

Taking the visual approach at Endo Pharmaceuticals

Improving employee engagement through the use of “discovery maps”

BY CHRIS GAY

To prevent overwhelming employees with a constant barrage of information, get the key messages across by visual means, says Chris Gay of Bridge Consulting. Here, we discover how Gay helped pharmaceutical company, Endo to improve their employees’ understanding of the company values and strategy by using a mixture of interactive communication techniques, including discovery maps.

The proverb “a picture is worth a thousand words” implies that complex stories can be described with just a single image, or that an image may be more influential than a substantial amount of text.

The modern use of the phrase is believed to stem from an article by Fred R. Barnard in the advertising trade journal *Printers’ Ink*, promoting the use of images in advertisements that appeared on the sides of streetcars. The December 8, 1921 issue carried an article entitled, “One Look Is Worth a Thousand Words”.

Regardless of the quote’s origin, it’s one we’ve heard many times and intuitively we know it to be correct. Yet all too often, once we enter the doors of our organizations, we immediately shift into a gear where it’s just words, words and more words.

Readers Digest recently conducted a study which found that the average corporate email user sends and receives 133 messages per day. If we combine this with all of the paper memos, voicemails and instant messages we receive, we’re truly overwhelmed with words at work.

The problem of information overload

We hear from employees on a consistent basis that they feel as if they’re getting information through a fire hose. There’s just no way that most people can absorb such tremendous amounts of content on a daily basis. In employee workshops with companies across the US, we’ve been asking people if they read all of the information that they receive. In the dozens of workshops we’ve conducted, only one person has raised their hand to say, “yes”.

This is where we, as communicators, have a real opportunity. How can we present information in a way that really grabs people’s attention and drives home our most critical messages? The questions remain: Is the content relevant for the audience? Is it the right amount of information? Is it presented in the right format?

Let pictures do the talking

There’s a great deal of research that tells us that increasing the amount of visual communication used in corporate communication should be part of the solution. Consider the following:

- Statistics show that over 50 percent of jobs require visual problem solving, meaning a visual culture clearly affects our work (Nancy Dunlap, Director of Educational Services, Safari Technologies).
- People are more likely to remember your content in the form of stories and examples, and they are also more likely to remember your content if your visuals are unique, powerful and of the highest quality (Garr Reynolds, Associate Professor of

Management, Kansai Gaidai University).

- Less than 30 percent of the population strongly uses visual/spatial thinking, another 45 percent uses both visual/spatial thinking and thinking in the form of words, and only 25 percent thinks exclusively in words (Dr. Linda Kreger Silverman, Director, Institute for the Study of Advanced Development).

If only one quarter of the population thinks exclusively in words, what does that say about our preference for communicating organizational information in words alone?

A case study

Endo Pharmaceuticals Inc., a small, rapidly growing company based in Pennsylvania, US, has found that communicating with visuals, rather than just words, can have a significant impact on learning. As Endo grows, it continues to redefine its business to build on its success and remain competitive in the marketplace. As part of its growth, two of the company's key objectives are to:

1. Ensure that people understand Endo's values and associated behaviors so they're focusing on how things are done as well as what's done.
2. Create a common vocabulary throughout the organization to communicate and facilitate dialogue about key aspects of the business.

Endo is using discovery maps to help with the messaging related to both of these objectives. A discovery map is a visual that illustrates key concepts, often with the use of strong metaphors and analogies, and is presented in a way that stimulates dialogue about the topic at hand.

While the illustration is important, the dialogue generated is every bit as vital, if not more so. A discovery map is presented by a skilled facilitator with a predetermined outline to help ensure that the key points are discussed. Here are three examples of how discovery maps are being used at Endo.

1. Enhancing employee understanding of company values

When new employees join the organization, they learn about Endo's values in a fun and interactive way through one of these discovery maps. An experiential group exercise has been created that resembles the game of "Clue" (see Figure One on page 23). The "game board" depicts a variety of locations where Endo employees might find themselves during the course of their work, such as a conference room, a laboratory or an employee lounge.

The discovery map is accompanied by a deck of

cards, as well as tokens that depict cartoon office people. Participants are divided into small groups. Each person receives a token and draws one of the cards. Each card shows a picture of an object that can be found in one of the locations depicted on the discovery map. For example, a card may show a stethoscope – an item one could find in a doctor's office. The participant who draws this card places his or her token on the doctor's office illustrated on the map. He or she then reads the back of the card, which describes a challenging situation that a sales rep might face while visiting a physician. The group then discusses how they'd react to the situation based on the Endo values and associated behaviors, which are also illustrated on the discovery map.

