

# The Urgent Need for Change Communications

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The world of work is busy these days. Companies are growing, new products are being launched, and most organizations are going through a series of transformations. And while all this is happening, employees are living their lives. They're taking new jobs, learning new things, changing their family situation, and dealing with the myriad of work-related issues that impact their lives.

And people don't have much time. Research shows that over 40% of employees now work more than 45 hours a week and more than 20% work 50 hours or more. They spend almost 25% of their time on email alone (and a quarter of employees believe almost a third of that time is wasted), they get messages on their phone and other systems, and they just don't have time to keep up. Yes, they feel more connected, but when there's something important to do, they often have to dig around to remember where it is.

Enter the vast and complex world of change communications. Companies have important, urgent, and valuable things to tell their employees. They range from simple announcements of organizational changes to instructions on how to select healthcare benefits, new safety or compliance programs to comply with, and even critical changes like updates to security processes, new IT systems, and changes in compensation, role, career paths, and more.

As I talk with executives about their change communications process, they tell me it's scattered and disorganized or flat out does not exist. There are email newsletters, communications delivered via an employee portal (often many), plus messages from the executive team, from managers, and from HR. Most agree that communications are dispersed, voluminous, and very hard to manage. And they never really know how much information is absorbed. Are employees changing their behavior to fit new processes, and are the processes taking hold?

And there is a massive cost to this confusion. Not only are multiple people managing newsletters, emails, portals, and employee apps, but companies are wasting employees' time by sending them information they don't need (or want).

Organizations spend millions of dollars on systems and tools that require "change management" but people aren't sure how to use them; and when an emergency or crisis occurs, the business can be at risk when employees are uninformed.

There's no question that communications about organizational changes are important. But there is a big question about how to do it well.

## How Communications Systems Work Today

One of the main challenges is that each employee-facing system has its own way of communication. Yes, many companies have integrated employee apps and portals, but they are mostly focused on transactional messaging. They don't tell you "what to do when" or alert you when there's a change. And employees have to go to multiple systems to get what they need - wasting time and energy.

When there is a strategic change initiative such as a major acquisition or layoff or a change in performance, pay, or benefits processes, companies must make sure people receive and understand the message and take the appropriate action. Employers may need employees to watch a video or fill out a short form; there may be associated time-bound deadlines. Should you send employees email after email reminding them to complete requirements? Schedule conference calls with replays? Or do you just tell managers to make it all happen?

And then there's the problem of segmenting employees by need. All companies have different groups: the sales team, the marketing team, first-line managers, people who work in the UK, people who work in a given location, and more. These groups may be differentiated by role, location, tenure, or just interest - and companies need to communicate with them uniquely. Some of the data needed for such segmentation is in the HRMS, but some isn't. (For instance, does your HRMS know if you're interested in a hiking club?).

It's no wonder companies have bought email systems, CRM systems, and other marketing-oriented systems to communicate. They want to segment and target their employees and let them decide what to consume. But these systems aren't designed for the "employee journeys"

companies want to curate to drive employee change, and some are just not designed for internal change communications at all. What can be done?

## Change Communications Platform: A New Breed of Software

One of the biggest topics in HR today is improving what we call “the employee experience” – making work easier, more engaging, and more productive. The domain includes using tools such as employee surveys and a new generation of rewards programs to listen to people, segment and target their needs, and build more employee-centric benefits and programs.

Employee experience is also big business. The corporate wellbeing market alone is now a \$40 billion market, and it’s expected to grow at almost 10% this year. All this spending is being sprinkled out into the workforce with the hope it makes peoples’ work life better. But how can employers tell employees what’s available and which is most relevant to their needs?

There needs to be a better way to communicate about change to the workforce. While email systems, ERP and transaction systems, and HR portals are great tools, they were never designed for “communications.” They may send messages and serve as great places to find things; however, they don’t always simplify, streamline, and improve employees’ understanding. And when employers need to get the word out fast, with deadlines, and in a multi-step process, they’re just not well suited to the task.

