



What Forms of Communication Do Your Members Value Most?



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The Art of Communication

Clubs interact with their members in a variety of ways. When members visit their clubs face-to-face communication channels are via both reception and fitness staff. Away from the club members receive communication via telephone calls, SMS, email and social media. In this report from the TRP 10,000™ study, we examine the level of communication members have received, what specific channels of communication they value and whether the quantity and type of communication is associated with membership retention.

What is TRP 10,000™?

TRP 10,000™ is the biggest and most comprehensive survey of member behaviour ever carried out in the health and fitness industry. 10,000 health and fitness members completed a baseline survey of their exercise habits and membership behaviour between July and September 2013. During regular intervals over the coming years they will be followed up to measure changes to their habits and membership behaviour.

Data and analysis

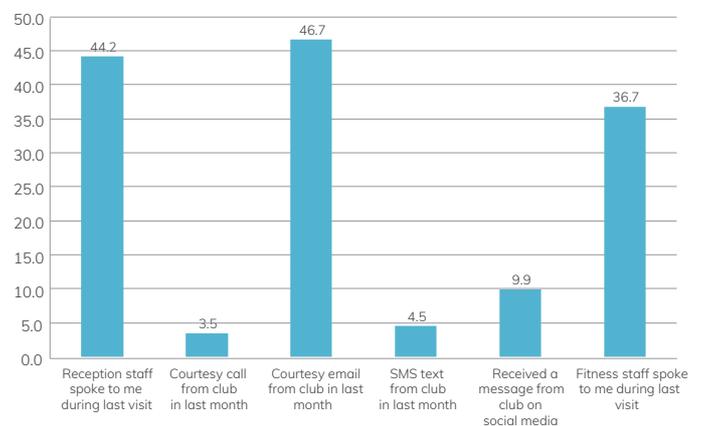
The results reported in this article are for members who completed the survey between July and September 2013 and who were followed up until the end of January 2014. During the follow up period 1,526 of participating members cancelled their membership.

Members were asked whether during their last visit reception and/or fitness staff spoke to them. In addition they were asked whether they had received a courtesy telephone call or email, a SMS text or a message/information via social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter etc). Finally, members were asked to indicate how much they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements about how much they valued each channel of communication.

Results

Figure 1 shows the proportion of members who reported receiving each type of communication. Less than half of members reported that fitness staff and reception staff spoke to them during their last visit. The most common form of communication away from the club was via email, with just under half of members reporting receiving a courtesy email within the last month.

Figure 1. Proportion of members reporting different communication methods

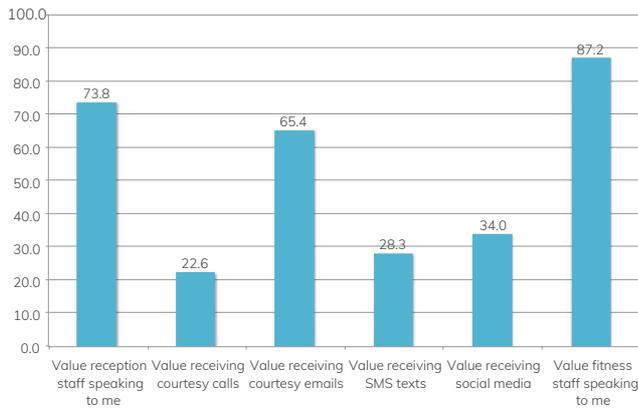


Does communication vary according to gender, age, and length of membership?

Table 1 shows that females are more likely to receive face-to-face and telephone communication than males but a little less likely to receive a courtesy email. Face-to-face and telephone communication increases by age group but older members are less likely to receive communication via social media. Longer standing members are much more likely to report being spoken to by reception staff at their last visit compared to newer members. This is also true for fitness staff communication albeit the difference is smaller. Although longer standing members are less likely to receive a SMS text than newer members there are no clear trends in external club communications by length of membership. Members who use their club more frequently report receiving more communication from reception and fitness staff, via telephone and social media.



Figure 2. Proportion of members who say they value different types of communication

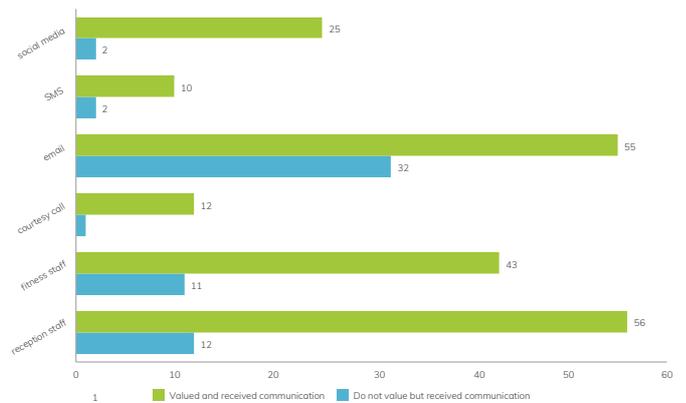


Do members receive the communication methods they value?

