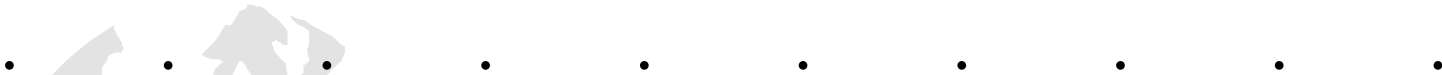




Communications Report



James Blair
Candidate No. 3005
Census No. 51323



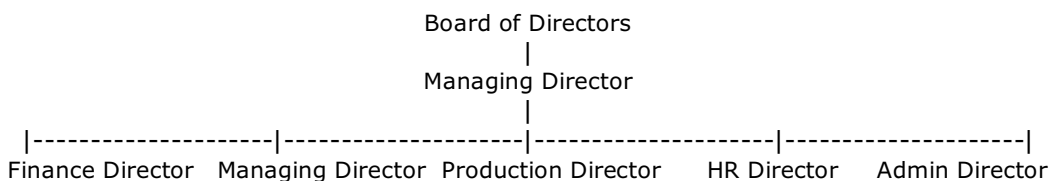
ACTION PLAN

Date (Complete by)	What I intend to do	Resources (see sources for web addresses etc.)	Problems / Adjustments	Complete ?
04/02/08	I will plan out what tasks I need to carry out to complete the report and arrange these into an Action Plan. I will print said Action Plan off to hand in. Start initial desk research into communication and objectives.	Textbook (GCSE Business Studies for Edexcel, Hodder & Stoughton – Sue Alpin, Jan Cooper, Gerard O’Hara, Fiona Petrucke), information from Mrs Sammons, Business Studies teacher.	No	Yes
08/02/08	Finish sections on need for communication and business objectives. Start on report (continual, to be added to each week)	Textbook, internet, sheets on communication.	Not enough information to start report, have to postpone that section until more research is done.	Yes
11/02/08	Create questionnaires; begin to give them to people	Representatives of Gillette, First Software, Tesco, Superdrug, e-scenarios, Bangles and Cara	No	Yes
15/02/08	Continue to give / receive questionnaires, collect information and collate into simple graphs and charts.	Information from questionnaires.	Not all questionnaires handed back on time, have to wait until last one is given in to finish making graphs.	Yes
18/02/08	Write up observation research and interview.	Observations from work experience at Fitness First, interviewee (Mr Nigel Blair, northgate-is).	No	Yes
22/02/08	Stark desk research, find out about different kinds of communication and costing etc. for next section.	Internet (sites in sources) and textbook (as above).	No	Yes
25/02/08	Finish all research and print off all data to hand in.	As above.	Printer not working, had to delay handing in until could print off at school.	Yes

03/03/08	Write up research on communications media, fulfilling all criteria from notes. Start to make recommendations and relate to research.	Information from research.	No	Yes
10/03/08	Finish writing out report, check it all works and print out work so far.	Information from research.	Printer not working, had to use school printer.	Yes
17/03/08	Complete draft including recommendations, print out everything to hand in on the Monday.	Information from research.	No	Yes
28/03/08	Make final adjustments to draft based on suggestions, print off all work as to avoid last minute panic.	Comments from Mrs. Sammons (Business Studies Teacher)	Art coursework delayed finishing of Business Studies, had to delay printing until 31 st .	Yes
31/03/08	Hand in final report		Had to print off work now as could not finish whilst doing art.	Yes

Brief

You have been appointed as a consultant to a medium sized manufacturing company employing 120 people. Part of the company organisation chart appears below:



Until this year production and administration had been located in central London. The purchase of a new production site 50 miles from London has led to a reorganisation of the company and its personnel. The Board Of Directors, Managing Director, Finance Director and Administration Director will now work from the London Head Office. The Marketing Director, Production Director and Human Resources Director will be based and the company's new manufacturing facility 50 miles outside London. You are required to identify the problems of communication between the two locations and suggest how they could be resolved. You should consider:

- a) the needs and importance of good business communication
- b) the range of communication methods available, e.g. people, paper, electronic.

What I expect

I expect that in most businesses, telephones and mobile phones will be the most widely used form of communication. Almost everybody has at least one and, as mobiles are portable, people can be contacted anywhere at any time. However, I do not think that many methods such as letters will be used as these are quite time consuming and very formal, not providing feedback for some time. Instead I think email will be more popular as feedback is easier and emails take very little time to write and send.

The Need for Communication in Business

There are several definitions for the verb 'to communicate'. The online Cambridge Dictionary (<http://dictionary.cambridge.org/>) has a definition of it as "to share information with others by speaking, writing, moving your body or using other signals." The textbook puts this more simply and plainly describes it as "the transferring of a message from the sender to the receiver". These are the definitions which I am going to work from as they clearly describe the way in which the companies would need to keep themselves running by making sure that the right people have the right information at the right time.

