

# The real reasons UTILITIES & MUNICIPALITIES NEED TO COMMUNICATE WITH CUSTOMERS

Thanks to David Letterman, we all enjoy a good top 10 list. Now, this list isn't in any particular order but it does include the top 10 reasons we hear of why utilities and municipalities do not communicate, or do not communicate regularly, or do not provide high quality outreach.

- |   |  |    |
|---|--|----|
| 1 "I just don't have enough time"                     | "My boss is an engineer and doesn't value it"  | 2  |
| 3 "It's not in the budget"                            | "We can just get free stuff out there"   | 4  |
| 5 "Our customers don't care"                          | "We don't want to be too successful with programs or tips b/c then we'll lose revenue" | 6  |
| 7 "We tried a couple of years ago and it didn't work" | "We don't want to stir up controversy"   | 8  |
| 9 "People don't read the stuff anyway"                | "We don't want to get noticed"   | 10 |

Do any of these ring true to you? Or maybe they all do! Well, no matter the reason for not doing it, we want to provide our 10 reasons for why utilities and municipalities MUST provide quality outreach to customers and citizens.

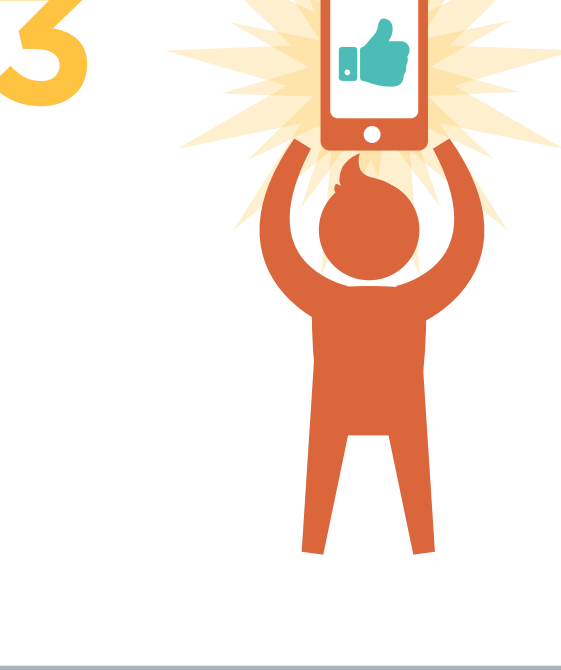


## 1 It's Noisy out there!

When it comes to outreach, noise is anything that takes away from your intended recipient receiving your messaging. It could be a phone ringing, lots of mail in the mailbox and it even includes 'ineffective marketing' because the result is that the consumer misses your message. So, it's important to offer targeted, on point, attractive communications with clear and fun messaging and creative concepts. You have to break through the noise.

## Consistency

Communication once a year doesn't do it. Research shows that consumers need to see advertising seven times is a general rule of thumb in the advertising and marketing Industry(1). This doesn't mean you have to do the same thing 7 times. Here's an example: one consumer may read a bill insert, while another sees the message on the side of a truck; yet another reads the door hanger while not reading the insert. Both of them see the message on their bills on line and delivered via mail. The reality is that consumers are different and they will notice messages in different formats. Yet, they will all recall the messaging when they see it multiple times. For many, they don't even notice it the first time you send it; therefore multiple messages and channels provide the most success.



## 3 Empower your Customers

Today's customer is different from ten years ago. From mobile apps, voice activated phones to being able to find answers to their questions any time of day via Google, your customers and citizens want the power in their own hands. Therefore, you need to provide easy to find access to programs, pricing, bills, tips to save money etc and they need to be able to access it quickly and on demand.

## 4 It's not expensive like you think.

Now, you can absolutely have very expensive communication plans, but tight budgets are typical with cities and utilities and there are experts in your industry whose goals are to work with your small budgets to create top of the line outreach on the hottest topics. There are some things you can probably tackle yourself, but hiring out projects and/or a consultant with expertise in outreach to help plan and execute your strategy can be very affordable. And, the cost analysis is well worth it because you do have happier customers.



## 5 Value Service Chain (2)

This concept is simple and includes communication to internal employees as well. If employees are communicated with and feel a part of the team, they produce higher quality work. If customers are communicated with, they are happier customers. Happier customers treat your team better on the phones, when they are out working on neighborhood streets or in businesses giving inspections. Then, your team is happier a positive circle creating higher retention of employees and a smoother running operation.

