

## Communication

If quality equals the results of work efforts divided by the total cost, what is the quality of your communication?

By Dan Zahlis

Leaving college 20 years ago, I entered a profession seemingly defined by the amount of paper it could generate, copy, collate, three-hole punch, staple and distribute. The purpose of my profession was to protect people at work and comply with a growing body of legislation.

My profession's practice seemed to be more about sustaining the paper products, office machinery and document delivery industries. I realized that my future success likely would result from my ability to collect, analyze, reproduce, organize and communicate information efficiently and effectively.

I was fortunate in my first "real job" to have been exposed to a fellow who truly understood the importance of communication when it came to format and delivery. This fellow had a unique way of distributing inter-office communications. While everyone else was using those clunky yellow distribution envelopes, this guy was using bright red ones.

I asked him about this practice and he enthusiastically shared his trade "secret." He told me that he used red envelopes because they stand out in the in-boxes of his recipients. He also made a weekly routine of visiting offices to relocate the red envelopes to the top of each in-box. This guy could have made a fortune contributing material to Scott Adams for the Dilbert cartoon, but opted instead for the joys of out-smarting the corporate mail station, and achieving his primary objective of impleasible deniability ("What memo?").

Ten years into my career, and with a growing appreciation for Dilbert, I began to use the Internet. I quickly realized what Peter Drucker had observed: "The new information technology – Internet and e-mail – have practically eliminated the physical costs of communications." The Internet, as a communication tool, could substantially enhance the

content, format and delivery of information at virtually zero cost, while helping to sustain the planet. If only a "red envelope" could be developed to better format and deliver the information. An active agenda was born.

### Communication

A typical organization has a stack of policy and practice binders living in a labyrinth of offices, departments and physical facilities. Each document calls for activity geared towards generating a variety of results. These documents often are outdated and rarely focus analysis on policy activities, opting instead to capture and track competing downstream results. Lost among these disconnected policies and practices is their redundancy of purpose and variability of practice. The communication resulting from these policies and practices equally is disjointed.

The Internet represents a tool for centralizing policies and practices at the action level. Active Agenda represents a way to integrate these activities and communicate results in a standard format. When it comes to communication, "less" (time and effort) and "better" (accuracy, immediacy, applicability) define quality.

Active Agenda uses Risk Imperatives – safety, quality, operations, ethics, sustainability, etc. – to enable single systems to track and communicate process data across multiple, often competing, policies and practices. Associating risk imperatives with process activities substantially reduces administrative redundancy. Centralizing process information this way also allows information customers to define the nature and content of the communication they want to receive.

Active Agenda allows information customers to define their own "red envelopes," while allowing process owners from across an enterprise to fill

the envelopes with the results of work efforts, at virtually no cost, and in real time. Allowing customers to define their own red envelopes is important to effective communication. I know this because I asked the recipients what they thought of those envelopes. They told me they loved them because they didn't have to open the envelopes to know they didn't want to read what was inside of them!

### What Gets Measured

Active Agenda captures and measures risk management process data across more than 80 (and growing) risk control processes. The process measurements also are used to generate charts that can be added to user-defined dashboards. These charts can be exported to a flat-screen monitor in the employee lunchroom or displayed in real time on a company Web site. Active Agenda measures the activity designed to generate results.

### What Gets Done

Active Agenda allows organizations to distribute process measurements and the results of work in real time, with the least amount of cost. More importantly, Active Agenda allows people to define the information of greatest importance to them, on their own terms, at their own frequency and in a simple, standardized format. Active Agenda improves the quality of communication.

### This Month's Links:

**Demo:** [demo.activeagenda.net](http://demo.activeagenda.net)

**Wiki:** [activeagenda.net/documentation/index.php?title=Charts\\_Feature](http://activeagenda.net/documentation/index.php?title=Charts_Feature)  
• [activeagenda.net/documentation/index.php?title=Dashboard\\_Feature](http://activeagenda.net/documentation/index.php?title=Dashboard_Feature)  
• [activeagenda.net/content/view/379/172](http://activeagenda.net/content/view/379/172)  
• [activeagenda.net/documentation/index.php?title=Notifications\\_Feature](http://activeagenda.net/documentation/index.php?title=Notifications_Feature) **OH**