

**BILL BOOTHE**

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Member Communications

Don't Get Carried Away

Using technology to communicate with and engage members is a well-established trend in the private club industry.

Unfortunately, a great number of clubs are misusing these tools in a well-intentioned effort to increase member engagement. I'm specifically referring to email and text messaging, which have become the mainstay for clubs to keep their members up to date and informed. So, to avoid the pitfalls of electronic communications, here are a few tips to help guide your member engagement strategy.

Target your communications: It's okay to send a weekly or monthly email to all members highlighting what's going on across the club's amenity spectrum. But that should be it for the "shotgun approach." Unless it's an emergency notification or a very special occasion promotion, all other communications should be targeted. That means sending topical emails/texts to members based upon their specific interests.

Targeting requires some work on your part to create an easy and obvious method for members to tell you what interests them. Most common are "opt-in" lists offered on the club's website or mobile app. Members can quickly indicate their areas of interest and agree to receive communications on those topics. You may also issue a brief online survey to your membership requesting that members choose which topics they would like to be kept informed about.

Don't get carried away: Once you get your email/text program targeted, you might be tempted to overcommunicate with your members. This is one case where more isn't necessarily better. A good rule of thumb is to limit targeted messages to one or two a month. That way you can keep your target audiences informed without pestering them.

The unsubscribe trend: Increasingly we're hearing where members are choosing to unsubscribe from club communications. As might be expected, members become weary of receiving information on topics they have no interest in. The predictable result is to unsubscribe.

Of course, you should always allow members to unsubscribe from the club's communications, but in a way that offers them the option to continue receiving information on some topics and not others. Offering just a simple "unsubscribe" option encourages a blanket rejection of all club communications. When unsubscribing, members should always see the target topics available so they can make informed choices. In some cases, members intending to unsubscribe will actually add topics to their target list while opting out of others.

Email versus text messaging: Numerous studies have shown that text messaging (a.k.a. SMS) is more effective than email for communicating in a simple, straightforward manner. Open rates for texts are around 98 percent, while email offers a much lower open rate of 20-25 percent. However, longer more complex communications tend to lend themselves better to email. An effective strategy will involve a mixture of emails and texts to maximize effectiveness.

Bottom line: If you want to maximize your electronic communications with your members, without aggravating them, follow this simple rule: Target but don't overdo it. **BR**

