



Employee communication strategy essential for cooperatives venturing into fiber broadband

Cooperatives and municipalities continue to step up and adjust their business model to help close the digital divide. Recently, several cooperatives have announced plans to add fiber broadband to their product lines. Because of their infrastructure and commitment to serving rural residents, these cooperatives are ideally positioned to bring high-speed fiber broadband to residents that the Fortune 500 internet companies aren't interested in pursuing.

Taking on an entirely new line of business does come with a myriad of challenges. To become a broadband provider, you're adding new operational procedures, becoming a sales organization, probably introducing new software and asking employees to add new skill sets and responsibilities. There's also new terminology that everyone should learn such as megabit, asymmetrical, OTT and bandwidth, to name a few. If your organization hires a dedicated fiber team, they'll have to be integrated into the culture of your company. Invariably, not everyone will embrace this paradigm shift.

This is where a well thought out internal communications strategy is so important. At BroadmaxGroup.com, you'll see where our communications services aren't grouped into a broad category. We believe internal communications strategy is distinctly different from external communications. Each has unique strategies, target messaging and tactics necessary to accomplish goals such as increasing knowledge, changing opinion or encouraging desired behaviors.

With more than a decade experience managing communications strategy for both telephone and electric cooperative broadband providers, we understand what works. The top priorities should be to develop key message points on why your company is entering the fiber broadband business and take every opportunity to reinforce them through your communication channels. In addition, employees want to hear from top leadership on a consistent basis. And, establish a primary source for company news and update it daily. There's easily enough happening at your company to achieve this goal, especially with a fiber network underway.

This is a solid start but there are many other layers to add to maximize effectiveness. Note: look for opportunities to create two-way communications. It's important to give employees a platform to provide feedback and concerns. How do you know if the messaging is effective? Various metrics are available to determine if you're on track.

Having an engaged and informed employee base is one of the most cost-effective investments to ensure a successful venture into fiber broadband. Developing an internal communications

strategy is just as important as developing your business case, budget, securing materials and lining up sales. Your employees are your company's most valuable asset. Take the time to thoughtfully let them know how fiber broadband supports your mission while providing an opportunity for job security.