Imagine if businesses had a system designed exclusively for change communications. One that specialized in delivering information about change and was able to help employees get on board with new processes and system initiatives? A software platform that could segment messages to audience groups, deliver single or multi-step communications, incorporate time-based activities, and give HR managers lots of data to measure how people are reacting to new systems and processes? This kind of system could sit in front of all other enterprise systems, dramatically reducing cost, clutter, and the time it takes to communicate. And, at the same time, it would integrate all the messages into one place, reducing duplication and saving everyone time.

This kind of platform is what GuideSpark is building. Called GuideSpark Communicate Cloud®<sup>1</sup>, the company built this platform after almost a decade of building employee communications content. Initially GuideSpark built interactive videos and highly engaging tools to help employees understand benefits and open enrollment. But over time, the company found out that more was required to orchestrate real change across the entire enterprise. This included software to help administer and manage communication journeys - a combination of personalized messages in a variety of formats using multiple channels, and back-end analytics to make sense of and improve upon your efforts. Not surprisingly, GuideSpark also realized this was an entire application area.

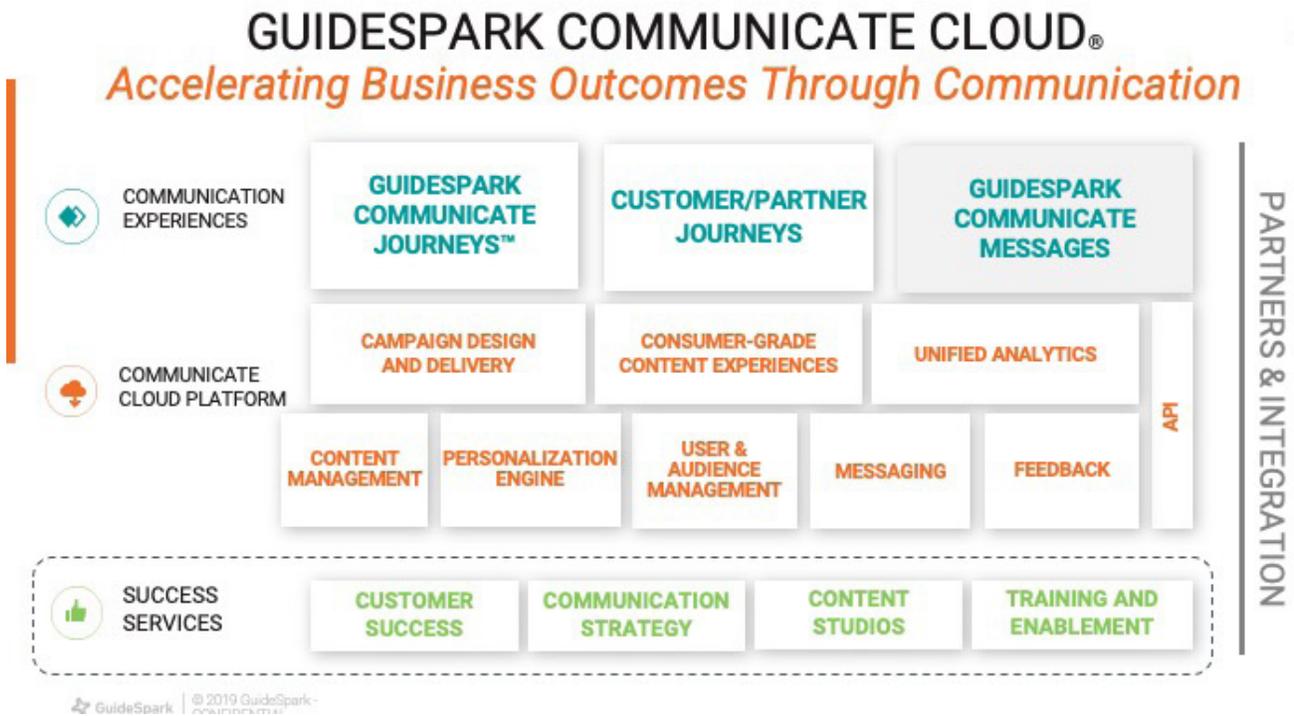
GuideSpark Communicate Cloud® orchestrates communication journeys, interactive content experiences that are designed to change employee behaviors to achieve strategic business goals.

