

# SAFE TEA TIME

## Communicado



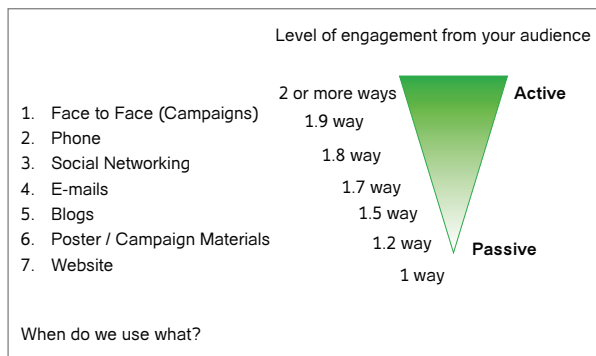
by Ir. Shum Keng Yan

IN the previous article, we looked at the difficulty in inculcating safety awareness within an organisation and the need for staff engagement. We continue the series by looking at ways to communicate better. Communication is only a small part of engagement and perhaps the most important step.

Let us take a look at the tools we use for communication. Email seems to have crept into all aspects of life. How many people actually have the time to read all their emails? How do you make someone enthusiastic about opening a safety email first? Perhaps the title needs to be catchy?

What about social networking, such as Twitter (works if enough employees and the management FOLLOW you) or Facebook? What about blogs and websites? Traditional notice boards? Flyers? Town hall meetings? Toolbox talks? The list is endless and we end up with a quagmire of combinations and sometimes more confusion when we try to do all of the above.

Allow me to illustrate my point. The “number of ways” illustrated below is not derived from a highly sophisticated analysis of a bunch of statistics. It is indicative to anchor your mind with a reference point.



1. At the top is “Face to Face” meetings where there can be more than two-way communication – especially when everyone is talking at the same time. I include safety campaigns as “Face to Face”. We can make it fun! I think most of you prefer a “Face to Face” meeting compared to conference calls.
2. Voice communication such as the telephone is nice but does not beat “Face to Face”. The voice is not a true two-way communication. The human touch is still missing.
3. Next, we have the all encroaching social networking. It is ranked below voice communication as, far too

often, there are missed sentences, assumptions and abbreviations, and part of the message is lost in the haste to reply.

4. Emails rank even lower. We can reply an email, or even delete an email without opening it or just archive everything.
5. Blogs are useful to put forward a view and solicit feedback, or with some blogs, feedback is not welcomed. However, blogs depend on our customers’ visits.
6. Posters and handouts are still used. However, you cannot respond effectively to the poster unless you know who had put it up. Posters and handouts have good points that beat blogs. They are more prominent if put up in a strategic location and does not require the customer to access it.
7. Websites are very easily updated. However, you need the person to go in to get the information. It is very passive. You can add a feedback function; however, that is not truly interactive. Websites are also more passive than the poster as the poster has a chance to stare back at you and make a statement. Thus you then see a lot of people promoting their websites. Unless the administrator creates a feedback feature, websites are effectively one way.

What about our traditional notice boards (or the latest electronic bulletin boards)? Are they still relevant? Why do safety auditors seem to like checking notice boards to see if we have posted anything new?

We also need to consider the age group that we are trying to reach. Baby boomers? Gen X? Gen Y? They respond to different communication modes. A multinational setting throws in additional complexity in terms of language, time zones and culture! Is your IT configured to deliver your preferred method?

I sum this up by saying that each of the above communication methods has its role and usefulness. That brings me back to the question: When do we use what? I leave you to think through and share your own preferences.

If you are keen to communicate with me, please use method 4: [pub@iem.org.my](mailto:pub@iem.org.my) (BBM, Messenger, Skype, Chat, etc. are currently not available). ■

*As technology improves so does communication, but not necessarily engagement. We might be over-connected and under-engaged!*