To have good communication is essential for a business. Good communication is shown by having everything happens on time and works as efficiently as possible with no information lost along the way and aids decision making by being as simple and as clear as possible. This is helpful to the business as when their efficiency improves then they can increase their output and this can increase their profits if it leads to higher revenue. It can also provide feedback which allows the company to make changes so that everything works at an optimum level and can increase the quality of the product, therefore increasing sales. To keep communication good it must keep the correct audience in mind, keep information simple and only include important details and it must be accurate and correct.

There are several different types of communication within a business. In any communication there needs to be a sender and a receiver. If possible there should also be feedback which is communication to the sender from the receiver.

The three main types of communication are:

- **Downwards**
From higher level employees to those who are lower within a company hierarchy. These can be instructions or notices. Generally do not require feedback unless making a complaint about it.
- **Sideways (Lateral)**
Between employees on the same level within an organisational hierarchy. Plans and discussions take place on this level as well as much of the actual working within the business on a team level.
- **Upwards**
These messages are from those lower down in the company to those who are higher up within the hierarchy. This could be to describe work done so far or submit figures. Feedback is expected but not always acquired.

Business Objectives

To optimise the communications system for the business we must first look at what they want to achieve overall. To do this I will discuss the probable objectives of this business and how communication will affect them.

- **Expansion**
As the business is opening a new site it tells us that they are looking to expand. Expansion is an objective which requires high levels of communication to co-ordinate new projects and initiatives.
- **Increasing Market Share**
An aim which ties in with maximising profit is the idea of increasing the company's market share and competing effectively. The company are likely to want to do this as it will increase their potential profits and income. This can be done in several ways, for example gaining a good public image by ensuring quality products are produced or by spending on a large marketing campaign to make people aware of the goods. Either way, effective communication is required to put together such a strategy and the communication must be accurate to keep the image of the business at a good standard.
- **Maximise Profit**
One of the most important aims of the business, as it is in the private sector, is probably to maximise the amount of profit. This can only be achieved if the business is being run as efficiently as possible as well as through marketing and so both internal and external communication need to be of high standards. For example if employees did not know how to use a piece of equipment properly and wastage was particularly high then if they can communicate this problem to their supervisors appropriate measures can be taken, for example training, to make the process more efficient. Communication therefore must be fast as to not waste time.

Research

To discover what communications media would be the best for the manufacturing company given in the brief it is necessary to research the methods already used within companies. To do this information must be drawn from several sources of information. I plan to use questionnaires, an interview and book and internet research to come to my recommendations as I believe that this is a wide range of different sources from which I can get a balanced view. In this way I will be doing both field (questionnaires and interview) and desk (books and internet) research both of which are useful in different ways. Questionnaires and the interview will give me an insight into people's personal opinions and allow me to not only get some facts from them but also how they feel about them and gives them the flexibility to answer questions in a more open way. From books and the internet I can get more hard facts and can use these with the opinions to come to informed decisions which take both sides into account.

Questionnaires

The first research I did was a questionnaire which I gave to seven people who I knew who are involved in businesses in which communication is a vital part of their running. I decided that I would ask not only what types of communication they use but also in which context (internal, between branches and external) as I believed that this would give me more insight into what each medium is useful for. I also decided that I would ask which communications media were the most useful and also how they felt that their communication within the business could be improved because I thought that I would be able to draw useful information from this on whether it is worth using them for the company within this context. Overleaf is a blank copy of the questionnaire which I asked them to fill in and collated my information from.

COMMUNICATIONS QUESTIONNAIRE

What does your company do? _____

How many branches does your company have? _____

Which methods of communication does your company use? (Tick all that apply)

	Internally	Between Branches (If applicable)	Externally (With customers)
Letters			
Memoranda			
Reports			
Notices			
Face-to-face			
Telephone			
Tannoy			
Fax			
E-Mail			
Pager			
Video Conferences			

Which are the three most important methods of communication within your organisation? (Please write in order from most important)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Which of these do you feel is the most important for good communication?

- Speed
- Cost
- Ease of use
- Feedback
- Clarity

Why? _____

How do you feel communication could be improved in your business?

THANK YOU FOR HELPING WITH THIS RESEARCH

COMPLETED COMMUNICATIONS QUESTIONNAIRE

What does your company do? _____

How many branches does your company have? _____

Which methods of communication does your company use? (Tick all that apply)

	Internally	Between Branches (If applicable)	Externally (With customers)
Letters			
Memoranda			
Reports			
Notices			
Face-to-face			
Telephone			
Tannoy			
Fax			
E-Mail			
Pager			
Video Conferences			

Which are the three most important methods of communication within your organisation? (Please write in order from most important)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Which of these do you feel is the most important for good communication?

