

Marketing and Communication



MARKETING AND COMMUNICATION

In our experience, this is one area that clubs often shy away from due to the perceived lack of experience or the large anticipated costs of advertising and publicity. However, it is widely acknowledged that good communication is critical of the success of any business for both sharing the key messages with existing customers and for attracting new ones.

It is also critical to understand HOW the recipients of your communications wish to receive it – 98.5% of the respondents to our online survey chose email as their preferred form of communication from the club, followed by face-to-face, text message and website.

This section provides guidance on the various forms and channels that can be used for cost effective communications and to outline our intentions to help you achieve a clearer understanding of effective communication.



Communications Planning -What, when, who, how?

Many clubs are guilty of being reactive when it comes to communication, largely due to time and human resource. Developing a simple yet proactive plan for the year ahead is a good way to get the club and its committee to highlight key events and dates in the calendar and to decide which ones to communicate and who the audience should be for each particular piece of communication.

The other key to this piece of work is to identify (and support) the person that is responsible for writing and distributing the communications and through which mediums.

It's important to develop an annual communications plan for internal and external messaging.

There are many ways to approach this planning however, for the clubs that may be approaching this piece of work for the first time, it could be simply split into two sections as follows:

INTERNAL COMMUNICATION:

All issues that impact upon members; plans and proposed changes, news stories and features, upcoming events, calls for help and support, fixtures and results and requests for feedback.

WHO (Audience): Current Members

HOW: Club Members Electronic Newsletter, Internal Notice Boards, Website (news and notices)

WHEN: Planned monthly, bi-monthly, quarterly newsletters, agreed weekly notice board updates, agreed frequency of website updates.

WHO (to fulfill): Club Committee to identify committee members/volunteers/dedicated 'Communications Coordinator' to manage/lead the above process and to direct the webmaster etc.

EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION:

Promotion of Open days and 'come and try' events, membership offers and promotions, non-member opportunities, special events and links to national promotions

WHO (audience): Prospective members and participants, key stake holders, regional and national Governing Body, sponsors and partners, Local Government, local/regional media.

HOW: Bespoke to each individual piece of communication, using affordable and well subscribed modern media channels

WHEN: Depending on the type and purpose of communication. If promoting an invitation to an event it is a fine balance between giving people sufficient notice and promoting it too far ahead of the event that they forget about it. If requesting a response, provide sufficient time for people to do so.

WHO (to fulfill): Club Committee to identify committee members/volunteers/dedicated 'Communications Coordinator' to manage/lead the above process and to direct the webmaster etc. The club could develop mailing groups within its database for the ease of circulating information.

What are the key messages and how do we communicate them?



Whether you are communicating to existing members or trying to reach out to new people, the content, style, tone and the frequency of the communication is critical to the messages being heard.

Website:

With the digital age influencing every element of our lives, we have become increasingly impatient when it comes to finding relevant information, and if it isn't a few clicks away from our fingertips, it simply isn't worth hunting for.

It is therefore, essential, that not only do our clubs have a web presence, but that we have a current, clean and clear and informative website that provides existing and prospective members and participants with the information they need, whether its finding contact details, opening hours, event information or simply to find out what facilities the club has.

Developing and hosting websites has become very affordable and we would urge all clubs to have an agreement with their webmaster to update the content as frequently as possible. Don't forget, the website is only as good and as current as the information that you provide to the webmaster.

Social Media:

Following on with the hunger and need for instant information and communication channels, social media again plays a pivotal roll in the way that people communicate, providing instant information. Facebook and Twitter are the most popular platforms and we would urge each club to not only establish a presence with these two mediums, but to identify someone/a team of people who are responsible for posting updates and news onto Facebook and for tweeting relevant information to the followers.

(There may be a member of the club who is familiar with these two mediums and spends a reasonable amount of time updating their own accounts or is responsible for updating their work Facebook/Twitter accounts, who would be happy to help to update the clubs accounts)

Use the appropriate communication channels to target the right audience and engage with younger members who may wish to help promote the club through social media.

Local Media Partnerships:

It is known that the distribution/readership of local/regional printed media has decreased in recent years, and with the growth of digital media, it is likely to continue on its downward spiral moving forward. However, with all of the local/regional media groups having online platforms that replicate the printed materials, they are still a very valuable medium to communicate your messages.

With a loyal readership, local media provides you with a good route to market, with many of the editors crying out for content and good news stories from its community partners. If you are able to establish such a relationship, they can often be very cost effective, if not free of charge, with contra deals being a very popular basis on which to develop such relationships, with the club offering the media group publicity and acknowledgement as their 'Media Partner' on the website, all printed matter and offering to distribute copies of the publications at the club/events etc.

It is also good to investigate the same opportunities for partnerships with local/regional radio stations.

It is important to spend time on developing quality marketing materials as they represent the club to prospective members, so if you are a fun, sociable yet professional club, your promotional fliers should reflect this!



Surveys - Know what your members want:

The success of any business is based on knowing your customers and what they need, and running a tennis club should be no different. Customer service is largely focused on delivering your services to the needs of the customer and unless you are aware of what your customer's opinion is, it is very difficult to improve their experience or respond to a need. It is occasionally the case that clubs will introduce something new at the club as the committee 'thought' that it was what the members may like rather than basing the decision on fact.

This is easily rectified and with multiple free online survey platforms available now, there is no excuse for not conducting frequent online members surveys, to truly understand what your members think of the club and what it offers. This could be done annually and you could incentivise members to complete the survey by placing all respondents into a prize draw for a free annual membership or free coaching session etc.

Surveys - Lapsed Members:

It is often the case that clubs don't follow up with lapsed members to understand why they have left the club and to learn from their mistakes in an attempt to improve retention rates in future years etc. We acknowledge that it is not always down to the fault of the clubs that people leave, in fact, it appears that a number of people that surrender their tennis club membership do so as they have sustained an injury or simply feel that they are no longer able to play tennis due to the physically demanding nature of the sport.

That said, there are valid reasons for people leaving and providing recently lapsed members with an opportunity to tell you why they left could be invaluable. The club then has the ability to address any issues and in turn offering the lapsed member with an incentive to return to the club whilst demonstrating that the club has responded to the needs of its members.

External Branding:

This is often the first communication that people see from your club and it may not always give a good first impression, especially to a prospective participant, as people are often greeted with an explicit 'Members Only' sign over the gate!

If your club is planning on extending its 'pay and play' access to non members, we urge you to consider how the club is presented to new users and how appealing and inviting the messaging on any signage is and to change accordingly, should you feel that the message doesn't match the intention.



Assistance:

For any assistance or enquiries on implementing any of the above suggestions please contact your regional development manager.