



AT A GLANCE

Every year, Ascend's portfolio of businesses help millions of people reach their career goals with products that prepare them to pass high-stakes tests or earn certifications. Ascend works with students, institutions and employers in a range of fields, including nursing, allied health, personal training, insurance and emergency medicine.

KEY STATS

80% of employees log on to the intranet at least twice a week

40% log on daily

450+ articles with

100,000+ combined views

1,200+ files with

10,474 downloads

Connecting Brands, Clearing Inboxes, and Cultivating Employee Engagement with an Intranet Community

Problem

Two years ago, the majority of Ascend Learning employees didn't think much about other brands in the company's portfolio. Remote employees had a hard time even connecting with their own brands. To remedy that, the communications team looked for a way to connect people within – and across – businesses. The goal: strengthen communications, create a shared culture, and invigorate employees around a shared mission.

Solution

In late 2015, Ascend Learning used Higher Logic's online community platform to launch a social intranet. The intranet connects all employees regardless of brand and location, encouraging closer relationships among teams, offices, and business units.

Benefits

Employees feel more connected to their peers, other brands, and Ascend Learning as a whole. They use basecamp to share ideas, celebrate wins, and champion initiatives. Plus, everyone has faster access to essential business information through a central knowledge base.

Q: What do you like about basecamp?

A: Everything!

- Rob Combs, Ascend Learning Employee

Bringing Disconnected Employees into a Shared-Services Business

Ascend Learning uses 12+ brands to deliver custom products and services to high-value industries like healthcare. But having many brands poses challenges to unity and culture.

Ascend Learning has more than 1,000 employees, and 30 percent work remotely. The scattered workforce and multiple brands made connecting to the parent company – or other brands – a challenge.

Aside from their paychecks, employees had little exposure to Ascend Learning and focus groups confirmed they felt disconnected from Ascend Learning. Since the previous intranet was just a repository of policies and HR forms, the company lacked a unifying force.

Ascend Learning's Communications Director, Nancy Mays, was given the mammoth task of finding a way to bring employees together across branding, states, and countries.

Finding a Social Intranet that Could be Managed by a Small Team

Nancy and her colleague, Communications Specialist Chelsea Didde Rice, started looking for intranet software that would connect brands and provide essential information. They also looked for a tool to help reduce the company's reliance on email.

"We needed an intranet that would do the typical heavy lifting – benefits information, leadership messaging – but also one that enabled conversations," said Nancy. "However, with only a two-person team, we needed to choose a platform that wouldn't require a large team to manage it."

Nancy and Chelsea knew of another organization using Higher Logic and found it met their needs, including the crucial requirement of being a SaaS platform.

"Higher Logic had all the features we needed to fulfill our strategic objectives: we can work independently to post content, the company is geared towards helping clients, and it helps increase efficiency. The platform also had to grow with us, and Higher Logic's capabilities have certainly expanded along with us."

Their community, basecamp, launched six months after platform selection.

Bringing Employees from All Brands Together in an Open Forum

Nancy and Chelsea set up basecamp as a series of communities. The home page and main community is an open forum that connects Ascend Learning's 12+ brands through discussions and a resource hub with hundreds of documents. It's a one-stop shop for all employees, complete with information on benefits, pay, human resources, travel policies, computer help, and other vital business resources.

Individual Communities for Individual Brands

Ascend Learning also created nearly 30 other communities dedicated to brands and teams. Each community has its own discussions, email, and resource library filled with relevant content.

Higher Logic's platform makes it easy for community managers from each brand to manage content and conversations in their communities, which makes maintaining the larger intranet manageable for a two-person team.



I like having important company and business unit (BU) information in one place. The community aspect is great, too. I see posts from folks in other offices and BUs and it makes the other locations and business units seem less far away

- Ascend Employee

- ▶ *Ascend Learning made naming its intranet an engagement tactic. It held a company-wide contest to crowdsource and vote on a name. The winner: **basecamp**.*



Encouraging Employee Engagement with a Mix of Business and Fun

A functional and easy-to-use setup gave basecamp a solid start, but getting employees to start using their new tool was still a challenge. “Changing human behavior is always the most difficult part of a project like this,” said Nancy. “People rarely visited our old intranet. We did not have people engaging before this.”

To encourage employees to engage, Nancy and Chelsea held promotions, educational webinars, and developed a strategy that balances critical information with culture-building content.

“Our intranet’s content is need-to-know and fun-to-know. We’re working hard to use basecamp for fun, culture-focused interactions, instead of email, while also including business-critical information”

- Chelsea Didde Rice

Teams now post business information, such as meeting notes, in community discussions, or upload documents to file libraries instead of using email. In the community, the information is easier to access and frees up space in employees’ already-crowded inboxes.

