

Communications Plan

In its simplest definition, a communications plan outlines WHO you need to communicate with, about WHAT, HOW you're going to do it, and WHEN (how often).

For some golf clubs, the idea of developing a communications plan might seem a bit daunting and may not be a high priority. In fact, compiling a communications plan is as simple as going through a small number of steps and answering a few questions

Developing a communications plan should be an ongoing process - as your club grows and changes, the way you communicate will also need to change. The most important thing to remember is that no matter what approach you take, you should always keep three things in mind: WHO, WHAT, HOW and WHEN.

Basic elements of a communication plan

Setting objectives

The key element of a communications plan is its objectives. These must clearly support your club in achieving its stated goals. If you are clear about where your club is heading and what it's trying to achieve (strategic plan), it becomes much easier to work out what you need to do in terms of communicating to support this. You also need to be realistic about the resources and budget you have to support your objectives

Target audience (WHO)

Many clubs overlook who it is they are really trying to communicate with. It is no use having something to say if you are targeting the wrong groups, so it is essential to be clear on the target audience. There will be a number of target audiences to communicate with that can influence the success of your club and it is important that you undertake a realistic assessment of this and what messages each will be interested in. Target audiences include members, prospective members, and also other groups who could be interested in what your club has to offer e.g. social golf, functions, corporate golf, food and average.

Key messages (WHAT)

Conflicting messages create confusion. For this reason it is essential that you define the key messages your club wants to communicate and ensure it is understood by your board/committee, staff, volunteers and anyone else likely to be communicating about your club to others.

Without knowing what it is you want to say to people, or what they need to know about your club, communication activities are wasted. A basic mistake is to talk about the things that are important to you, but not important or relevant to your audiences. It is ideal to have a set of key messages – one overriding set of messages that are applicable to all of your audiences, and a second set that are specific and relevant to your target audiences identified above.

Methods of communicating (HOW)

Once you have worked out your key messages and target audiences, you need to then choose the right method to convey your messages. There are many ways of getting your messages across – from e-mail, website posts, flyers, electronic newsletters, local media (newspapers, radio, TV) and engaging an online audience via social media.

Whatever way you decide to communicate your messages to your key audiences, you need to ensure the method you use is the right one for each. For example, if your audience is young teenagers, online social media could be the ideal way to get your message across. Alternatively, older members still prefer written communication and newsletters.

Frequency of communicating (WHEN)

You must keep firmly in mind what you can realistically do given your budget and the skills and resources available. This will also help you determine the frequency of your messaging.

Some ideas for sources of communicating:

- Website: an essential communication tool for most audiences. This is generally the most used resources for communicating to your current and future audiences. It is essential you keep it up to date.
- E-Newsletters: a weekly, monthly or regular email update is great if you have a database of your audiences. If not, start to request your members e-mail addresses and start to build your member database. Or start collecting your club's visitor and social green-fee players' email addresses
- Social media: establishing a Twitter feed or Facebook page for your club can be a very effective way of getting your message across to a large online audience. Ensure your messages, including accompanying images, are up to date and to the point.
- Flyers: particularly useful if your target audience is in a particular area or neighbourhood. Also useful for schools, local councils, placing on community noticeboards or directly into letterboxes.
- Local media: using local papers are an excellent way of getting your message out to the wider community.

Monitoring and reviewing

Once you have developed your communications strategy, it is important to monitor its effectiveness and achieving the objectives you set. This could be as simple as asking members if they have seen the news article in the local paper or received their e-newsletter and their thoughts on it. Another way is by looking at the number of visits to your website and the pages most visited.

A good communications plan is not something that is static. It constantly changes according to the nature of your club and the messages you need to communicate and the effectiveness of the channels you use to get your messages out. By constantly reviewing and updating your communications plan, you can learn new ways of communicating with your audiences and therefore contributing to success for your club.