A recorder tracks the values and behaviors that each team associates with the various scenarios. At the end of the exercise, there's a facilitated debrief to ensure that all the relevant key values have been discovered for each situation.

This is proving to be a fun and informative way to help new employees understand the Endo way of doing things and prepare them to be more successful as they make choices about how to do their work within the organization's unique culture.

2. Teaching the company strategy

Endo is also using discovery maps to help ensure that employees understand the company's business strategy. The need for this type of approach is illustrated in Phil Jones' book *Communicating Strategy*¹, in which he writes, "If you don't communicate your strategy in a way that your people understand and find compelling, how can you expect them to help you succeed with it? Research suggests only five percent of the people in an organization understand its strategy. If that's true for your organization, whose strategy are the other 95 percent implementing?"

Research by the IABC (International



Chris Gay, ABC, is a co-founder of Bridge Consulting, a network of engagement and communication professionals who provide full-service solutions to organizations of all sizes, industries and geographic locations. Chris has worked in corporate America for 25 years in both HR and communication. Her work has earned three IABC Gold Quills, a PRSA Silver Anvil and recognition as one of the top 20 HR case studies in the world according to the International Benchmarking Association.

KEY POINTS

- Endo Pharmaceuticals Inc., a US-based company wanted to ensure its employees understood the company values, as well as create a common vocabulary to encourage dialogue about the business aims.
- Discovery maps were used as a means of creating dialogue through illustrating key concepts.
- After one session where discovery maps were used, 89 percent of attendees were keen to see visual communication methods be used in the future.
- Some 96 percent of employees strongly support the business strategy as a result of learning about it in this way.

“A SURVEY SHOWED THAT 89 PERCENT WERE EAGER TO SEE A SIMILAR VISUAL APPROACH USED FOR OTHER COMMUNICATIONS WHERE APPROPRIATE.”

- ◀ Association of Business Communicators) supports this point stating that, “Only about one in three companies has been successful in motivating employees to understand, be committed to and carry out their employer’s business strategy in their daily jobs. In addition, only about half of companies have effectively involved their management and leadership teams in communicating with employees.”

3. Creating a common vocabulary

Endo is using visuals to help employees build a common vocabulary around the work they do. The company tends to hire highly experienced people, most of whom come from other pharmaceutical companies that each have a unique set of business processes, standards and terminology. It’s important to define for employees the “Endo Way” of doing things and a shared language that’s specific to Endo.

This helps to ensure more effective communication and collaboration throughout the company. For example, Endo doesn’t do drug research so a strong process to source new drugs through licensing deals is critical to the company’s success. To help employees understand the process – known as “asset sourcing” – and their part in it, the company created a visual to describe the various steps it uses to identify, evaluate and obtain new products.

The discovery map illustrates the five phases of asset sourcing, showing a person in a specific type of job or role acting as an analogy for each phase of the process. For example, a detective is used to represent the identification and initial screening of drugs, and a judge represents due diligence, where a “judgment” is made about whether or not a drug being considered is viable for the organization.

Each illustrated character shown in the discovery map wears a very distinctive hat that fits the role in the process. For example, the detective mentioned above dons a “Sherlock Holmes” cap, while the judge sports a long powdered wig.

When a recent meeting was held to educate employees on the asset sourcing process, presenters of each process phase wore hats that corresponded with the “roles” in the illustration.

The presenters had a lot of fun with this, and so

did the audience. The participation was higher than they’d seen at previous meetings and the visuals and creative approach spurred a highly interactive session.

A survey was completed at the end of this session, and the results show that:

- 85 percent of attendees believed the visual helped them better understand the phases of the asset sourcing process.
- 87 percent believe the visual will help establish a common vocabulary and understanding of the asset sourcing process at Endo.
- 89 percent were eager to see a similar visual approach used for other communications where appropriate.
- Survey comments were overwhelmingly positive. When describing what they liked about the visual, several respondents simply wrote that “a picture is worth a thousand words”.

Endo took a similar approach to explain the drug development process. A visual theme of “cooking up molecules” was used in a discovery map to describe the “ingredients” that go into developing a new drug into a safe and effective therapy for patients. During the facilitation, the team wore lab coats and hats and gave all of the attendees a cupcake decorated with a molecule.

Measuring success of strategy communication

In addition to the discovery maps, Endo has made a concerted effort to communicate their strategy to employees in multi-faceted, consistent and transparent ways that include eBulletins and meetings with employees that facilitate dialogue addressing various aspects of the strategy.

Endo also measured the understanding people have of the strategy through the administration of an online survey that was submitted to a valid sample of employees. The results of the survey showed that:

- 77 percent of employees had a clear understanding of the strategy.
- 96 percent of employees overwhelmingly support the business strategy.
- 86 percent believe that Endo will be successful in achieving the strategy.

