How are marketers improving remote team communication?

Communication skills have always been important for marketers and they only get more important the further you are in your career. Being a “good communicator” takes on different shapes depending on whether you’re communicating within your own team, cross-functionally or with clients, executives or other stakeholders. Remote adds another dimension.

“It’s been pretty eye-opening,” Mike Henderson, CMO for SuretyBonds.com, said of the shifting demands for communication since the pandemic sent everyone home during a Live with Search Engine Land session on in-demand marketing skills. “It’s just vastly different how people communicate, or the lack thereof, when they don’t have to be face-to-face with you.” Here are ways Henderson and other marketers are keeping things running smoothly while maintaining trust and accountability.

Tips for improving internal communication for remote teams

Standup meetings. These short status meetings can keep people accountable and projects moving forward. For remote teams, they also ensure everyone on the team or project connects once a day.

“We started morning standup meetings that have had a major impact on the team’s productivity and my visibility into what’s getting done,” said Henderson. “We’ve been running on an agile framework for a few years now (using Jira and Confluence), but were skimping on the daily huddles. This is something I plan to keep regardless of being remote or in-person.”

Simon Poulton of WPromote said they've re-instated regular standups as well. "Full adoption of agile (daily stand up meetings, cameras on) – we were doing the planning prior, but would get lazy on stand-up follow through; now it's a daily 15 min opportunity to see the team and get things done," Poulton said.

At Search Engine Land, we've always worked remotely, so when the pandemic hit, little changed in the way we work and communicate. The one exception is that our daily video standup calls became a little less all-business and a bit more conversational. This was particularly true in the early weeks when anxiety levels were high, kids were home and it was just generally harder to concentrate. Having those few minutes to connect and decompress a bit helped while still usually keeping them to 15 minutes max.

You may find a daily meeting is overkill and a different schedule works better. The important part is to have something regularly scheduled. "We've started having twice-per-week full team standups where all the functions across the team share updates on what they're working on," said Natalie Barreda, senior manager of media at T-Mobile. "Additionally, we've made better use of Slack by sharing daily updates on pacing, budget changes, etc."

Status updates. Whether you're using Slack, Teams or another communication platform, letting people know when you're not available is a key piece of remote communication.

An internal Slack channel (ours is called "Where Am I") to let teammates know when you're stepping away from your desk to take a walk, a call or whatever else will keep people from feeling like you left them on open, as the kids say.

Christine Shepherd Zirnheld from Cypress North said it's customary for team members to post in Slack when they're stepping away from their desks "even if it's only for five

minutes.” “Does that feel like babysitting?,” I wondered. “No I never thought about it that way! We’re big on internal Slack calls so it’s nice to know when people aren’t available. That’s the main purpose,” Zirnheld said via Twitter.

The flip side of using status updates is to encourage people to take that walk and not feel glued to their desks. “We’ve started a team policy of Slack emojis/status updates to indicate your availability or not. Helps people feel more comfortable with a screen break,” said Aaron Levy of Tinuiti.

Want to automate Slack status updates? Holopod is one tool that integrates with Slack and Google calendar to automatically post status updates for calls, coffee breaks, etc. and snooze notifications to keep down the Slack noise during high-concentration periods.

Video or no video? How many calls did you have over video versus just voice before the pandemic compared to now? A benefit of video is being able to pick up facial cues in conversation that get missed when you’re just on the phone. Presumably, people are also paying more attention when they’re on video – but that’s far from a guarantee.

Sometimes a regular phone call can be better. Many people prefer to pace when they’re on the phone and are going to be more attentive if they can get up and walk around than if they have to stare at a bunch of heads on a screen. Don’t discount the benefit of a walk and talk for one-on-one problem solving or brainstorming sessions.

“Be respectful of screen time. We’re all encountering Zoom exhaustion,” said Amy Do, social director for Barkley US.

Meeting fundamentals still apply. Notes and documentation are even more important when teams are remote. You can shorten meetings by sending out or updating shared agendas in advance of meetings. “Recaps and meeting agendas. Including pre-reads w/ mtg invites are great too,” added Do. Cloud-based recaps

and running meeting notes ensure everyone can stay up-to-date even if they couldn’t attend a meeting.

“Always, always recap phone calls. Always,” said digital strategist Amalia Fowler. “Actionables delineated for each team with deadlines. Then make appropriate follow-up task for yourself in [your] project management tool of choice. When things don’t happen / get delayed then it’s easy to figure out the hole.” Fowler says she’s documenting a lot more and making sure the team is routinely using the processes and tools available.

An evergreen skill

In talking about the skills they hire for during Live with Search Engine Land, both Barreda and Henderson said communication remained a priority. In this article, we’ve mostly focused on team communication, but if you want to advance your career, start honing your persuasion skills. That includes being able to tell stories with data and be able to effectively communicate to clients and executives.

“A huge one that I look for is just people who can communicate in a way that is influential,” said Barreda. “On the agency side, you’re constantly influencing your clients to try out a new tool or spend more money or try a new feature… but when you’re working on the enterprise side of things … a lot of times we are influencing people to showcase the value of what we’re doing. Numbers obviously speak volumes, but if you can’t communicate it in an influential way … it doesn’t land.”

Watch the session below.

[embedded content]

About The Author

Ginny Marvin is Third Door Media’s Editor-in-Chief, running the day to day editorial operations across all publications and overseeing paid media coverage. Ginny Marvin writes about paid digital advertising and analytics news and trends for Search Engine Land, Marketing Land and MarTech Today. With more than 15 years of marketing experience, Ginny has held both in-house and agency management positions. She can be found on Twitter as @ginnymarvin.
http://feeds.searchengineland.com/~r/searchengineland/~3/Qaz_5XsdVL4/how-are-marketers-improving-remote-team-communication-338349