

Communication

Today's to-do list

We are going to start today with your mini-session on communication. We are going to look at some different methods and interactions you can add to your site to help with admin and improve customer communication.

Learning objectives:

By the end of this session, you will
Understand what communication methods are available
Identify ways to manage your communications better
Know what issues can arise and understand what to test.

4. So how might a customer get in touch with you?

Email off a website

Fill out a form on your website

Phone or text

Message through social media or GMB

WhatsApp

Website chat

Messenger

Zoom, Facetime, Teams or Skype

Each one of these methods works equally well, there's no right and wrong, it's just down to personal preference. Some people prefer WhatsApp, text and email. They are not big on picking up the phone and having a chat. Other people are different, they like to talk to people, chat and communicate.

It might depend on your industry, the tattoo industry for example communicates almost completely in Instagram messages. They are too busy being creative to talk to someone on the phone and very rarely use email.

Making sure you use the methods that your customers use is essential to make sure you are the most accessible. Of course, each one of these methods has its pros and cons and slightly different ways of being dealt with.

First and foremost, whichever communication method you use make sure you answer the messages. You don't want to put people off because you can't answer a simple email or reply to a web form.

If someone is contacting you, they want something. It sounds obvious but it's so often overlooked and can cause you real problems, bad feelings, and frustration. It's the cause of bad reviews and lost custom. They might want help or information before they buy, but it might be a problem after they have bought. Whichever one it is, it needs your time to deal with it.

Let's start with web forms and email links

Most importantly, make sure your forms work on your website. Always test every form and every email link to check you receive them ok.

As an example, take a big fancy marketing company down south working with people like Volkswagen and Kia. You would expect them to be on top of their game when it came to communication. They complain that they don't get any contacts through the website, and they didn't understand why no one had been in touch. When their new web designer looked at the site, the web forms went to the email address of the guy that had originally built their website, he'd gone bust about a year before. So, any form that anyone had to submit had gone to him, not the marketing agency. The form got reworked and was set to go to their generic info@ address. *"Who gets these emails? I'm going to do a test and I'll need you to check you get it ok"*

This was also the email address that the email links went to from the site. *"Oh, no one checks it..."* When they logged in there were over 2000 emails, at least a dozen of those were business enquiries from people that they were desperate to work with. Then they wonder why these people no longer take their calls or respond to their introductory emails.

Secondly, make sure you answer them in a timely fashion. If your potential customer has taken the time to contact you they need some information from you so make sure you get back to them, ideally within 24 hours.

Of course, unless you want to sit up all night every night, don't say you will reply to people within an hour. Be realistic with your response times.

We do live in an Amazon generation where people expect 24-hour chat and customer service. It's not practical for most of us. Make sure you set out your stall early, and let people know when they can expect a reply. If you only work three days a week, tell people that. If they know they won't get a reply until Wednesday they won't get so annoyed waiting for you and end up going off somewhere else.

Another thing to be aware of, especially if you have a WordPress website or use Microsoft 365 emails don't always get to their final destination. Microsoft especially despises any web-based email so sending email forms through your website it's a good chance that they won't always get to you. That's why it's so important to check all your forms. There are plenty of easy fixes and plugins like Postman SMTP and WPmail are set up for just that purpose and give you plenty of options for ways to fix the problem. Or you can use things like Flamingo that saves all the forms inside your website rather than relaying them. It might be just a case of adding an SPF record to your DNS like one of our examples in our first week.

It will depend on your hosting provider and the set up they run and the platform you are using as to which method is going to work the best for you.

WhatsApp

WhatsApp is currently owned by Facebook. Created as a closed messaging app to compete with Messenger. WhatsApp remains the most popular social messaging app, way out in front of Facebook Messenger. It might not seem the obvious choice for brands but with the introduction of the Business Profile, it's going more in that direction. The messages are secure and rather than being web-based and running off social platforms, WhatsApp is attached to your mobile number. It means better encryption for more secure messaging.

