Communications Process Improvement

Project Improvement Process

Public Relations (PR) specialists spend approximately $283,712 each year producing and printing facility newsletters. The PR leadership team recognized that we could significantly reduce those costs while helping employees to prioritize and digest the barrage of information we distribute each week. In 2010, a multidisciplinary team comprised of representatives from Online Services and Public Relations collaborated to improve the process for creating and distributing weekly systemwide and facility news.

Stakeholders
- All Public Relations Specialists from facilities across the organization
- All Banner employees who read employee news and Banner information

Team Members

Executive sponsors
- Jeff Brown and Renee Moe

Project managers
- Becca Holder-Otte (Online Services) and Sarah Boggan (Public Relations)

Technical Programmer/Designer
- Mark Hicken (Online Services)

Team Members
- Public Relations: Candace Hoffmann, Lisa Bohlmann, Amy Schilz, Tamara Barry, Lindsay Carrillo, Hollie Costello
- Online Services: Dan Green
- HR: Rhonnie Arthur (Total Rewards)
- Design Services: Corine Green

Design

The team determined that new editorial guidelines coupled with a tool that would automate the production of eNews could greatly improve efficiencies and save the organization nearly $200,000 per year in direct costs.

During the design process, the team used several tools to help create a shared need, create a vision and determine the scope of the project including:

- Project charter
- Stop, start, continue exercise
- Threats and opportunities matrix
- In-control and out of control matrix
- Prioritization matrix

How did the improvement project impact your facility/entity?

The team designed a custom-built tool, which automates the creation and publication process for the weekly eNews product. The team also standardized the way news is distributed throughout the organization; creating a one-stop news feed on the employee website where employees can find news and information in real time (rather than waiting all week for the eNews edition).

The new process provides an improved workflow, an improvement of systemwide communications by making it more strategic and integrated as well as an increase in profile through a streamlined design.

It ensures that employees receive the most important news at home or work (depending upon the employee's preference) in an electronic format. The tool cut production time to 30 minutes per week, per specialist and cut printing costs by 1/3. We anticipate further promotion and enhancements to the eNews @ home product will reduce printing costs by 3/4, saving the organization an additional $171,600 per year in printing expenditures.

Costs/Savings

	Original Expenditures	Expenditures after process improvement
Labor	22 specialists X 2 hours per week) X 52 weeks =2,288 hours X avg. hourly wage of $24/hour = **$54,912 average annual labor**	$8,236.80
Printing	**$228,800** annual printing costs	$34,666
Total Annual Expenditures	**$283,712**	$42,902.80
	Total annual savings	$240,809.20

*These costs do not consider indirect costs such as paper expenditures

Methodology

As a team we answered the following questions:
- What are we are trying to solve?
- What are the behaviors we want to drive?
- What are the key features we need?
- Who are we designing for?
- How do we grow readership?

- How will we define success?
- How do we quantify and measure our objectives?

Then we explored the pain points for each of our stakeholders. Following is an outline of our work:

Employees
- Super busy
- Tech reluctant
- Have barriers to access (which are out of our control)
- Just make it easy!

Public Relations
- Not enough time, money or human capital
- Too many "bosses" with competing interests
- Limited online experience (barrier)
- How to effectively impact Initiative L2.1 (Shape the Future to drive organizational outcomes)
- Just make it easy/efficient!

System Hurdles
- Employee Engagement
- Complexity and Ambiguity
- Relevancy
- Access
- Innovate!
- Economics
- Change (resistance)
- Capacity

The team also utilized a combination of Design, Measure, Analyze, Improve and Control (DMAIC) and the Plan, Do, Act, Check (PDAC) approaches.

Using web metrics, labor calculations and average printing costs, the team was able to identify where improvements could be made. Once the plan was outlined, the team prioritized efforts and implemented the features and functions that would have the most impact. The team continues to monitor product readership and printing costs to determine future steps to creating further efficiencies.

