

MyComm tool guides communication strategy

IABC's website offers software to help managers improve their communications plans and make employees feel wanted.

By John O'Dwyer

Internet infrastructure giant Cisco Systems has created a version of its proprietary online communication-planning tool, MyComm, to help members of the International Association of Business Communicators.



John O'Dwyer manages the O'Dwyer website.

MyComm Creator Karen Horn describes the tool as a communications planning wizard that captures the thought process of successful communicators.

"Most managers just need a little help, particularly in the technology business," said Horn, Senior Director of Employee Commitment at Cisco.

Cisco has been successfully using the software for a few months now to help company managers keep employees happy and working efficiently, according to Horn.

"Typically, when managers improve their communication efforts, employees feel more connected with their jobs and organizations. This results in greater job satisfaction and leads to improved team performance and higher productivity," Horn said.

She explained that Cisco decided to share its patent-pending software with not-for-profit IABC because of the organization's respect among communicators.

MyComm directs the user's thinking to help make good choices. Plans can be shared easily through the MyComm Home Page at the IABC website (www.iabc.com) and the tool helps to see that there is a shared understanding about the desired outcome, according to Horn.

"Too many times we get hung up on the choice of delivery vehicles or the clarity of the message, but the real problem is that many people don't have a clear understanding upfront of what they

want people to do as a result of hearing the message," Horn said.

MyComm takes users through a six-step process in putting together a viable written communications strategy.

The first step deals with clarifying the communication issue or business need.

Then the program prompts you to identify targeted audiences and the possible impact of the message on them. Horn said it's important to accurately judge how certain audiences will feel when they get your message.

The third step is to compose your key messages. "Different employees deserve

The fifth step offers the most suitable delivery methods. "This is where the whole process is really centered on," Horn stressed. A matrix of tools to be used is populated based on questions answered earlier in the process.

Finally, a comprehensive document that identifies and summarizes all of the essential audiences, messages, timing and preferred communication channels is produced that can be downloaded to Microsoft Word, Excel or in Adobe PDF form.

Horn said a member of her team at Cisco recently used MyComm to produce a plan for a sophisticated product roll-out.

"I was able to easily see the plan from beginning to end and determine whether it was a good plan," Horn said.

After the final document is produced, it is up to the user or users to flesh out the key messages, select the exact

delivery channels and determine who will be responsible for each tactic, explained Horn.

The software prevents a user from jumping from a communication problem directly to an instant tactical solution. Experience shows that this is the major problem for anyone not familiar with developing communication strategies, Horn said.

MyComm can also be helpful to a consultant trying to define realistic project objectives, outcomes and delivery methods with a client.

Horn stressed that MyComm will not write your communication for you nor is it a replacement for preparing

quick e-mails, building PowerPoint presentations and tactical planning and scheduling.

Communication consultant Roger D'Aprix contributed to "expert help" sections for the IABC version of MyComm. ■

Users log in to MyComm on IABC's website at www.iabc.com. The communications planning wizard follows a six-step process and uses patent-pending logic to help craft a communications plan.

different messages," Horn said.

A calendar component in the program helps outline communication delivery dates in the fourth step. "This step makes it easy to identify possible events such as a holiday that may impact the communication," Horn said.