Ascend Learning’s team uses the platform’s tools to update content daily. There are posts for Motivation Monday, Tip Tuesday, and Wellness Wednesday, as well as daily articles posted using the blog tool. Topics range from benefits and leadership announcements to interviews that help employees get to know one another. Content is summarized in a Friday email, which causes traffic to spike.

To highlight their different locations, Ascend Learning embedded a Flickr website widget on the home page with employee-submitted photos of different office locations, meetings, and team-building events.

Other engagement tools include a rotating poll, event calendars, and a peer recognition program called Peak Performers, run with Higher Logic’s gamification tools. Through Peak Performers, employees give one another virtual high-fives and badges based on the company’s core values.

An Award-Winning Intranet that Increases Engagement, Improves Jobs, and Boosts Morale

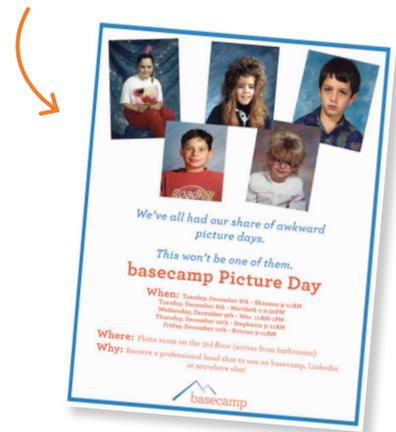
Since Ascend Learning’s previous intranet had limited content, there was barely any employee engagement. “We went from, essentially, zero percent intranet engagement to 82 percent of all employees logging in at least twice a week!” said Nancy.

Over 40 percent of employees visit basecamp daily. Out of 1,000 employees, 902 have edited some part of their profile and 809 have profile photos.

A One-Stop Shop for Information

basecamp’s content, including its daily articles, are also very popular. Ascend Learning has more than 450 blogs, each with an average of 210 views. Blogs written by executives get more than double that, with an average of 553 views. Ascend Learning’s top blog received

- ▶ Encourage people to fill out their profiles with a fun promotion. Ascend Learning held a “Picture Day” like the ones you used to have in grade school.



- ▶ Ascend Learning’s intranet has been so successful that, just a year after launch, basecamp was awarded the **Gold PRISM award for Internal Communication** by the Greater Kansas City Public Relations Society of America (PRSA).

almost 1,900 views in five months – nearly double Ascend Learning’s total employees – and combined blog views are over 100,000.

Articles, documents, and discussion forums have also alleviated problems with email. Instead of having to dig through their inboxes for important messages, employees visit basecamp. Content is easily accessible and searchable in discussions and file libraries, with 10,474 total file downloads.

“I like that it’s a one-stop site for all of the information about what’s going on around the company. Sometimes it’s hard sifting through e-mails to find events or info, so having it archived in a convenient location is great,” said Sarah Fettke, an Ascend Learning employee.

A Connected, Inclusive Culture that Improves Morale

Engagement continues to rise and employees from different brands are connecting with peers outside their immediate teams. “basecamp is a good place to tie all of the Ascend Learning brands together. It’s easy to forget we work for a large international company sometimes,” said employee Andrew Payne.

Remote employees and staff in small offices are also seeing a boost in morale. When asked what they liked about basecamp, staff members said it provides a “sense of community” and a “sense of unity.”

Creating a Better Intranet on a Better Platform

Moving forward, the Ascend Learning communications team plans to start more conversations in the community, and they’re using an already-proven strategy of executive participation to help spur discussions.

“Any time we mention a senior leader’s name, or they upload something to basecamp, our interaction numbers go sky-high! Our employees want to hear what leaders have to say, so we began a new “Friday Flash” initiative in 2018. Different members of the leadership team host a discussion with employees to garner feedback and chat about what’s going on in the industry, their careers, and even their personal hobbies,” Chelsea said.

As engagement grows, Ascend Learning’s businesses, employees, and culture will grow as well.

“Each day we see more behavior changes and increasingly hear the word “basecamp” in employees’ daily conversations,” said Nancy. “Above all, basecamp has increased trust among business units. Because of that we’ve seen groups sharing resources, from content for marketing to ideas on vendor selection. A social intranet like this has proven to be an ideal connector for a company like ours, spread across locations, time zones, and businesses.”

▶ **1,900**

Ascend Learning’s top blog has nearly 1,900 views – almost double the total number of employees Ascend Learning has.

HIGHER LOGIC

Higher Logic is an industry leader in cloud-based community platforms. Organizations worldwide use Higher Logic to bring people all together, by giving their community a home where they can interact, share ideas, answer questions and stay connected. Our goal is to help your organization with deeper engagement and meaningful interactions for your members, customers and prospects.