most innovative companies in the world, the membership provides benefits for both senior leaders and their teams, including premier networking, extensive industry training and benchmarking reports.

Ragan Events and Awards

Ragan produces best in class in-person and virtual events, including conferences, webinars, workshops, bootcamps and roundtable discussions featuring industry-recognized experts and an unparalleled attendee experience. Signature events include Communications Week, the Employee Communications & Culture Conference, Future of Communications Conference and Social Media Conference at Disney World, to name a few. Our events cover a vast range of internal and external communications topics including strategic communications, writing, executive communications, crisis communications, wellness, media relations, DEI and measurement.

Ragan's award programs salute top campaigns and people in internal and external communications, workplace wellness and HR. Winners and finalists for our varied awards programs are recognized at in-person awards events throughout the year, as well as featured on our websites and in ebooks.

Ragan Training is an online membership portal providing access to video training courses in communications, public relations and digital marketing. The video library provides sessions and courses covering new practices and required skill sets for various specialties—as well as panel discussions and perspectives on the changing nature of our industry.

Workplace Wellness Insider gives leaders in HR, wellness and communications the insights, ideas and strategies to align employee health and engagement with organizational goals. Through its subscription service and training programs, Workplace Wellness Insider provide managers with the tools, strategies and ideas on employees' mental, physical and financial health, social well-being, and work-life balance.

The **PR Daily Leadership Network** is a peer-to-peer group and training resource for external communicators at corporations, nonprofits and agencies worldwide. Members experience discussions, training and insights on media relations, crisis management, social media, branding, reputation management, thought leadership, executive communications and more. Further information can be found at **leadership.prdaily.com.**

Communications Week is designed to celebrate and accelerate the role of the communicator. Join us in November for a series of educational, networking and inspirational events hosted by Ragan and our industry partners that will shine a clarifying light on the key issues and trends for brand leaders and storytellers far and wide.

First Draft provides communicators & editors with timely and relevant content to keep readers engaged and connected.

Bits and Pieces is a monthly magazine read by thousands of professionals seeking personal inspiration and motivation.

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