## 6 Content is King

More than ever with social media and internet marketing, content is king. It's how companies communicate with their customers and it may be very indirect. Offering tips 10 tips for conservation with their online bill is one way to use content with reach our relationships with your customers. The more content and knowledge you can share with your customers, the more they look to you as a resource and expert in your industry...which you are.

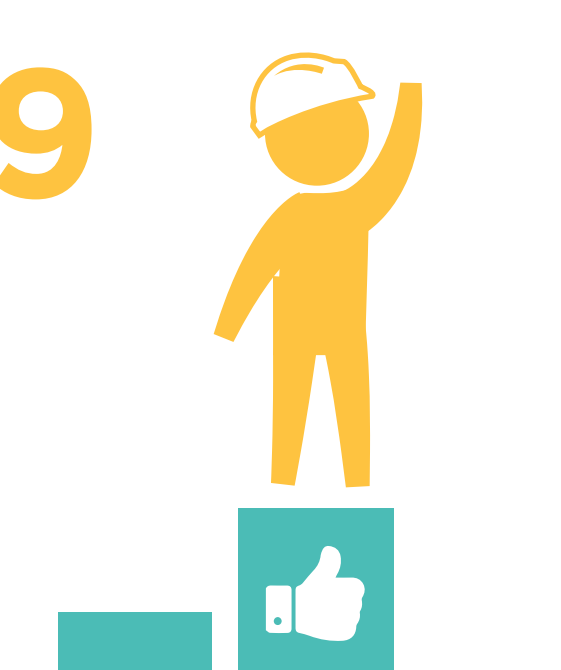


## 7 You are professionals

It takes trained professionals and sophisticated systems to provide clean, quality water and electricity to customers every day. Therefore your communication quality should match the hard work and dedication your organization has to delivering high quality services.

## 8 Become a Thought Leader

You are the provider of services that make your customers lives easier. In fact they can go about their daily routine without having to think twice about turning on the lights, the faucet or flushing the toilet and doing laundry. So, as you lead the way in systems to provide these services, you should match that with helping your customers understand what you do and why you do it. Sharing insight on ways to save money, natural resources, reasons to upgrade their systems, developing technologies, pilot programs etc, all help your customers see you as a leader in the industry and a more valued resource. It may just make it easier to pay that bill each month as customers

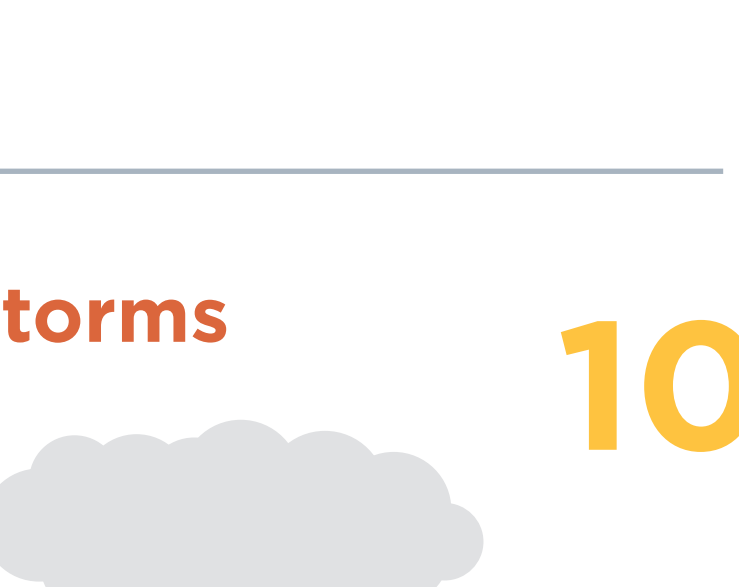


## 9 Build Trust and Your Brand

By providing consistent, high quality communications over time, your customers start to trust you. Your utility/municipality builds a brand that is trustworthy because you are providing valuable information to your customers. Instead of just being a bill at the end of every month, customers realize you provide options, tips and are a valued resource...your brand is built beyond a tagline with your logo.

## 10 YOU can better weather the storms

When a brand is built, communications are consistent, knowledge is passed on the how, why and what and a relationship is built with customers. Then, if there's an outage, a violation, a rate increase or some other perceived or real 'storm', your customers are likely to handle it better because they have an understanding and relationship beyond just a bill.



Footnote 1: Armstrong, G. & Kotler, P. (2014). Marketing: An introduction (10th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, and Kerin, R. A., Hartley, S. W., & Rudelius, W. (2011). Marketing (10th ed.). New York, NY: McGraw Hill Irwin.  
2. QuickMBA.com



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