WhatsApp uses end-to-end encryption which means only the person sending and receiving can access the messages. There's been a lot about WhatsApp's security in the press recently, it's not that the security is bad, it's too good and those people that like to be able to access every email and every message we send have realised they can't. They want WhatsApp to reduce security and they have refused. It makes it the number one choice for business chat. And with the bonus of being able to send images and documents securely too, it's ideal as a business communication tool.

Ideal for customer service, WhatsApp messages are more direct and secure than email. Facebook has started rolling WhatsApp out across its business pages instead of Messenger as a chat option. Rather than an open advertising portal, think of it more as a direct marketing channel for your audience.

If you change your profile to the Business app, you can create a catalogue to showcase your products and services. Connect with your customers easily by using tools to automate, sort and quickly respond to messages. I use WhatsApp with a lot of my clients, we can create groups and they can share images and content with me, I can send them links or ask questions and I find I get a much better response rate than asking them on email

We have our own WhatsApp group for you to use in this Skills Bootcamp, it's a very useful app with a lot of features that are widely undervalued. WhatsApp is going to be one of the platforms that are going to get bigger and most useful as it goes along.

There are plugins and integrations with most platforms to add WhatsApp to your website as a chat feature too.

Social Media Messages.

Messaging through social media has become a popular way of getting in touch especially if you are selling products through your page. People find it quick and easy to dash off a note, especially through Facebook.

Social media messages through any of the platforms can get missed. If you are using multiple platforms then it's very easy to miss checking messages. A best practice is to set up autoresponders to give people more information. If you don't check the messages on that platform, signpost them off to somewhere where they can get in touch with you. If you are going to use the various platform messaging systems then make sure you have notifications turned on so you can see any direct messages when they come in.

Website Chat

A very popular tool, online chat has become a staple for anyone selling or needing to support customers. The ability to ask a quick question either about a problem or a pre-sale has become an essential part of your customer service routine. There are a couple of options for you if you decide to go down this route. Dashboard chat widgets like Zen desk, where you create an account, usually paid for monthly, you have a dashboard and people submit messages. The problem with that is it has to be manned at all times. If there's no one there and logged in then it will just show as offline and leave a message. Whilst that's

understandable at 9 p.m., at quarter past 10 on a Tuesday morning, not so much. The other option is something that's become hugely popular over the last couple of years, Messenger.

Messenger

A social messaging app owned by Facebook. Used by Facebook as part of its closed messaging system it branched out on its own as a popular chat app.

The creation of Rooms during lockdown allowed families and groups to chat on video and was designed to reconnect people. The beauty of it was that you could join a room without the need for a Facebook account, you just follow a link. Rooms have stayed around and are now available for people to drop in at any time.

Where Facebook is pushing WhatsApp as chat for your Facebook, they are pushing Messenger as the platform of choice to connect to your website.

Messenger chat has become a popular choice for any business that's not always sitting at their computer waiting to talk. You can pick up your messages wherever you are whether that's in the office or not. One thing to bear in mind is if the person contacting you does not like or follow your page they submit their question as a guest and you only have a limited time to respond before it's closed so make sure you keep an eye on guest messages.

Messenger plugins can be installed on nearly all platforms and the messages go directly to your business Facebook Messenger account. You can read the messages at your leisure and reply when it's appropriate. People can see when you have read the message so make sure you reply at the time of reading but you can send autoresponders with opening times or ways of contacting you.

Set automatic replies if you can that state opening times and when you will respond to messages. People forget that they can contact you at any time of the day or night and you might not be there to respond. Manage expectations and set auto-replies that tell them when they can expect an answer. Remember with WhatsApp and social messaging the sender can see when you have read their message so if you are not going to reply straight away, don't read it until you are ready to reply. Otherwise, they will feel like you have ignored them.

