3 steps to clear customer communications

Clear communications provide accurate and up-to-date information. Being clear will help your audience know what is going on and what to expect from you. This requires making sure that you are not undermining your message by having different information in different places.

Pandemic challenges

The pandemic has created some macro communications challenges around vaccine hesitancy and public health measures and mandates. On a micro level, I've noticed issues for businesses and organizations in communications changes to their customers and patrons. One that keeps cropping up is mask wearing rules. In Montgomery County, Maryland, where I live, mask mandates were dropped in the late spring/early summer and then brought back in early August in response to the Delta variant. These zig zag changes made it difficult for organizations to keep up. When the mask mandates went out, they changed certain webpages and email templates and when they came back, they may have not changed all their communications to reflect the new reality.

Take for example a yoga studio I go to which requires proof of vaccination for attendance. When you go to its website, it tells you that you can unmask because everyone will have shown their vaccine cards. But when you get your class enrollment confirmation email, you are instructed that you must mask up in class.

Is that your latest menu?

But it is not only around COVID and masks that we see different information from different sources from the same organization. It could be different hours of operation on a sign versus the website. Or a spring menu being listed on a restaurant's website when it's already fall.

Be accurate and consistent—here's how

You can make sure that your communications are accurate and consistent across all your channels. Following are the three steps you'll need to take.

Step 1: Create a trigger list

What kinds of things do you need to tell your audience about?

- *Changes (including updates) to:*
    - Policies
    - Staff/personnel
    - Hours
    - Location
    - Dates
- *Additions*
    - For example, you've added new classes or staff members
- *Deletions*
    - Perhaps your pool is closed for the season, or you are no longer offering a product.

Step 2: Audit your communication platforms

You'll have to do an in-depth assessment of all the places you communicate with your customers, patrons, or donors. You want to know everywhere that people get information about you. While you are doing this, take the opportunity to make sure the information is consistent and updated. This includes (and is not limited to):

- Website (and remember to list ALL pages/areas of the website where information is listed). For example, you may have your hours listed on your homepage and then on your contact page.

- Email communications
- Signage
- Advertising and other marketing materials
- Staff (e.g., receptionist, information desk personnel, etc.)

Step 3: Create a checklist

Create a checklist that you follow whenever a trigger occurs. You may choose to make this very specific. If your organization changes board members every year, you would list it followed by the places you need to update, such as the website about us or leadership page, the organizational letterhead, signage in your office, and so forth. The checklist could be a Word or Excel document that is accessed each time one of your trigger list items occurs. You'll then have a systematic way to make sure that each of your communication platforms is updated at the same time.

Bottom line is that maintaining all your information updated, accurate and consistent keeps your customers and other patrons in the know.