- Speed
- Cost
- Ease of use
- Feedback
- Clarity

Why? _____

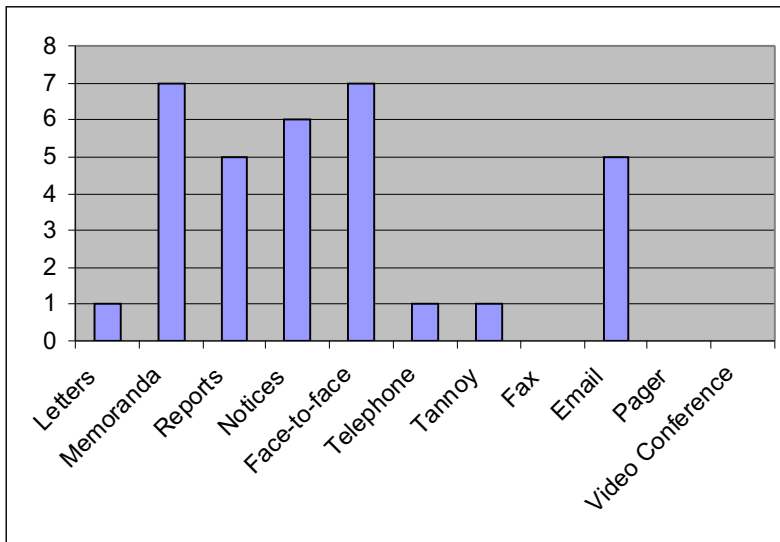
How do you feel communication could be improved in your business?

THANK YOU FOR HELPING WITH THIS RESEARCH

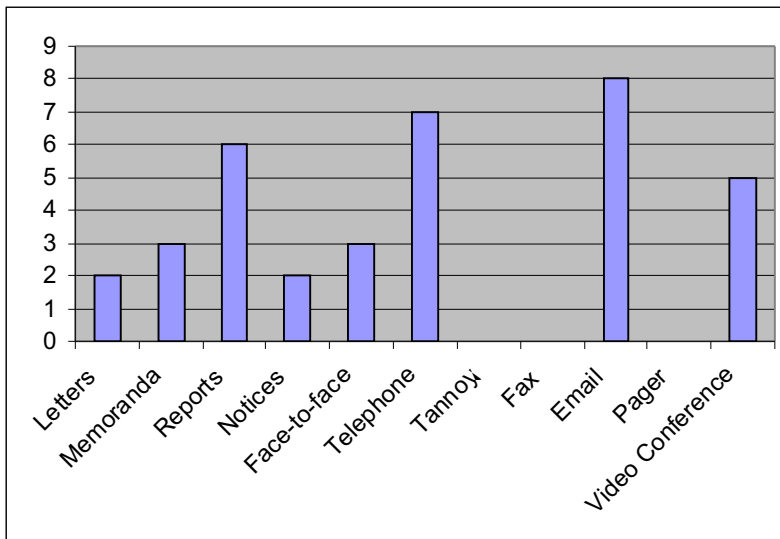
This questionnaire generated a large amount of data but not all of it was useful to the task. To remedy this I collated the data which I decided would be useful towards my research and decided to display in graphs. It could have been arranged in tables but the graphs make a more visual statement as to any majorities and it is much clearer and easier to draw conclusions from.

This is the data from the question on what media was used in different situations. At first I was going to display it as a pie chart but in doing so it was very difficult to see the differences between the values and some didn't show up at all so it made much more sense to use a bar chart in which the values are clear and comparisons can easily be made.

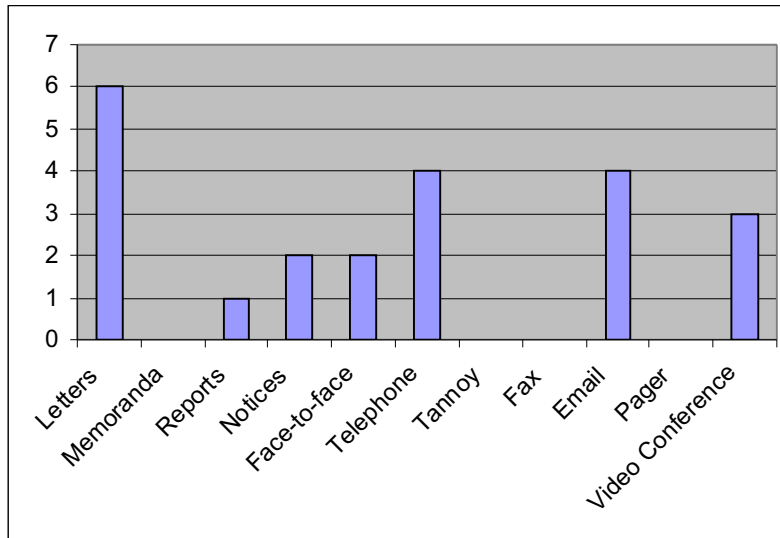
Internal



Between Branches



External



From these three graphs we can draw some large conclusions on each of the different media which were researched:

Letters: Used occasionally within the business and between branches but far more often with customers and external businesses. This is probably to keep a written record of any transactions between the company and the customer and would be too formal and time consuming for regular use within the company.

