

Critical Communications Guide

Overview

We interviewed MLSs from around the country who represent different sized organizations. The goal was to understand how MLSs approached the challenge of communicating complex policies to their members and which tactics they employ to successfully educate members during highly charged times.

Core principles

Step 1: Listen.

Open all channels. Read emails. Observe social media. Establish notification systems so that hot topics are flagged and surfaced to the appropriate executives. Talk to front line support staff daily. Understand intimately what is concerning your members.

Step 2: Decide.

Quickly establish your organization's point of view with input from your stakeholders. Those positions can change as the situations evolve, but this is not the time for analysis paralysis. You need to be early and ahead of the curve.

Step 3: Create the content.

Don't overthink or over-overproduce. Your mantra should be "Less is more. More of less."

The 3Cs of Critical Communications

- Communicate with Clarity
- Communicate with Compassion
- Communicate with Confidence

Step 4: Broadcast your message.

Start internally with employees and managers and make sure they know what to say - they are your strongest evangelists. Schedule and roll out evenly across **all available channels**.

Step 5: Repeat.

Don't worry about over-communicating. Flood the zone.

Audience

In the past, MLSs have treated membership as a single, homogeneous audience. However, all agents' participation in the MLS is not created equal, and they should not be treated as such.

Some MLSs are starting to segment their communication efforts into different audience lists based on production, years in the business, location and other factors.

Understand how and where each of those segments interact with the MLS and tailor the delivery of your message accordingly.

Channels

Must-haves

- Email is still the most viable means of regular communication. Dust off your weekly newsletters or repurpose existing newsletters to make the point.
- Video is a quick and easy way to show personality, empathy and - in this environment, in particular - a human face. As a substitute for face-to-face efforts or in-person, consider video chat or hosting webinars or other live events for larger groups.
- In-app communications are an important touchpoint but are often ignored when members are in transactional or task-based mode.
- Social media should be used judiciously to share more bite sized announcements but requires constant monitoring and oversight for responses.
- The media is an important amplifier of your message. Consider regular press releases and conducting media relations efforts to local outlets. However, stay on top of what your brokers are doing in the market and make sure you are not getting out in front of their efforts.

Nice-to-haves

- Audio and video podcasts are a growing medium but consider making appearances on other established shows in your market - rather than starting something new.
- Find and connect with local influencers (e.g. agents who have large online followings) who you can activate and help spread your message. A respected advocate (usually a peer from outside of your organization) can help share the message so that it isn't just coming from one source.

Content

- Showcase your unique perspective. Determine what data points and information you can readily dispense around activity in the market.
- Visuals (infographics, motion graphics videos) are a helpful way to impart complex information around important topics in a manner that is easily digestible and shareable.
- Guard your credibility and don't spread misinformation. Double check every fact. Use reputable primary sources (ie. government or institutions) and don't rely on the media.
- Use humor sparingly. Let your audience create and share humorous memes. It often backfires coming from companies or brands.

Techniques

- Establish a 'war room' and designate one person on your team to be the point person for all communications going out the door. Also establish a spokesperson who is comfortable being the public face of your company.
- Work out an editorial calendar and stick to it. Make sure the daily tasks are achievable and there is accountability.
- Measure all your efforts. Track open rates, video views etc. Adjust accordingly.
- Remain flexible. All of this guidance should be subject to change.