

After Healthcare Merger, Western Connecticut Health Network Adopts New Email Newsletter Tool to Engage Expanded Workforce

Western Connecticut Health Network (WCHN) is a not-for-profit network of three hospitals, 69 medical groups, and numerous satellite offices and off-site services that joined forces in 2014.

Joyce Bretherton, Communications Manager, sought to support senior leaders as they communicated the new, collective vision and mission of the newly expanded Network after the merger. In addition, Joyce wanted to standardize communications and use the most effective and informative channels to help unify the organization, foster growth and improve employee engagement and patient care across the Network post-merger.

"When employees are informed, they not only understand the organization's strategy and goals, they understand how their work personally contributes to the overall mission. In turn, they'll have a more positive attitude towards work," states Joyce. "In today's rapidly changing healthcare industry, consistent communication also helps create a workplace culture where everyone is engaged and working collaboratively to provide quality care to our patients" she says.

Supporting the Unique Internal Communications Challenges of Healthcare Networks

WCHN was faced with internal communications challenges typical of healthcare organizations with busy staff operating across multiple departments, shifts and locations - with limited time to read news. In addition, each of hospitals used different means to communicate with staff, including email, digital signage and intranets. Consequently, they sought a means of communication that would be easily accessible and functional.

"As our Network expanded, we were looking for the most effective way to share timely, relevant information with all of our staff," says Joyce. "We knew that information overload



leads to message fatigue and we didn't want to run the risk of having critical content overlooked. We wanted to create an email newsletter that would streamline communications, be informative and one that our employees would be excited to open – and then we found EmailOpen."

The EmailOpen team helped Joyce create an email newsletter, *Vital Signs Online*, which aligns with WCHN's brand, meets the Network's specific communication needs, and serves as a great engagement tool. The bimonthly email newsletter is distributed to 7,000 staff members and provides an effective communication platform for executive leadership and key departments, such as human resources, quality and nursing. Communication is two-way, where employees can submit story ideas and comment on articles, sharing ideas and insights directly with their colleagues.

Communicating Strategic Imperatives and the Latest News

Vital Signs Online offers a mix of must-read content, including progress against the Network's strategic imperatives, network news and announcements, employee recognitions, team accomplishments, training opportunities and new policies. New hires can get up to speed quickly since the email newsletter distribution list is automatically synced to WCHN's Active Directory every two weeks.

Employees can open the email newsletter on smartphones or shared PCs or even read printed copies that are posted in departments to help staff stay up to date on the latest news, best practices and successes. Joyce says *Vital Signs Online* achieves open rates of 35 to 40 percent and clickthrough rates that average 15 percent.

"With the layout EmailOpen created for us, employees first read about organizational updates, announcements, recognitions and achievements followed by hospital-specific news. Employees have the ability to scan an issue and select articles they're interested in," says Joyce. "They can also like and comment on stories and we gain valuable insight into what our employees care and want to read about."



Joyce values EmailOpen's ease-of-use and great service. "I can access the platform anywhere, any time, to work on the latest issue or make an update," she says. "It's easy to create stories with Message Builder and enrich them with images, videos and URLs."

Readers Give *Vital Signs Online* and Managers Top Marks

A survey of readership at the one-year mark found that **98% of respondents found *Vital Signs Online* a valuable source of news and information, and 70% ranked it an 8, 9 or 10 on a scale of 10, with 10 being excellent.** Reader comments included that *Vital Signs Online* is a "great tool to stay on top of what's happening around the Network," and "the newsletter provides an easy-to-read, visually appealing synopsis of what's happening around the Network and among our colleagues: We would have no way of knowing any of this information without *Vital Signs Online!*"

Just as importantly, the Network's enhanced communications strategies have yielded other significant results. In the most recent employee engagement survey, **employees ranked managerial effectiveness as eight percent stronger and said they were three percent more engaged – thanks, in part, to their ongoing connectedness through *Vital Signs Online* and other communications tools.** "We all know that employees are the heart of every organization, and EmailOpen helps us support their work and recognize their achievements." "Empowered employees and effective communication is integral to creating a workplace culture that's the foundation to providing high quality patient care," says Joyce.

Using Triggered Emails to Personalize Communications

WCHN also uses EmailOpen to send triggered emails to staff on their birthdays and work anniversaries. The branded, personalized announcements have been well received. "Our employees love the triggered emails," says Joyce. "We congratulate them on their work anniversary and also recognize their birthday - wishing them a great day."

Responsive Service Keeps Communications On-Track



Joyce also values the service EmailOpen provides. While issues are few and far between, "They are resolved quickly. EmailOpen is always willing to connect with our IT department and is very good at troubleshooting," says Joyce.

"Healthcare is constantly changing and the industry is very competitive, concludes Joyce. Many organizations like ours are combining to provide convenient, broader services to their communities. **Our EmailOpen e-newsletter helps us empower our employees with the information they need throughout our transformation journey and employees understand how they personally can contribute to the organization's success.**"