As such, its features help businesses manage and scale the entire communication lifecycle. With GuideSpark Communicate Cloud®, you can:

- Manage all change communications from a single management interface for planning and distribution across the organization.
- Build communication journeys to deliver a coordinated set of messages, sent over time, often in a non-linear and asynchronous fashion, and aligned with key programs and processes.
- Personalize messages for different audiences and then send using email, text, web, social, and print formats.
- Provide interactive content experiences in a unified interface with related content and search capabilities that enable employees to quickly find relevant material.
- Measure employee behavior, including how employees engage with communications and content and what actions they take.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.guidespark.com/?utm\\_source=joshbersin&utm\\_medium=website&utm\\_campaign=200615-article](https://www.guidespark.com/?utm_source=joshbersin&utm_medium=website&utm_campaign=200615-article)



**Figure 1:** Guidespark Communication Cloud

- Gauge sentiment for change initiatives through feedback from ratings and polls.

Recommend relevant content to increase employee adoption and alignment with changing business processes as part of the employee’s content experience.

## Benefits of This System

Does change communications software replace the HR portal or IT case management system? No, they are complementary. Whatever mechanism you use for employee access (a portal, an app, a chatbot, or an integrated ERP system), there is still a need for change communications. Why?

Communications are different from applications. They are often urgent, frequently have deadlines, and they range from simple messages to complex instructions. GuideSpark has learned this over time: its platform sits on top of applications to deliver a unified set of easy-to-understand graphics, simple instructional videos, and interactive webpages that help people

better understand and learn about changes taking place in the organization.

The biggest benefit, however, is integrating, streamlining, and simplifying all communications. GuideSpark’s platform treats employees like customers: their interests, demographics, language, and even location can be segmented. Manufacturing workers in Germany can receive one set of communications, while salespeople in France may see another. Rather than have different communications specialists manage various employee groups (and send duplicate and colliding emails to the masses), the work can be done in one place, just like a marketing manager administers campaigns to prospects.

The ROI of this type of system can be measured in many ways. Communications staff can be streamlined; executives can much more effectively distribute important information; employees save hours of effort deleting useless emails; systems and programs are better utilized; and business change initiatives are more successful. The corporate LMS, benefits system, and performance management system can now be invoked and

promoted through communications, making the system more useful and practical for everyone.

GuideSpark has more than 150 enterprise clients, and many find the system very useful -- from retraining how employees manage performance to increasing the utility of HRIS systems.

Automotive giant Ford is using GuideSpark to build and implement a communication strategy for its strategic change initiatives. In Ford's case, this is to empower internal people leaders on new performance management and compensation plans, part of Ford's 2020 business objective to improve employees' experience. By building trust and accelerating employee performance, leaders can deliver business value by more closely aligning objectives, feedback, and rewards to business priorities. What impressed Ford about GSCC was the ability to track 'real' metrics that can be used to understand what is and is not working, not to mention the interactive consumer-like content that was developed for the communication journeys.

Leading research and academic medical center Nebraska Medicine leverages GuideSpark to communicate important changes as they implement Workday for more than 8,000 employees. This is part of a company goal to modernize back-end technology systems for HR, finance operations, and data management to better support Nebraska Medicine for the future. To be effective, its communications need to adapt to the needs and schedules of 24/7/365 operations in order to educate employees about new processes, retirement of older systems, and how to use their new HRIS. A well-crafted communication strategy will be implemented in GuideSpark Communicate Cloud® targeting defined groups of employees with appropriate communications about why changes are being made, how it affects individuals, and where to find available resources and training.