Project Workflow

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┌─────────────────┐     ┌─────────────────┐     ┌─────────────────┐     ┌─────────────────┐
│ Identified      │     │                 │     │ Created project │     │ Conducted change│
│ project charge  │ ──▶ │ Created a Shared│ ──▶ │ charter, scope  │ ──▶ │ management      │
│ and team members│     │ Need & Vision   │     │ and design      │     │ exercises       │
└─────────────────┘     └─────────────────┘     └─────────────────┘     └─────────────────┘
          ▼
┌─────────────────┐     ┌─────────────────┐     ┌─────────────────┐     ┌─────────────────┐
│ launched test   │     │                 │     │ Created         │     │                 │
│ version and     │ ──▶ │ Created change  │ ──▶ │ communications  │ ──▶ │ Launched Pilot  │
│ conducted tests │     │ management plan │     │ and             │     │ Facilities      │
│                 │     │                 │     │ implementation  │     │                 │
└─────────────────┘     └─────────────────┘     │ plan            │     └─────────────────┘
          ▼                                      └─────────────────┘
┌─────────────────┐     ┌─────────────────┐     ┌─────────────────┐     ┌─────────────────┐
│                 │     │                 │     │ implemented     │     │                 │
│ Measured Results│ ──▶ │ Made Adjustments│ ──▶ │ communications  │ ──▶ │ Launched full   │
│                 │     │                 │     │ and change      │     │ project         │
│                 │     │                 │     │ management plans│     │ system-wide     │
└─────────────────┘     └─────────────────┘     └─────────────────┘     └─────────────────┘
          ▼
┌─────────────────┐
│ Continue to     │
│ measure for     │
│ further         │
│ efficiencies    │
└─────────────────┘
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The key measurements that indicated a need for change included:
- PR productivity levels
- PR Expenditures
- Voice of the Employee Survey Results
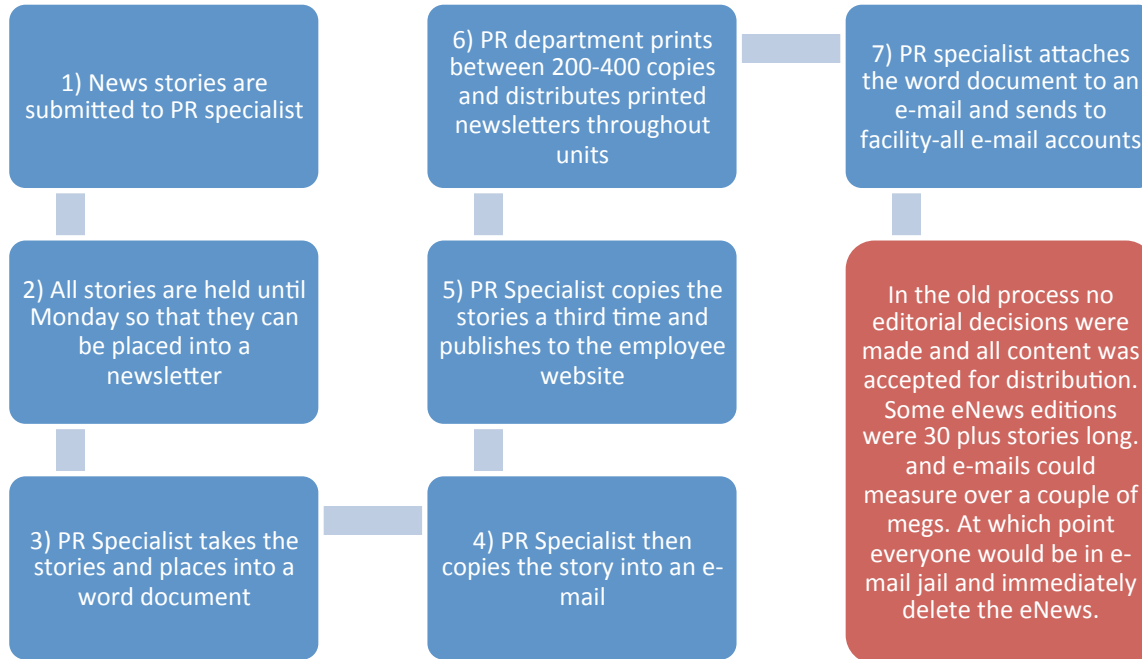- Web analytics