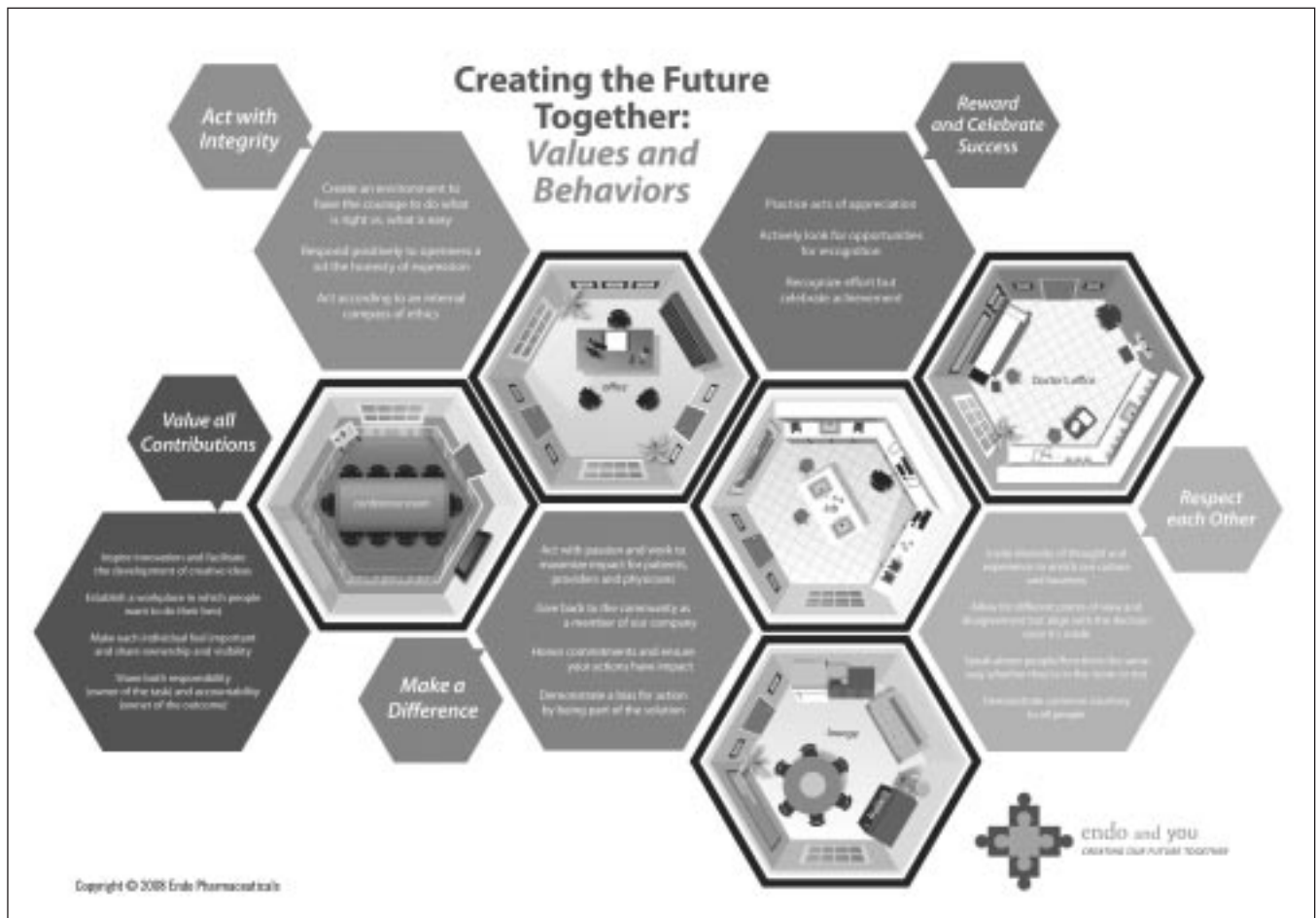
Developing an interactive comms strategy

As the IABC research stated earlier, many companies are finding it difficult to ensure that their employees understand and are committed to their business strategy. The results that Endo has achieved through a highly interactive communication strategy prove that it’s possible to find a winning combination of communication

techniques to meet this challenge. It's not just what you communicate, but how you do it – and words are only part of the picture. scm

1. For more information on this book, please visit: <http://www.gowerpub.com/>

Figure One: A Discovery Map in the form of a board game, helps new employees learn about Endo's values in a fun and interactive way (Image courtesy of Endo Pharmaceuticals)



CONTACT DETAILS

Chris Gay
 Bridge Consulting
chris.gay@bridgecnslt.com