Memoranda: Memos are an extremely highly used form of communication within the business though not at all externally. This is because they are brief notes and therefore would not be formal enough for conversing with the customer. It would be worthwhile looking into memo systems later in the research.

Reports: Also used very widely within the business and for one company, externally as well.

Notices: Used in all three cases to a small extent. Can be used to inform people about offers and events so can be geared to most audiences.

Face-to-face: One of the most popular forms of communication internally as well as playing some part between sites and businesses, though that could prove more difficult.

Telephone: Not used very often internally but very highly used between branches and with customers. This is probably because it is a method in which information can be passed quickly with feedback but makes little sense to use when the person is in the same building as you.

Tannoy: Used by one company internally but other than that, not used.

Fax: Not used at all. This is probably because it has been replaced with more modern methods such as email which are quicker and easier.

Email: Used highly in all three cases, especially between branches. This is probably because it allows the employees to communicate in a slightly less formal way and easily send feedback between the branches.

Pager: Not used in any of the organisations who filled in the questionnaire.

Video Conference: Not used at all internally but quite popular between branches and externally. This is probably because it is a more efficient method of meetings taking place without people having to leave the building but would not make sense in just one site as it is expensive and they can see each other anyway.

Overall from this section of the questionnaire we can gain the knowledge of the most popular forms of communication for each situation (i.e. internal, between branches and external). These are as follows:

Internal

Memoranda, Face-to-Face, Notices, Reports, Email

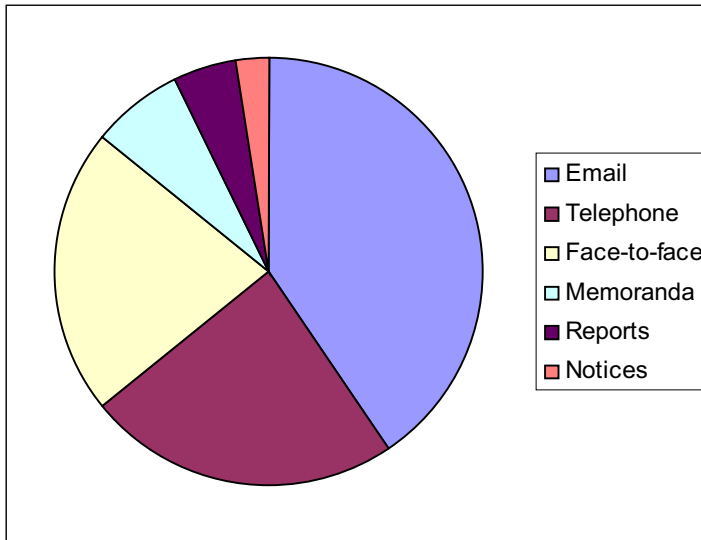
Between Branches

Email, Telephone, Reports, Video Conference

External

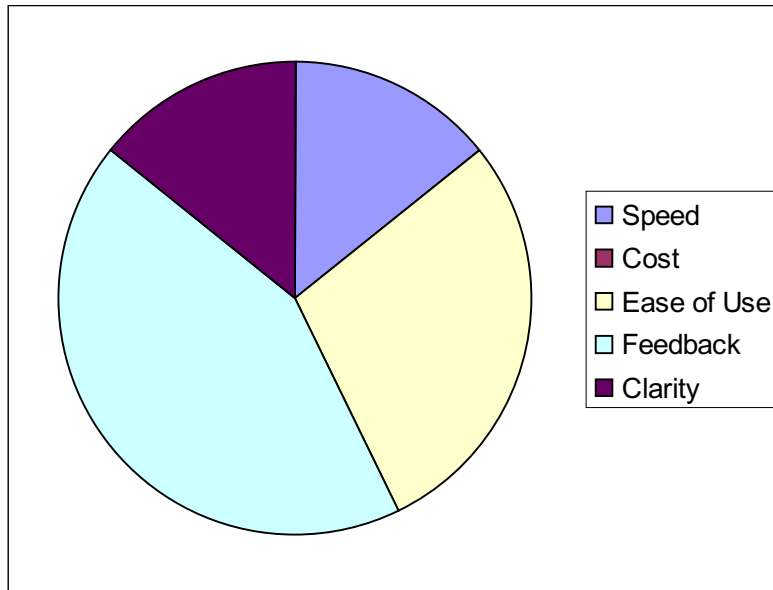
Letters, Telephone, Email

There was also a question on the questionnaire which asked which the three most important methods of communication in the business were, ranked from one to three. To display this data I used a point system giving three points to a medium whenever it gained first place, 2 points when it gained second place and 1 point when it gained third place. Instead of a bar chart for this I decided on a pie chart as in this case it is the percentages rather than the raw values which mean anything valuable.