Productivity

The organization continues to grow and change, while budgets and human capital continue to be squeezed, and public relations found themselves mired in outdated processes making it difficult to meet organizational demands.
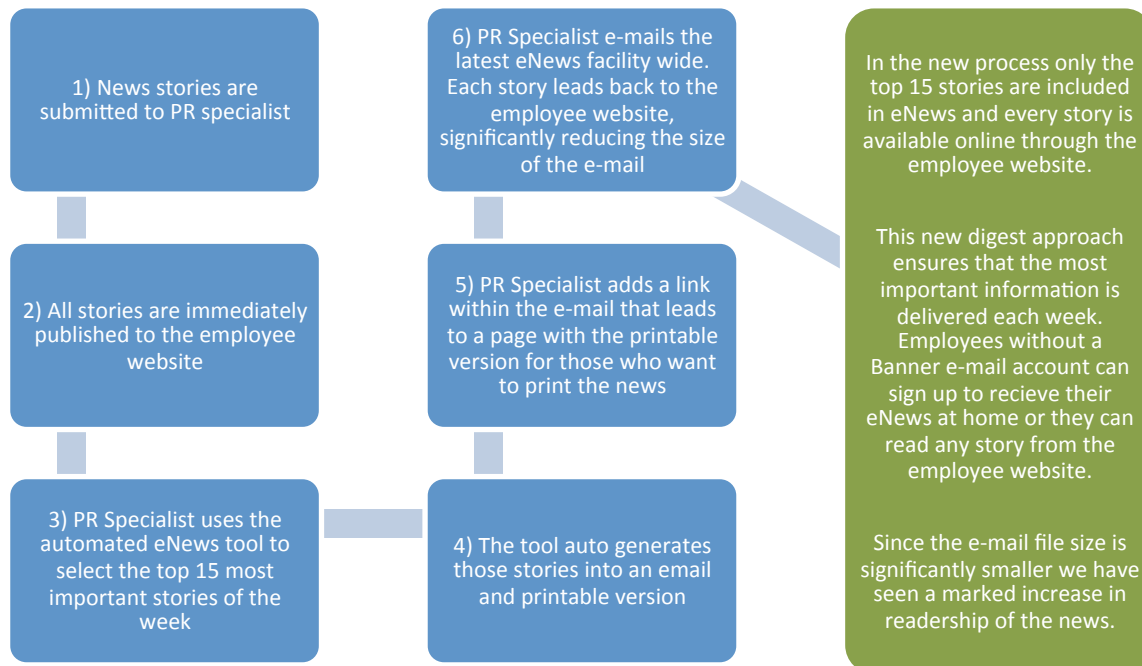
In an effort to meet these demands, Public Relations reorganized in early 2010, centralizing and shifting specialists across the AZ region. The reorganization did little to alleviate the workload as the team realized that a significant amount of resources were used to distribute weekly news. The VOICE of the Employee survey also indicated that PR's return on investment was hindered as employees reported that they didn't have the information they needed to stay abreast with the organization or that the information they received was irrelevant.

We needed a way to streamline and make eNews production more efficient, while helping employees sort through the volume of information so that they could better digest key information. The result from the project saves each PR specialist an average of two hours per week that he or she can dedicate to other projects. Additionally, employees now receive the week's most important news within the eNews digest, so they are able to digest the most important information each week.

OLD PROCESS

1) News stories are submitted to PR specialist

6) PR department prints between 200-400 copies and distributes printed newsletters throughout units

7) PR specialist attaches the word document to an e-mail and sends to facility-all e-mail accounts

2) All stories are held until Monday so that they can be placed into a newsletter

5) PR Specialist copies the stories a third time and publishes to the employee website

In the old process no editorial decisions were made and all content was accepted for distribution. Some eNews editions were 30 plus stories long. and e-mails could measure over a couple of megs. At which point everyone would be in e-mail jail and immediately delete the eNews.

