

# Sound of losing money goes PING

For any business to be truly successful, its collective message must resonate from within the hearts and minds of its employees and reverberate to its customers.

And when this message is sustained, your marketing mantra becomes a profitable brand.

Yet too often, companies spend tens of thousands of dollars promulgating an external message without an internal manifesto.

They stumble into the marketplace out of tune and echoing some copycat business lyrics about excellence, service and quality, as compelling as Britney Spears lip-synching Socrates to appear profound.

Like individuals, companies – especially those privately held – find it easier to look outward rather than inward.

Having revenue success without watchdog shareholders feeds this external view until unresolved tensions between the company and its associates begin making some noise, at first festering and fuzzy, then more audible and pestering, until someone inside hears the sound of losing money, which I call PING (productivity interference negating growth).

PINGs reverberate with ferocity throughout the company's pipeline.

They disrupt not only the department in which they were created, but also they play havoc on the effectiveness of other functions within the profit pipeline.

A PING occurring early in the pipeline, such as at the reception desk, can create a cacophony of company contaminators later.

Answering phones may be the company's simplest task, so imagine a more complex, systemic PING enveloping an entire process, such as inventory management.

The recoiling effect of a process PING of this degree can be catastrophic.

Unfortunately, a process PING, left unencumbered, finds its way to the company's exterior audience. And the longer a PING is allowed to reverberate, the more likely it will affect bottom-line profitability.

Though PINGs are rarely eliminated, they may be contained. How do you quiet PINGs? Retreat. Empower. Integrate. Step back and begin looking inside.

Once PINGs are identified, invest immediately in your employees. Empathize with their frustrations and let them create solutions. Develop a simple rewards program for employees who contribute to real problem-solving. Be generous

with bonuses, perks, free days and other valued incentives.

Empower these employees to co-author the right brand promise, one that is sincere and truly deliverable. Create an internal manifesto with a company-wide mantra, steering those who are not yet on board.

At this stage, the unanimous integration of PING solutions is just as important as employee buy-in.

Remember, PING correctives must be made as a consolidated effort. Just as PINGs reverberate and disrupt other process points, individual corrections – while they may provide a short-term fix for an existing PING – will also reverberate.

If an earlier or later process PING is not corrected as part of the whole, solutions for that PING could be ineffective – or worse yet, create more PING episodes throughout the pipeline.

Now you're ready to develop an external marketing approach that mirrors your internal one.

And when you launch, you will have already won and those PINGs will be reduced to a harmonic hum of internal productivity, external customer satisfaction and increased company profitability.

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## CARE: Employee benefits often includes counseling

### GROWING BURDEN

**The San Francisco-based Family Caregiver Alliance, a nonprofit group that advocates for policies and programs to help people who provide in-home long-term care, reports the following:**

- 25 percent of all workers are providing care for someone 65 years of age or older.
- The average caregiver is married, female and 46 years old, earning \$35,000 annually.
- More than 50 percent of all caregivers for people ages 50 or older work full-time, and nearly two-thirds of all caregivers work either full- or part-time.
- The majority of caregivers for individuals 65 or older report they must rearrange their work hours, work less hours, or take unpaid leave.
- Nearly half of all caregivers are clinically depressed and are more reliant on prescription drugs for anxiety, sleeping problems and depression than non-caregivers.

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Restructuring the employee benefits package to enable employees who work at least eight hours a week to qualify for benefits also helps, Langhurst says.

"You may pay more the less you work," she says, "but it allows you to keep the benefits."

NBBJ's employee health plan includes emotional wellness and referrals for counseling – and those services are used, she says.

"I refer a number of people to it, and I think those in the stress of caregiving do take advantage of that," she says.

Doug Reys, manager of compensation and benefits at Franklin International Inc., a Columbus-based glue and sealant manufacturer, says what the company offers its 400 employees is fairly standard for many companies – compliance with the Family Medical Leave Act, which in most cases, is not paid time off.

"So that obviously begins to add to the stress," he says. "And many of our caregivers have children, too, so they are pulled in both directions."

Franklin's employee assistance program is a strong resource, Reys says, and the company is linked with Care-Wise, an Internet-based program for employees to access online or phone-based help, 24 hours a day.

"If they have general questions about a parent's medication," Reys says, "the employee can call in the middle of the night, or go online to search out information."



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