From this we can see that, unlike my original prediction, telephone is not the most important form of communication within the businesses, although it still has a high proportion of the points. Instead, email is the most important form with a very large percentage of the points which suggests to me that I should look into it as a possible form of communication for the manufacturing company especially as, according to the answers from the previous question, email is highly used both within the business and externally. Also important is face-to-face communication and I expect this is because not only do you get to hear it but feedback is immediate and you can also interpret body language which can help to get a message across and can teach you a lot about what someone thinks even if they do not say it. The other three media deemed as most important within organisations are memoranda, reports and notices, all three of which can be produced using a computer and therefore would be possible if a computer system was implemented.

The final graph which I could create was from the question asking what the most important property of a method of communication was. Again I chose a pie chart over a bar chart as again it was the proportions which mattered, not the actual values.



The results from this question are a little less clear to see but it is still obvious that feedback is a very large concern to the businesses. When asked why feedback was so important, the general consensus was that it was so that the business could continually stay ahead of the times and improve constantly to meet the demands of the market. This fits in with the business objectives I listed earlier as they brought me to the conclusion that efficiency would be a major issue within communications and therefore would have to include a feedback loop of some sort.

The chart also shows that ease of use is also a high priority for communications and therefore anything introduced would have to be not too difficult for the employees to use. When asked why they thought ease of use was most important the answer was that it saved money on training and one said that it increased employee esteem because they felt that they were able to do their job. Speed and clarity also had some recognition as important factors because of efficiency and accuracy respectively. This fits in with fulfilling the business objectives yet again.

No-one voted cost as the most important factor. I imagine that as the people being questioned are looking at an ideal form of communication cost would not be an issue but I would challenge these results for making it appear that cost does not have an influence because in the end it will have effects of the amount of capital which can be used on other things and therefore will have to be considered carefully.

The final conclusions I can draw from the questionnaire are the answers to the last question, how communication could be improved. As this was an open ended question I cannot create a graph so I will verbally sum up the responses. I was surprised to discover that 3 out of the 7 questionnaires replied that they did not think that communication could be improved at all within their organisation. This was not very useful to me, however 2 of the other ones claimed that investing in new technology such as video conferencing would be useful to the company because it would increase the speed and efficiency of their communications. Other ideas put forward were having more written records of spoken communication to settle disputes, giving each employee a personal pager so that they could be sent to the right place at the right time and setting up a website for bulletins rather than the noticeboard as it may be looked at more often.

Interview

In addition to the questionnaires I also conducted an interview with Mr Nigel Blair of northgate-is to find out in more detail what he felt about communications within his organisation. This is the interview transcript:

What does your company do?

It provides products and services for the public sector and also human resources and payroll systems.

What position do you hold in the business?

I work developing new markets and strategies.

How many different sites do you have to communicate between?

Four main sites.

What information needs to be communicated?

People need to ensure that current projects are progressing and strategies are always being developed. Communication is also used for managing staff and making sure everyone is doing the right task at the right time.

What methods of communication does your company use most often?

In general, face-to-face meetings such as visiting the other sites and meeting at customer sites or conference calls and email.

Which method of communication do you find the most useful?

Face-to-face is the most useful as you can get immediate feedback and can judge how people truly think about your proposals. It also is far more personal than sending letters and does not take as much time.

Do you find that there are differences are there between communication within the organisation and with customers?

Communication within the organisation tends to be quite informal and friendly whereas when communicating with outside businesses and customers we must be much more formal and keep formal documentation of most communication.

What problems do you have with communication within the business?

Sometimes a lack of face-to-face contact can be an issue because messages are not interpreted correctly and this can lead to mistakes being made. However meetings are quite difficult to arrange and all the sites are far away from each other meaning that staff have to drive a long way and they don't like that very much. Meetings and conference calls can also end up not being very productive and then they seem as if they are a waste of time and money.

How do you think any problems could be solved?

Unnecessary meetings should be minimized as they take up a lot of time, money and effort and therefore are very pointless. Also we are now involving a lot of new technology such as email, text messaging and the use of online forums which has meant that our communications are a lot quicker and has saved a lot of time and money.

Do you have anybody specifically employed to aid communication within the business?

Not anyone in particular but engineers have to fix communications networks such as the computer system occasionally.

Work Experience

Through my work experience at the Fitness First gym in Tilehurst I learned a great deal about how communications were dealt with in this particular business. There were several different types of communication and each one dealt with different purposes. For communicating within the different branches of Fitness First there were landline telephones and an email system with which each employee could have their own email account. There were three computers, two located in the Marketing office so that communication with customers could be dealt with and one at reception which dealt with other communications. There were many telephones throughout the building. All employees were obliged to carry a switched on mobile phone when off the site as this made it easier for the company to get in touch with them. I observed some bad communication as one man had not taken his phone with him to a course and the company had to spend a lot of time trying to get hold of him which wasted valuable time and money in the process. For internal use there was a noticeboard, a whiteboard which the employees could add to and a tannoy system. The staff also held regular meetings including meetings with those from other branches which made it easier to share good practice and make sure that all branches were providing the same level of service. Communication between the employees was not always good and if they did not know where someone was then there was a lot of shouting which made the employees unhappy. Some of the staff complained that those higher up weren't always listening to them and this made them feel that their views did not count towards the business.

