

THE MARLIN COMPANY: “Workplace communications experts.”

In 1912, the Marlin Company, a division of a firearms manufacturer, was in the business of providing interesting news photos for shopkeepers to place in their windows. The purpose was to attract customers.

Around the time of World War II, the North Haven, Connecticut, company started offering safety posters to manufacturing companies and has remained in the safety business ever since.

Today, Marlin has moved beyond posters and has developed a sophisticated employee communication system it sells to some 9,000 subscribers in North America.

Safety materials are placed in specially designed, lit kiosks known as “communications centers.” The centers are located in plant lobbies, break rooms, or other places where workers gather.

The industries the company serves include:

- Manufacturing,
- Transportation,
- Health care,
- Distribution and warehousing,
- Retail,
- Hospitality, *and*
- Utilities.

Although the displays address quality, teamwork, and other workplace concerns, the primary focus is on safety.

Program materials can be customized to the needs of the client business.

Marlin also offers a high-tech center with electronic content displayed on plasma or LCD screens.

Editorial Vice President Ed LaFreniere says keeping the centers freshly stocked with changing messages enhances their ability to build awareness.

Keep It Fresh

Manufacturing sites are Marlin’s primary customers. A subscription entitles a facility to about 50 communications each month. Included are posters, mini editorials, training materials, illustrations, photos, cartoons, and tips.

Marlin works with researchers, artists, and organizations such as the Mayo Clinic to ensure top quality, visually appealing material. LaFreniere says the effort is to find a balance that is entertaining, instructive, and inspirational.

Marlin conducts an annual employee survey. The findings reveal employee attitudes and priorities and influence how communications are written.

For example, Marlin executives have learned that most employees care very much about being treated with dignity. That’s why the safety tips and other messaging are long on “please” and “thank you” and other terms of respect.

The company has also determined that employees care about the boss and the organization, but they care more about co-workers. So LaFreniere makes sure that the safety messages emphasize the risk to colleagues when workers take shortcuts and break safety rules.

Says LaFreniere: “The premise is that managers spend 80 percent of their

time either dealing with people who need a lot of attention, which is a minority of your employees, or are in meetings all day.” That means little time is left for communicating about safety, health, wellness, violence prevention, and other topics.

“Managers need to understand the ‘whole person concept.’” By that, LaFreniere refers to the fact that employees bring multiple distractions to the workplace—from a mild headache to an argument with a spouse, debt-related worries, and many others. This mental pull heightens the need to keep safety top of mind.

At the same time the centers teach and reinforce, they also reinforce the host company’s values through messages that remind employees of the importance of getting the job done without making mistakes or behaving in ways that can cause injuries or expensive product losses.

The concept is fairly simple, says LaFreniere: “We know life is difficult, you’re stressed, and you may even be angry. But you still have a job to do and here are some tips.”

Effort Not Wasted

Marlin provided a high value solution for an Allied Waste Industries operation in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Waste hauling can be a dangerous business, and Allied wanted to reduce the number of injuries by making safety awareness paramount in employees’ minds.

Allied tried communicating safety statistics on a dry-erase board outside the area where employees punch in and complete paperwork.

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Awareness increased but accidents did not decrease; among challenges was keeping the information up-to-date.

Allied Waste installed a Marlin 42-inch flat-panel display that featured changing, animated safety messages and other content sent via the Internet. The display also shows news, sports, local weather, and motivational workplace messages.

In conjunction with other strategies, the communications center had a significant impact on accident reduction. In 2007, the Grand Rapids location received Allied's "Safest Shop" award.

Execs at the company called the communications center "an indispensable component" of their safety awareness program.

Are You Aware?

Underestimating the role of awareness in your safety program can be a serious mistake.

It's hard to define, tough to quantify, and difficult to instill, but it can make a big difference in your incident rates and the buy-in of your workforce. [30, 90, 6, 166]

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