How Messenger can help develop your business

Bamber Sewing Machines uses Messenger chat, it's reduced returns by over 50% and increased sales and sales area. There is always someone around to pick up the messages. People can ask for recommendations and be sent to the right product so it cuts down on buying the wrong thing, therefore reducing returns. They can ask for help if they have a problem rather than have to come in the shop and take up time that the staff could be used in the workshop or training rooms. Unlike the majority of their competitors' sites, they use a chat feature so people can find out what they need to know before they purchase. They are reassured that there is a real person at the other end who is knowledgeable about their subject. During lockdown when the shop was shut and people were sewing like crazy, the Messenger App became an essential part of the business. People couldn't get into the shop, there was no one there to answer the phones so they struggled to get the help they needed. Enter Messenger. Using the chat feature on the website, customers were able to ask for

help with repairs or problems. The shop owner, Alan was able to send pictures, links and even video demos to the customers to show them how to fix the problem.

Where their competitors told their customers to wait until the shop reopened, Bamber's was able to help their customers remotely. It meant that they increased their service area from a 30-mile radius of the shop to nationwide. When the shop and the workshop reopened, people sent their machines in by courier for service and repair rather than take them to their nearest dealers because they had had the help they needed, when they need it and wanted to carry on using that company.

They now use Messenger not only to communicate but also to help with their everyday jobs. They send video surveys of machines to customers when their machines come in for service as you get at a car dealer when your car goes in for service. They can show them problems, and fixes they have made, and show them replacing parts so that the customer can see the work has been done not just charged for.

Communicate well

There are lots of reasons why a customer would get in touch with you and there are lots of things you can do to reduce the number of contacts. If you have to spend time answering endless messages it can get in the way of actually doing your job.

By providing more information, avoiding problems and mistakes and using some of the tools available in the platforms you can cut down on admin and help your business run more smoothly.

Signposting and autoresponders

Using the autoresponders in the social media platforms you can give people FAQs like appropriate pages and direct replies to pre-set questions.

Example: Ginger Bistro in Fulwood get a huge amount of communications through their Facebook page. The way their booking system works it's impractical to take bookings over the phone and through email and social media. It's a full-time job just checking the messages. When it's just two staff in the bistro trying to serve and trying to run all the admin it can get a bit much. They use Facebook auto responders to signpost people off to the appropriate pages. The majority of the messages are asking to see a menu, the opening times and to make a booking. So, the auto-reply gives them opening hours and links to the menu and booking portal on the website.

The information they need is all there, fully accessible but it probably cuts down on around 3 hours of admin a day.

Using FAQs and information on your website forms is another useful way to help cut down on the responses needed. If you've ever tried to send a message through your bank or insurance company they often have a list of FAQs or tech sites that have links to knowledge portals where you can get the info you need without actually having to speak to someone.

‘Signposting’ is a good way to send people off to the areas where they can get the information they need without you having to spend time writing the same old replies.

Example: Atom scooters had an issue a while ago with Argos who was selling a really cheap and not very cheerful kids' scooter. It fell apart when it came out of the box. The people that had bought the scooter were jumping on Google and looking up Atom Scooter and landing on the wrong site. After wasting days writing the same responses to often extremely rude people they got in touch and asked if there was anything we could do on the form to stop people from sending the messages. We added this little disclaimer on to the contact form, with links to the appropriate places and the emails stopped overnight. They worked out they had spent over 24 hours in two weeks answering these messages when they could have been doing far more useful things.

Practical Brief

Thinking about the communication tools we have just discussed and the content elements like the signposting and forms, we want you to add to any one of the builds you have done this week. Incorporate contact methods that are appropriate to you, it might be web forms or chat widgets. Think about utilising signposting and FAQ sections to cut down on admin and give your viewers the information they need without having to ask.

What we want to see:

- Pick at least 2 communication methods
- Tests of your forms or emails
- Additional content sections with relevant links to emails, forms or content that could form an FAQ or further information signpost.

You can use any of the builds you have created this week, whichever you are most comfortable with or you may choose to do different elements on each one. Email us screenshots or links to the relevant pages to dms4alltrainers@gmail.com

Extra help

If you need any help with anything from today's session, feel free to message me in the WhatsApp group. If you have any other issues or problems related to the course or the tools speak to Andrew and Irfana, they are here to help you.