3) PR Specialist takes the stories and places into a word document

4) PR Specialist then copies the story into an e-mail

NEW PROCESS

1) News stories are submitted to PR specialist

6) PR Specialist e-mails the latest eNews facility wide. Each story leads back to the employee website, significantly reducing the size of the e-mail

In the new process only the top 15 stories are included in eNews and every story is available online through the employee website.

This new digest approach ensures that the most important information is delivered each week. Employees without a Banner e-mail account can sign up to recieve their eNews at home or they can read any story from the employee website.

Since the e-mail file size is significantly smaller we have seen a marked increase in readership of the news.

2) All stories are immediately published to the employee website

5) PR Specialist adds a link within the e-mail that leads to a page with the printable version for those who want to print the news

3) PR Specialist uses the automated eNews tool to select the top 15 most important stories of the week

4) The tool auto generates those stories into an email and printable version

While we continue to solicit feedback and statistics, we measure the project results through data collected from PR specialists regarding time savings, and monitoring employee use of the employee website through web analytics.

Customers

Our customers include:
- Public Relations specialists and directors
- Departments that submit content to be distributed to the organization such as benefits, ECHO
- All employees who read news

How was it determined what type of customers would be affected by the change?

Early on we identified that Public Relations Specialists would experience the most change. Not only were we introducing a new technology, but we had to completely change the way we viewed news distribution at Banner. We first had to convince everyone that it is better to publish news in real-time (as it happens) rather than waiting until a bunch of stories could be collected to be placed into a print publication.

Secondly, we recognized that moving to an online format would be met with significant resistance within the organization. We had anecdotal evidence that nurses and other clinical staff won't visit the intranet or read their e-mail so we identified that group as one where we would need to change their mindset. Additionally, to make the change stick, we recognized that we would have to stop enabling our customers by discontinuing the printed newsletters throughout the facility.

Thirdly, we recognized that department communications needs would not go away. We needed to give them a way to get their information out quickly and effectively without overwhelming our readers with so much content that all of the news becomes noise.

To make this change successful, we partnered with change agents to work through exercises to ensure that the changes to eNews and the creation of the eNews tool would be an accepted and long-term change for the organization and the Public Relations department. We rolled out a comprehensive training and communication plan to ensure that PR and employees accessing the new eNews would be informed about the changes/improvements and the reason for those changes.

Change Management Tools

PR Staff
- Using the threats and opportunities matrix we created a vision and shared need within the Public Relations department and illustrated why the change was necessary
- Using the stop-start-continue methodology we offered training and communication as to why we were changing, what we were changing and what we would continue to do. We held five mandatory in-person training sessions over three weeks. All trainees had access to handouts and training staff after the training session to support them in the process.
- PR senior leadership supported our efforts by holding each PR specialist accountable for adopting the new process. No one was allowed to opt out.

Departments
- Within our communications and education plan we proactively let departments know that we can continue to support them by publishing their content to the news section of the

employee website as it happens. We also created a section where we post all of the facility's events to one page and departments can post their information there as well. Finally, we created a section where we recognize all of employees' accolades and achievements so the information is easy to find and significantly cuts down on the volume of stories.

Readers
- To support our readers who liked having the newsletter delivered to their units, we offered them the option to sign up to receive eNews in their personal e-mail accounts so that they could read the news at their leisure. We also educated our readers that they can find all of the week's news online from their home page.
- We also posted a link to a printable version of the week's news for those managers to print out for employees who have no access to computers. We helped managers understand the new process by including the information in the Leader eBuzz.

What were identified as the customers' key requirements?
Public Relations required a streamlined communication process for eNews that integrated several daily and weekly duties into a single process/product. The goal was also to improve and sort through the "noise" employees can experience when looking for news that is important to their work, their workplace and Banner Health.

What outcomes (measurable) for the process improvement project were determined using customer inputs?
- Outcomes were improved efficiency for PR and increased readability for consumers of eNews.