Radisson Hotels uses GuideSpark to create an integrated communications program to align and educate its workforce for its onboarding, career development, and performance management program. Initially designed to help roll out the new performance process, the platform was so successful that it's now used to inform and develop all employees on the entire talent development process. As a result of the new process

and communications program, Radisson's engagement is 72% favorable (7% above industry benchmarks), and the company's

ability to identify top performance is rated 12% above the North American benchmark. It credits GuideSpark for much of this success.

## Communications in the World of Coronavirus

Finally, it's important to point out the critical role of communications in the Coronavirus pandemic. Today, companies are rapidly communicating daily (or even hourly) new information on safety protocols, organizational changes, benefits and tools for work at home, and a myriad of new programs for wellbeing, productivity, and employee support.

While email and typical web portals are excellent tools for this communication, companies want to make sure their employees have consumed certain information, they want to provide inline tools and surveys, and they often need these communications to result in certified training results. GuideSpark's platform enables all of this, too. Let me cite a few examples.

St. Joseph's Health has more than 6,000 employees, including over 3,000 medical staff, but teams were still stretched thin during the COVID-19 crisis. St Joseph's was forced to increase its hiring efforts to help combat COVID-19 and is currently onboarding new staff at a rate of 50 employees every two weeks. "Remote onboarding is the new way of the world," says Amber Murat, director of organizational development, MSED, PHR. "GuideSpark Communicate Cloud® lets us effectively manage and support new hire processes and provide ongoing communications." GuideSpark also allows St. Joseph's Health to make its library of onboarding, benefits, and organizational overview content available to all new hires.

Altru Health Systems is a community of 3,800 health professionals and support staff serving over 200,000 residents in Northeast Dakota and Northwest Minnesota. "The ability to send an immediate text message out to our providers and employees to encourage them, stay connected, and direct them to helpful resources has been extremely effective," said Kaia McCoy, supervisor of compensation and benefits at Altru

Health System. “In the current climate, it’s so important to have this immediate channel to keep our customers and employees informed. The feedback has been great!”

As companies look to improve their employee experience, they must also look at how constant business changes are impacting the employee journey, as the latter is inextricably linked to the former. In this case, effective change communications become a strategic enabler. Given this, I believe the change communications market will grow. Companies like GuideSpark will play an important role in defining how it complements the broad and complex world of HR technology.

## About Josh Bersin



*Josh Bersin is an internationally recognized analyst, educator, and thought leader focusing on the global talent market and the challenges impacting business workforces around the world. He studies the world of work, HR and leadership practices, and the broad talent technology market.*

*He founded Bersin & Associates in 2001 to provide research and advisory services focused on corporate learning. Over the next ten years, he expanded the company's coverage to encompass HR, talent management, talent acquisition, and leadership. He sold the company to Deloitte in 2012, when it became known as Bersin™ by Deloitte. Bersin left Deloitte in June 2018, but he continues to serve as a senior advisor and contributes to major research initiatives. He also sits on the board of UC Berkeley Executive Education.*

*In 2019, Bersin founded the Josh Bersin Academy, the world's first global development academy for HR and talent professionals and a transformation agent for HR organizations. The Academy offers content-rich online programs, a carefully curated library of tools and resources, and a global community that helps HR and talent professionals stay current on the trends and practices needed to drive organizational success in the modern world of work.*

*Bersin is frequently featured in talent and business publications such as Forbes, Harvard Business Review, HR Executive, FastCompany, The Wall Street Journal, and CLO Magazine. He is a regular keynote speaker at industry events around the world and a popular blogger with more than 700,000 followers on LinkedIn.*

*His education includes a BS in engineering from Cornell University, an MS in engineering from Stanford University, and an MBA from the Haas School of Business at the University of California, Berkeley.*