Communications Media

After taking all of this research in from human and organisational sources I decided to also use my textbook (GCSE Business Studies for Edexcel, Hodder & Stoughton) and various internet sites (see sources) to create a table showing the various different methods of communication which would be available to use and their advantages and disadvantages. In this way I can use a variety of information to make my judgement and ultimately make recommendations for the business to follow.

Written Communication

<i>METHOD</i>	<i>DESCRIPTION</i>	<i>ADVANTAGES</i>	<i>DISADVANTAGES</i>
Letters	Mainly used for formal communication, companies may have their own house style and letterheads, usually external (with customers) or for formal internal business.	There is a permanent record, can be very detailed, can be referred back to so information not forgotten, confidential and should go to right person.	Slow method, impersonal, no immediate feedback can be gained, can be lost in the post or opened by the wrong person, can wait a long time for a reply.
Memoranda	Usually for internal communication, quite a brief message, can be electronic or using an internal mail system.	There is a permanent record, short and keeps to the point, can be used in between branches so would be suitable for this business.	No immediate feedback, can be lost or not read, you do not know if they are received, may be overlooked.
Reports	More formal than a memo and presenting	Can be copied and sent to many, can be descriptive and	Can be complicated and confusing as language and details

	information gained from research in a structured way. Normally computer created and includes recommendations.	detailed including lots of information and charts or graphs to make it clearer.	can be difficult, take a long time to write, people may not bother to read them.
Notices	Usually internal, can be to inform employees about meetings or out of work events as well as information on how the business is doing and work which needs to be done.	Everyone can see them, cheap, quick to prepare.	Can be taken down, not everyone will look at it, people might not pay attention to what it says.

Oral Communication

<i>METHOD</i>	<i>DESCRIPTION</i>	<i>ADVANTAGES</i>	<i>DISADVANTAGES</i>
Face-to-face	Can be internal or external and include anything from two people having a conversation to a large group holding a meeting.	Information can be given to a large group all at once, discussions can be held, feedback is immediate, seems to be more personal, everyone has input.	People may not listen or understand, organising is difficult, travel can be expensive and time consuming, people may not be confident enough to talk.
Telephone	Electrical method, can be mobile or landline, fast and internal or external, very widely used.	Can be over a long distance, quick, immediate feedback is given, both sides can give their opinions, problems are solved quickly.	No record (unless call is taped), can be misinterpreted, person not always available, bad signal can make calls unclear, may be difficult to understand, time zones may cause problems.
Tannoy	A system in which a person speaks through a microphone over a series of speakers to make announcements. Mainly internal.	Everyone can be informed of something quickly and efficiently, heard all over building.	No record and not everyone might hear it (deafness could be an issue).

Electronic Communication

<i>METHOD</i>	<i>DESCRIPTION</i>	<i>ADVANTAGES</i>	<i>DISADVANTAGES</i>
Facsimile (Fax)	Written message sent as data over telephone line, quite outdated but still used in many cases.	Sent quickly and accurately, easy and can be asynchronous (no-one at other end)	Poor quality, both sides need fax machines, not always confidential, needs paper.

Email	Computer communication in which messages are sent over the internet, eventually will probably take over any old written technology.	Messages stored until needed, can communicate over many sites, multiple recipients of one message increases speed, hard copy can be obtained, attachments can be added, easy to sort.	All users need access to computer and internet, mail must be checked regularly, accidental deletions can cause loss of data, could possibly be intercepted.
Pager	Device which alerts the owner to the fact that someone is trying to get hold of them. Also may display a short message from them a bit like a mobile phone text message.	Very portable, quite cheap, no line rental or monthly charges.	Only one way, pager must always be charged and turned on, message sent cost money and this can build up, if out of range they don't work.
Video Conferencing	Involves speaking over webcams with headsets so that a conference call can resemble a real meeting. Mainly used internally though can also be with customers.	Eliminates travel which can be expensive, less time and cost, quite personal due to ability to see facial expressions.	Hardware can be very expensive to set up, people may be wary of the technology, not the same as really seeing people in person, needs to find a time to suit everybody.

From this and all my other research together I narrowed down the choices which I was likely to make for the final report. I decided that I would suggest:

- A landline phone system
- A computer system including internet and printer (therefore can be used for emails, reports, memos, letters and video conferencing)
- Regular meetings of directors (once a month)

I believe that with these recommendations the original problem of communication will be addressed and the objectives of the business should be met. However, before I prepare the report for the Board of Directors these ideas should be fully costed and evaluated to ensure that they are cost-efficient and fulfil any external factors.

