Over the past two decades, technology has transformed the way we work. Many employees are content to read and respond to emails at all hours of the day. Technology has also allowed people to work from just about anywhere, whether it’s the main office, the comfort of home, or a location across the country or around the world.

This change means that internal communication has gotten more difficult. Posting a flyer in the break room or company kitchen isn’t an effective way to communicate events or announcements. And while email is the main way most workers communicate, many employees feel bogged down by it—over 200 billion business emails are sent every day.¹

The chance of your important employee benefits or health & wellness program update reaching all employees via email is slim. Most of your workers are focused on tending to critical emails from colleagues and clients and will likely flag your internal communications for another day. This makes getting them to read important messages or respond before deadlines difficult.

One possible solution to the internal communications conundrum might be to go social.

The success of mainstream social networks like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Pinterest has led to the creation of internal, private social networks for businesses of all sizes to spur collaboration, share important company news and create deeper connections between employees.

Internal social tools range from messaging apps to more robust enterprise social networks similar to Facebook where participants can post messages or upload photos, videos or documents and comment on items in their news feed. The hope with these networks is that they’ll foster collaboration, improve company-wide communication and maybe even boost morale and employee engagement by giving individuals a voice.

From a human resources perspective, enterprise social networks and internal messaging systems can be used to communicate personnel changes, updates on employee benefits and announcements about health screenings and other wellness events. These messages can serve as the main form of contact with employees, or a way to remind them about upcoming benefits and health & wellness-related events.
Before implementing an internal communications platform or messaging system, it’s important to get buy-in from leadership. Obviously, there are costs involved with implementing and maintaining a network. But more importantly, leadership’s involvement has been shown to increase usage rates and be the difference between a social network that’s used often and truly connects employees and one that looks like a virtual ghost town.

Research shows that in companies with more than 250 people, most employees don’t use the internal social network. Just 36% of firms using collaboration platforms like IBM notes and SharePoint say “many employees” use the platform. Use of enterprise social networks like Yammer and Chatter, community forums like Jive, and employee advocacy programs like Dynamic Signal was even lower.²

The reason? Employees may not feel like they have enough of an incentive to visit the internal social network, taking the time to log into yet another program when they could be answering all of those emails or devoting their time to other tasks.

However, in businesses where leaders actively promoted and used internal social networks, employees joined in, too. If top leaders of the company see collaboration and social networks as a good use of their time, employees will follow. Research shows that when executives like the CEO participate in social networking, it increases their favorability and helps build connections between employees and leadership.³

If an internal social network like Yammer doesn’t seem right for your company, consider other communication tools your employees are already using.

Messaging platform Slack has exploded in popularity in the past two years, with many companies and their employees noting the tool’s ability to free them from the constrains of email. If your employees are using Slack or a similar messaging platform like HipChat or Ryver to communicate throughout the workday, you may find it easier to reach them through one of these communication platforms over other forms of communication.

Whether you opt to launch an internal social network or reach employees through a messaging system they’re already using, it’s important to plan and set expectations before beginning.

If you choose the messaging route, make sure you understand the tool’s capabilities and how your employees typically use it before starting.

If you’re embarking on a social network for the first time, make sure your leaders are comfortable participating, and then promote, promote, promote. If the C-suite is sharing interesting and engaging information and makes your internal social network a habit, your employees will naturally make it a habit, too.

² Harvard Business Review, “Why No One Uses the Corporate Social Network”
³ Weber Shandwick, “The Social CEO: Executives Tell All”

For more information, please call 1.877.426.7779