

What minimalism can teach internal communicators

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Declutter. Simplify. Tidy up. Are we talking spring cleaning or internal communications here? Are they mutually exclusive? Not if minimalism is the intention driving and delivering communication that does more than tick another box.



What is minimalism?

There's the textbook answer – an art and music movement after WWII that embraced minimal design and pared-down art, both as a post war necessity and creative experiment. But there's also the storybook answer.

Picture it. You're on holiday at the beach. You brought a sarong and very little else. At first your sarong serves its original purpose as a beach towel fending off water and sand. But, by sunset, it's served as a wind break, a shawl, a sun protector, even a sling bag to carry the mangos you bought from that guy on the beach. And it makes you feel good (proud even) to have transformed a single piece of cloth into a range of utilitarian tools, again and again. Welcome to the world of minimalism, where doing more with less enables you to be an active participant in your daily activities. Because, believe it or not, most people want to be involved, not told, how to spend their time and, consequently, their lives. See a Segway to communications yet? Hold tight.

Minimalism is already here, there and everywhere

Most people understand what minimalistic design is. Apple and its ubiquitous range of slim, sleek, paired-down products made sure of that. Today minimalism can be seen in nearly every corner of the market, from the tiny house movement to the online subscription model where brands like Netflix and Spotify encourage rental above the physical ownership of movies and CDs, which would normally clutter up shelves and fill storage rooms. In this minimalistic space, a new space opens up for decluttering gurus like Marie Kondo, who pens the best-selling "The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up" which gets repurposed as a binge worthy TV series with a cult following to boot.

Minimalism didn't just happen overnight or out of the blue. Minimalism makes economic sense. With a booming global population, space has become the ultimate premium that no one can afford to waste. Add to this recessions and rising debts and you have masses of people needing to cut back and cut out excess from their consumer driven lives. And, much like the post WWII movement, minimalism might have been born of economic necessity, but its true power lies in the value it adds to human beings and their relationship with the people and objects that occupy their space. In truth, minimalism and its "less is more" approach can add a lot of value to any industry that demands the innovative use of time, money and space. Which is pretty much all industries and disciplines, especially ones like internal communications, which aim to build human relationships by applying these principles.

Is there such a thing as minimalistic internal communications?

Minimalistic internal communications? Sounds like an oxymoron, right? Especially when you scroll through your Inbox every morning. But what if we were to create and curate internal communications with a minimalistic mindset? Could we apply these principles in a way that could really simplify and amplify internal communications, in their planning as much as their messaging?

In the spirit of minimalism, let's cut to the chase...

FIVE principles of minimalism to boost your internal communications:

1. Identify the essential

This is probably the most important lesson for internal communications today. We often speak about the clutter and how we can cut through the noise, but how often do we take ownership for our own excess? Define and refine what is truly essential to your employees and goals and then stick to it and defend it to the last Tweet.

2. Omit needless things

This is about having the intention to remove the excess in our lives so we can focus on what really matters. Knowing what is essential helps you see what is not. The word "needless" is a clue in itself. Need less. When it comes to creating internal campaigns, look closely at the design, content and channels you have chosen. You probably need much less than you think to get the core message across. Remember, you want to leave room for your employees to create the story with you and not simply be bombarded with messaging.

3. Edit! Edit! Edit!

Don't trust yourself. We are but simple creatures born into a consumer society and weaned on the maxims of maximalism. Go back and edit, cut and edit some more until you have whittled your words down into a masterpiece that is truly essential to your audience. In other words, give them a sarong and let them give it purpose and meaning.

4. Make everything count

If everything is essential and, once all needless things have been omitted, you should be left with a very simple, clear communications plan and content strategy. Now make it count by carefully choosing when and where to place it and for how long. Don't just fall into the obvious pattern of using every platform at your disposal for as long as they will have you. Make everything, from the message, design and platform to the Arial **BOLD** 14 headline, count.

5. Simplify and amplify

This is a great motto to adopt when looking at your content. When you look at every word and paragraph through this lens, you start to weed out the frivolous and prune the essential. You also start being more intentional about how you make those carefully chosen messages stand out. It's less about keeping your word count down and more about eliminating the noise

that distracts the audience from the truth of your story. Because every story has a truth, you just need to find it and then amplify it through creative storytelling. Nothing more, nothing less.

As you develop your internal communication strategy, implement your next internal communication campaign or review your internal communication channels, remember the perceptive words of Leonardo da Vinci: "Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication."

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