Costings

Phone System:

One off costs:

	Average cost per item	Quantity	Total
Telephones	£15.00	30	£450.00
Answer machine	£30.00	2	£60.00

Total setup cost = £510

Monthly costs:

	Average cost per month	Cost per year
Broadband	£10.00	£120.00

Total monthly cost = £10

Total yearly cost = £120

Computer System:

One off costs:

	Average cost per item	Quantity	Total
Computers	£300.00	15	£4,500.00
Printers	£100.00	2	£200.00
Peripherals (mouse/keyboard/etc/)	£7.00	30	£210.00
Webcams (for v-conferencing)	£15.00	15	£225.00

Total setup cost = £5135

Monthly costs:

	Average cost per month	Cost per year
Broadband	£10.00	£120.00
Paper	£10.00	£120.00
Toner	£8.00	£96.00
Business email account	£15.00	£180.00

Total monthly cost = £43

Total yearly cost = £516

Face-to-Face Meetings:

One off costs:

	Average cost per item	Quantity	Total
Meeting table (with chairs)	£800.00	1	£800.00
Projector (with screen)	£600.00	1	£600.00

Total setup cost = £1400

Monthly costs:

	Average cost per month	Cost per year
Train fare return to London (for 3)	£44.00	£528.00

Total monthly cost = £44

Total yearly cost = £528

Report

The final part of this investigation into communication is to collate the findings into a final report in which the choices and implications of these choices will be explained to the Board of Directors. On the next few pages will be the final report and its recommendations.

REPORT

TO: BOARD OF DIRECTORS
FROM: HARRIET BLAIR
SUBJECT: RE: BUSINESS COMMUNICATIONS
DATE: 06/10/2008

This is a report in response to the briefing to research and recommend communications methods for the business to resolve the situation of the business being divided between two sites, the London Head Office and the new manufacturing facility.

Firstly it was essential to identify the areas in which communication would be needed within the business. These can be separated into three key fields, internal (within the same site), inter-branch (between the two sites) and external (with customers and other businesses). Each of these three areas needed to be approached differently as sometimes it is inconvenient or even impossible to use the same media for communication between several buildings as you can within one.

To find out which types of communication were common in businesses I decided to use a questionnaire because in this way I could gain the opinions of people who were already in the situation of using many different methods of communication in their working life. From this questionnaire I learnt a great deal about communication methods in business and although I had originally thought that telephone would be the most popular method it actually turned out to be second most popular to email which came out on top for most people. Face-to-face meetings were more popular than I had expected in the questionnaire which means that I plan to include these within my communications plan. Reports and memoranda were very highly used even though at first I did not think that written methods would be very popular in this day and age but again I shall also recommend these because they can be kept as a permanent record. The questionnaire also showed me that most employees were looking for easy to use communication methods with quick feedback were preferred along with decent speed and clarity. With the people I asked, cost did not seem to be a main concern as long as the other points were fulfilled.

To back up the results of the questionnaire I also had a one to one interview with Mr Blair who utilises communication in his workplace within northgate-is plc. It was his opinion that face to face meetings were always the best, however some were pointless and they were all very difficult to organise and so they would use conference calling and new technology such as emails, text messaging and internet forums to keep in touch. Further research which I also carried out involved studying of a textbook and the internet for information.

The recommendations I therefore put forward to you for internal communication are regular face-to-face meetings, memoranda and reports. Being in the same building means that face-to-face meetings are readily available and so it is worthwhile to have them as they allow immediate feedback and for a large number of people to have their say. The problem with this could be that people may miss a meeting, for example if they are ill or forget, and therefore miss out on vital information. This could be solved by making sure employees are well informed about when meetings are going to take place and by taking down notes during the

meetings to pass on to any absent members. Memoranda are quick and convenient and can be typed up and sent electronically for extra ease and this can be done over a computer network within the business. Memos may be ignored if they are used too often which means that it should be stressed to employees to only use them for vital information. Reports can also be typed up and should be used for formal documents which need to have a written record although should not be used just casual day to day communication as they can be difficult to understand and may use very technical and specific language.

For communicating between the head office and the main site I suggest that you use telephone, email and video conferencing. These were all deemed as popular means of communication by the questionnaire and correspond with the capacity to give feedback and the ease of use which people claim are important in communication. The telephone is quick and can be used for less formal discussions where no record is required. Feedback is immediate and so decisions can be made quickly and easily. Telephone calls cost money however, so it must be regulated how long employees spend on phone calls and make sure company phones are not used for personal calls. This could be done by monitoring telephone bills as although this would be time consuming it would eventually save money from abuse of the system. Emails are also useful for less formal discussions but can also be used more formally, for example reports can be attached to them and the body can be formatted to have a more formal style. They are also useful in that you will have an electronic record of these communications between the sites. Video conferencing has the added bonus that you can see the other participants' body language which, although I had not considered it at the beginning, I have discovered to be quite important within communicating. Feedback is again immediate and there can be a large group of people talking at once so many can get their views across without having to be at the same place at the same time. Having said this, I also suggest that monthly meetings take place at the head office because face to face contact has been suggested to be a very highly useful method of communication as it seems more personal and people may feel that their views are being listened to. There is the problem that the directors will not be at their normal jobs at least once a month and this could lead to a lack of the important day to day running of the business at those times, especially if important orders were coming in. A solution to this would be for the directors to delegate their jobs for that day which would have the added bonus of training lower level employees for jobs higher up.