The green columns in Figure 3 show the percentage of members who report both receiving and valuing each type of communication. The blue columns show the percentage of members who report receiving each type of communication but who do not say they value them. For example, 56% of members who value being spoken to by reception staff say they were spoken to by reception staff at their last visit and 12% of members who do not value being spoken to by reception staff were spoken to. The green columns highlight the fact that there is considerable scope for increasing all types of communication to members that would value it and this is especially true in the three most valued communication types, fitness and reception staff interactions and courtesy emails.

As noted above, the blue bars in Figure 3 represent members who did not value each of the communication methods and one stands out. Nearly a third of members who said they did not value email communication reported they had received emails. As 32% of members do not value email communication there is the potential to irritate quite a number of members with unsolicited emails. Perhaps surprisingly, just a quarter of the members who value communication via social media actually report receiving any.

Figure 3. Proportion of members receiving communications according to whether they value them



Is communication associated with retention?

Retention rates were calculated based on the time from questionnaire completion (when all members were live) to either the cancellation date (for cancelled members) or the 31st January 2014 for live members. Communication methods were separated into two groups. Face-to-face communications were scored '0' if members reported no reception of fitness staff communication at their last visit, '1' if either member of staff spoke to them and '2' if both spoke to them. Too few records were available to examine each of the other methods separately, so external communications were assigned '1' if any were reported (telephone calls, emails, SMS text and social media) or '0' if none were reported.

Figure 4 shows that compared to not being spoken to at their last visit, members who report being spoken to by either the reception staff or fitness staff have higher retention rates. Further, members who are spoken to by both sets of staff have even higher rates. These findings are true for members at any stage of their membership (data not shown).



Figure 4

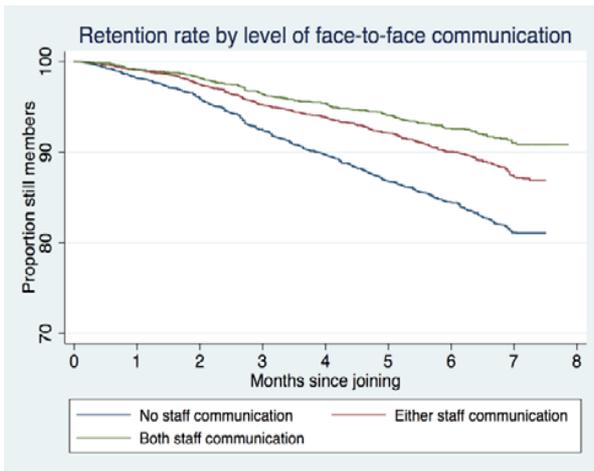
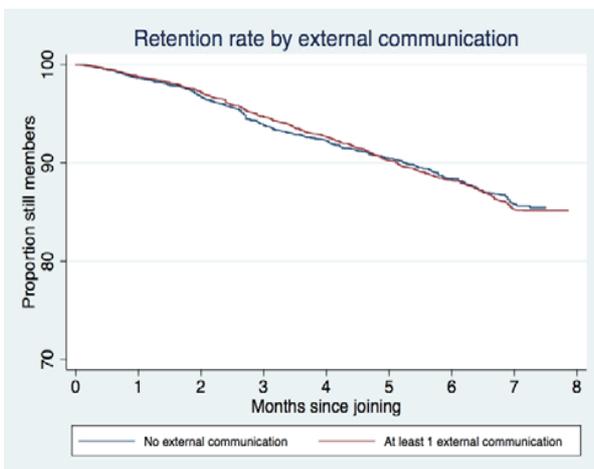


Figure 5 shows that receiving external communications in the previous month is unrelated to membership retention at any period after joining.

Figure 5



Although numbers are a little small to formally report, there is a general trend in the data that indicates that members who receive the communication style they value have the highest retention rates and those who do not receive what they value have the lowest rates. Only one exception to this trend was observed. Members who received emails they did not value had lower retention rates than members who valued them and did not receive them suggesting that unsolicited emails may well be detrimental.

Summary

Members primarily value face-to-face communication from both reception and fitness staff and members receiving such communication significantly improve their retention rates. Despite the direct effect on retention, less than half of members say that reception and fitness staff spoke to them at their last visit. Emails are also valued by around two thirds of members but again 45% of members do not receive them. On the other hand 32% of members who do not value emails received them and there is some evidence that this may increase the risk of cancelling. Other forms of communication, such as courtesy telephone calls, SMS texts and social media are less popular overall but in some groups are still valued.

External communications appear not to be targeted to specific demographic groups or members who prefer certain types to others and they seem to be unrelated to length of membership or visit frequency. The low overall level of external communication and the lack of targeted and tailored messages may explain why such communication is not associated with membership retention.

Recommendations

- Develop a targeted communication strategy designed to maximise opportunities to interact with members within and outside of the club.
- Create a conversation culture within the club – implement methods to maximise face-to-face communications and monitor progress.
- Identify preferences – consult with members to understand how and when they want to be communicated with. If nothing else, work in line with the preferences identified in this article.
- Target emails – ensure emails are only sent to those members who value them.
- Restrict unsolicited telephone calls – only call members who have expressed a desire to receive them.





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