5 tips for an effective communication strategy

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When it comes to customer experience, communication and engagement are two factors that heavily influence overall success. It's important to keep this in mind so your campaigns don't fall flat. For example, implementing a new business technology, like a customer engagement platform, can be a complex process that affects staff and customers. But a well-designed communication campaign that includes effective customer engagement and organizational change management activities can help the implementation go smoothly.

Successful strategies for technology implementation communications

Watch our latest webinar, available on-demand, to learn how to integrate organizational change management to ensure a successful communications campaign for technology implementations.

Watch now

Utilities often underestimate the importance of stakeholder communication and education, so we've pulled together five tips to help your team implement a successful communication strategy that will support a variety of activities and programs that may be on your horizon.

Before we dive into our tips, it's important to establish the key components of a thorough campaign strategy. While some of the elements can change depending on the project, we recommend taking the following steps to create a comprehensive strategy:

1. Outline goals, risks, and benefits
2. Facilitate the development of the overall branding
3. Identify key messages, stakeholders, and communication channels
4. Establish the means to measure the success of the campaign
5. Develop a schedule to serve as the living guide for project deliverables

Outline goals, risks, and benefits to build a strong foundation

Our first and possibly most important tip for designing an effective communication campaign is also our

recommended first step in designing a communication strategy. It serves as the foundation that determines the direction for the rest of the strategy and influences the long-term outcomes. Let's break down each element:

- *Goals.* Create specific communication goals and objectives rather than relying on the overall project goals to keep you on track.
- *Risks.* Identify risks during the planning phase so you're prepared to take a proactive approach in mitigating any pushback or concerns along the way.
- *Benefits.* Identify the benefits so you are prepared to answer the common stakeholder question, What's in it for me? Focus on benefits to individual stakeholders. For example, how will the change make a staff member's job easier? Or how will it help a customer save money or access their account information faster?

Implement strong organizational change management activities

Organizational change management (OCM) is the collection of tools, techniques, and mindsets that help organizations make sure people are ready to engage, willing to commit, and able to do what it takes to realize the full potential of solutions.

There are several ways to incorporate OCM best practices to support your staff during a transformational utility program or technology implementation:

- *Analyze stakeholders.* It can be a tedious process, but it's important to listen to and validate stakeholders' concerns. Make sure you understand their communication preferences.
- *Educate and engage staff.* A successful communication strategy should focus inward too. For example, if a customer calls with questions about your new program, contact center staff need to be able to provide accurate information and assistance. We suggest outlining a new program's benefits and clearly communicating them to all necessary stakeholders. Take it to the next level by conducting training and education sessions, making sure all departments understand the program's impact and can address customer inquiries.
- *Involve sponsors.* Engage with your sponsors early on to make sure they're actively participating throughout the project and serving as advocates for your vision.
- *Undertake reinforcement planning.* Reinforcement becomes important toward the end of (and even after) implementation to ensure long-term success. For example, a rewards and recognition program can keep the momentum going.

If you need help building understanding and buy-in for a new technology or other change, our consulting team can help you develop a custom strategy that will resonate with stakeholders. Our approach applies processes, tools, and techniques to help your staff effectively transition from business as usual to utility dream team. Contact us today to get started.

Keep customers informed about new technologies that affect them

Let's stick with our new business technology implementation example. If your utility is upgrading its customer information system (CIS) or rolling out advanced metering infrastructure (AMI), your customers (and your staff) will need to be engaged and prepared. There are many ways to keep customers in the loop.

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social media, mailed notices, door hangers, brochures, press releases, and community events.

To reach your entire customer base, we recommend using multiple channels, including your website, social media, mailed notices, door hangers, brochures, press releases, and community events. Spread the news—and critical information—far and wide to prevent confusion, disruption, and stress.

We covered these strategies and more in our recent webinar Successful strategies for technology implementation communications, now available to watch on demand.

Use storytelling to educate in an entertaining way

Many utilities struggle to engage customers with their content across various platforms. Don't underestimate the power of storytelling. It's an important tool to help you connect with your residential and business customers' values, senses, and emotions.

By presenting your company and its offerings in a story narrative—easily executed in emails, ads, and social media posts—you can entertain your customers and help them better remember your offerings. Effective storytelling frameworks include:

- *Hero's journey.* The hero's journey typically features a main character who sets out on a journey to make a change. They run into a problem but ultimately triumph, usually with a little help. It's can be an effective storytelling approach for utilities because you can show all the ways you help customers overcome obstacles with your programs, products, or services.
- *Wake-up call.* The wake-up call starts the scene in the middle of the conflict. Your customer is pulled into the drama, investigates the origin of the problem, and determines how they can solve it. You can present a product or program as the solution, serving as a wake-up call for the customer.
- *Before-and-after.* The before-and-after approach shows your customer in their *current* reality compared to their *ideal* reality. This approach helps you market your products or programs as ways to make customers' dreams become reality. This approach helps you market your products or programs as ways to make customers' dreams become reality.

For more frameworks, check out our e-book 8 storytelling frameworks for utilities. It includes effective storytelling examples that will influence how people feel about your utility's brand and highlight your unique value.

Get social and involved in the community to spread the word

If you need help getting the word out, lean on your local community and use social media. We recommend building partnerships with organizations and businesses in your community to expand the reach of your marketing campaigns.

Think about the organizations your customers interact with and the businesses they patronize. For example, ask grocery stores to display a flyer about your program or ask schools to send students home with a handout for their caregivers. Partnering with community organizations is a good way to reach specific customers and show you're involved in the community.

Another great way to spread the word is via social media. Utilities are engaging with customers on social media more than ever, meeting customers where they are. The most popular social media

platforms for utilities are:

- Facebook
- Twitter
- YouTube
- Instagram

But don’t be intimidated by social media trends. New platforms like are an opportunity to connect with even more customers. Stay tuned for our upcoming research on these emerging platforms.

And for inspiration, visit E Source Energy AdVision, our database of thousands of examples of utility marketing and advertising campaigns. You can find many examples of successful utility marketing campaigns that relied on community partnerships.

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