Communication between the business and external sites such as customers should take the form of letters, telephone and email. Letters are formal and therefore address the more formal tone needed to converse with a customer. House style and layouts can be used to strengthen the image of the brand and it will seem to be professional. Telephone again gives you fast feedback which is beneficial to the business as you will be able to find out quickly what the customer wants and be able to provide it within much less time which increases efficiency. The customer may also feel that they are being treated much more personally and so will be more inclined to purchase the product again. Email is a very convenient form of communication and will keep the customer up to date fast but does not require them to be present to receive the message. It is also useful because emails can be sent from anywhere at any time so staff will be able to work from home and still have the capacity to communicate with the customer.

To carry through with these recommendations you will have to install three new systems; a computer system, a telephone system and a meetings system. A computer system can be used to type memos and reports, and when used online it can also support video conferencing and email. This covers many of the types of communication I have suggested. From average costings I have estimated that a computer system consisting of fifteen fully equipped computers (ten for the main

site, five for the new site) with two printers would cost £5135 to set up. To run the system and pay for broadband service at the two sites this would cost £516 a year. Increase in electricity usage would also need to be taken into account. However, I believe these costs will be worthwhile as to fulfil the business objective of remaining competitive you must be using the most up to date technology and without a computer system you will fall behind the competition. A phone system including thirty phones (fifteen on each site) would cost £510 to set up and, if used with the broadband from the computer system, should not cost any extra line rental although cost of calls will have to be taken into account. For a meeting of the directors at the head office once a month a decent meeting room should be set up. To include all of the furniture required I have estimated that this would cost £1400. For all three directors to get a train journey the 50 miles into London it will cost about £44 return and so this will cost £528 a year. However again I believe all these costs are worth it as they allow immediate decisions to be made and this will increase the efficiency of the business which will allow them to meet objectives such as maximising profits which can only be met as long as the business is working at its most efficient.

The methods of communication I have chosen will also have implications on training. The telephone and meeting systems should be relatively straightforward for the staff to understand but employees may require ICT training in order to use the new computer system, especially if they have not used computers in a communication context before. They will need to have knowledge of word processing programmes to create memoranda and reports as well as have the ability to use email programmes and video conferencing software. This training will also incur a cost but again it will be worth it as the staff will be happy that they are able to use their equipment correctly and with a heightened sense of self esteem they are less likely to make mistakes which may cost time and money.

Government legislation will also need to be taken into consideration. The Data Protection Act says that data must be processed fairly and lawfully and also requires that privacy is respected so any data which is stored and communicated must be kept very secure and only used for the purpose for which it is meant. This may mean that computer files must be encrypted or password protected which can mean even more training required as they will have to be able to use this. Secure mediums of communication such as confidential letters, encrypted computer files and private telephone conversations will have to be used when transferring personal or sensitive data and this may add to the costs which could affect the profit made when taking account of overheads. However it is important to keep the data secure as if it leaks you will be breaching the Data Protection Act and the brand name will be damaged as well as risking lawsuits from customers. Another piece of legislation which must be abided by is the Health and Safety at Work Act. When the new systems are installed at the offices there are bound to be many trailing wires which could be tripped over so in accordance with health and safety these will need to be kept properly maintained and tidy. This may incur even more costs but with the possibility of having to pay compensation if a member of staff injures themselves it makes more sense to have protective measures in place. Another implication of this would be that your business would have to use notices to display health and safety issues and inform staff of what they should be doing to abide by health and safety regulations within the business. This would be particularly of use within the production site of the company and would require the use of another communications medium – notice boards.

Another implication the new communications systems may have is on the environment. The computer system and phone system will use much more electricity than the sites use at present and so increased energy usage will incur more fossil fuels being burned which contributes to pollution and using up of resources as well as being expensive. A way to make sure that this impact is reduced it to ensure that

computers are always turned off when they are not in use and in time of extended non-use of a certain electrical implement it should be switched off at the socket. This will ensure that no excess electricity is used and you are harming the environment as little as possible. Also, written communication will mean that you will use up a lot of paper which can be environmentally unfriendly. There are two ways around this which can either be used separately or together. You could either buy paper from a sustainable source as this prevents deforestation and/or recycling bins could be put around the sites to allow staff to recycle any waste paper and prevent any excess wastage which would be bad for the environment. These measures to protect the planet not only fulfil government targets but also help to fulfil business objectives as the brand name will be associated with 'green' practices which will probably increase sales and help to maximise profits even though there will be some increase in overheads to implement and oversee the improvements being put into place.

Overall, these recommendations should fulfil the requirements of the business and overcome the problems outlined in the brief.

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