Measures
The key measurements and other data elements collected include:

- Website statistics – we monitored visitor traffic to stories before and after the change
- Qualitative data from PR specialists – informal surveys of their customers
- Current Shape the Future dimensions from the VOICE of the Employee Survey compared to next year's results
- The ratings and feedback gathered from the employee website
- Time on site before and after the change
- The number of eNews @home subscriptions before and after the change
- PR Specialists' time spent creating and distributing eNews
- Department printing costs before and after the change

Benchmarks
We considered the following **benchmark**s throughout our project:
1. Cost (Savings) – researched other companies, and current company expenditures. "DoubleClick's DARTMail estimated that the average e-mail costs $.25 per unit to send versus $1.25 for a direct mail piece. Digitrends estimates the average e-mail cost per e-

mail message in the U.S. is less than $.01, compared to $.75-2.00 for direct mail" (Brehe, 2002).

2. Our current ability to deliver relevant communications as measured through the VOICE of the Employee survey results, ratings and feedback submitted through the employee website and field studies.

   a. VOICE Results – Only 55% of the organization reported understanding why change happens and how it supports the big picture; 69% of the organization said they receive good info/communication from top leadership
   b. Prior to the launch of the new tool, employees rated news content 3.11 on a 5-point scale. After the launch, employees rated news content 3.75 on a 5-point scale.

3. Measurability – visits to strategically important stories versus less important stories, visits to the website (we had no way of measuring how many of the 200-400 weekly printed newsletters were being read throughout the facilities)

4. Richer Content- measured by click-throughs to more information on the site

5. More efficient publication measured by qualitative evidence submitted through a survey by PR specialists

6. Reach - measured by number of e-mails sent. In the new process we are able to see how many people actually read each story.

7. Quicker Response / Immediacy - the baseline prior to the new process was seven days before a new story was published, today, new stories are posted within one hour.

Validate and Improve
Root Cause Analysis
After exploring the pain points, we created a system that would be quick and easy to use, easy to access and relevant to our customers' needs.

The new tool was created with these requirements in mind. Public Relations specialists tested the initial product and offered some feedback. It was then rolled out to select pilot facilities. Again, feedback was gathered and the tool tweaked based on that feedback. On Nov. 14, it was rolled out systemwide. The response was enthusiastic that the tool was both user friendly, timesaving and met the criteria customers needed – a way to easily prioritize and integrate system and facility news, in a clickable format with the news having a better presence on the employee website.

The team continued to elicit feedback on the tool's use as well as from those who read eNews. The key requirements of the tool were met in the initial rollout. The process and additional features will be added based on ongoing feedback. The key to the success of this tool is its ability to be tweaked according to this ongoing input; however, the key requirements of a one-stop shop for disseminating news have been met.

Implementation Plan

- We created a Charter, Scope document, Prioritization document
- Training plan (short and long term)
- Communications plan
- We continuously monitor the use and feedback

How did you ensure your key customer's commitment to change?
- Leadership empowered us to hold everyone accountable for the new product. When folks start slipping back into their old ways we gently remind them of the new process. Leadership will use PR's compliance as a measure of performance.
- Leadership prioritized this project over other projects so that we would have the time needed to create a successful implementation
- We offered continuous support for anyone who needed assistance with the tool. From handouts and online training, to staff to answer questions. Everyone knows who they can turn to if they run into issues
- We continuously monitor and identify improvements rather than waiting for things to thwart the progress. When identified items do not work or need improvement we take steps to fix them right away, thus eliminating the barrier. Tools used to monitor the project include polls, surveys, e-mail and ongoing website analytics.
- We created a prioritization document that allowed us to effectively evaluate which features needed to be implemented right away and which ones could be delayed. This enabled us to speed up the implementation of the project

How are improvements from this process shared within your facility/department and across the organization?
- The new tool was introduced at leadership team meetings, through an initial news article and in ongoing conversations, "elevator speeches."

Results

Tool Launched Nov 15	**760,593 total visits**
eNews @ home visits	**733 total visits**