

THE BROKER'S GUIDE TO EFFECTIVE CLIENT COMMUNICATION TOOLS



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INTRODUCTION

It has never been more important to communicate with clients, especially if there is no prospect of meeting them face to face.

As the COVID-19 outbreak spread, AWeber data showed that on 12 March 2020, a whopping 12% of all emails sent on their platform mentioned the coronavirus. Many of the emails will have been sent by schools, airlines and other businesses to reassure people, but the result is that many people have overflowing inboxes and many of the communications simply won't be read.

Something different has to be done.

The technology is there, and it has evolved with consumer behaviour to make communication a seamless digital experience when done right.

Clients want to experience service on their terms, in their time, in their way. They don't always want to phone up and chase you for an update - some want to log into a portal at any time and find the information they need. Others would prefer a weekly text message update.

With communication changing, so should the way businesses communicate. This guide looks at how that can be achieved, so that the modern broker makes the most of the latest tech to enable customers to have the best experience possible.

OMNICHANNEL COMMUNICATION: WHAT IS IT?

Omnichannel refers to unified communications across multiple channels. This approach allows consumers to have a seamless brand experience as content is optimised for each channel and device.

Put simply, omnichannel marketing means you provide consistent, on-brand communications across multiple customer touchpoints with a strategy that includes online and offline channels such as:

- **Mobile apps**
- **Social media profiles**
- **Brick and mortar stores**
- **Online reviews**
- **Websites**
- **Email marketing**
- **Customer service resources**

A well-executed omnichannel communication strategy roughly translates to a business creating a consistent, easily recognisable and integrated customer experience across all of the above.



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WHO ARE YOU TALKING TO?

Before you throw yourself into the latest Twitter trend or embrace Snapchat, think about who your audience is.

They will generally fall into one of three groups, each with their own worries and stresses:

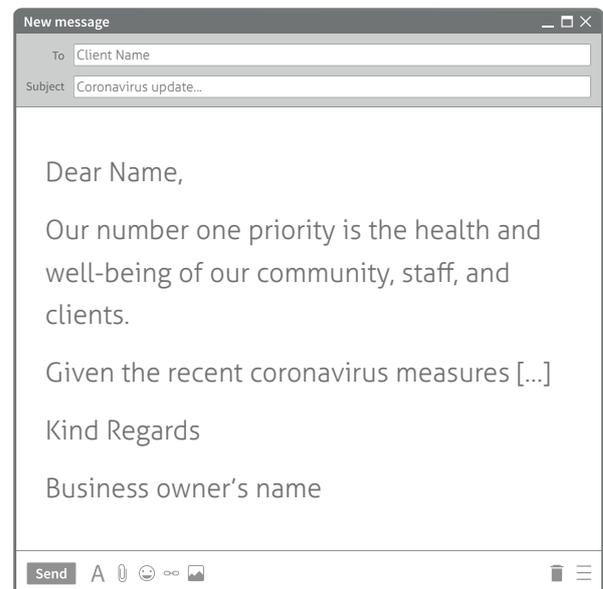
- **Existing clients:** These will want information about their mortgage, especially if their existing mortgage product is coming to the end of its term. They might even want to know about house prices in their local area. It's important your communications are of reassurance: position yourself as an adviser who is looking out for them.
- **Prospects:** In times of trouble, people seek advice. So it's important you are available to reassure new clients and ensure they don't make rash decisions without understanding how the housing market is currently positioned.
- **Professional connections:** These will also have clients in the same boat, worried about the uncertainty and looking for help. If you are delivering the right communications at the right time, you're more likely to benefit from a referral.

Logging communications preferences is vital and a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system lets you do that at scale. The information stored can be a contact's details, a description of their challenges and even whether they prefer to be referred to by a nickname.

WHAT DO YOU WANT TO SAY?

Knowing what to say, especially when you know clients are going through a difficult time, is very hard. You don't want to come across as 'salesy', but nor do you want to be just another email of reassurance in their inbox.

After all, we've probably all seen the following email:



First and foremost, it's important to communicate early and often, even if you don't have all of the details or don't necessarily have many updates. People who trust you with their mortgages – the roof over their head - want to hear from you. Besides, in the absence of any information from you, even if it's the same information slightly updated, they will fill the vacuum by listening to your competitors.



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The best businesses are those that are transparent about their own challenges, and share openly what is or is not working for them while also asking for ideas and suggestions thus engaging their clients and making them feel valued and part of something beyond their situation.

Ultimately, you're building trust.

WHAT TECH CAN YOU USE?

In the middle of a crisis, using multiple forms of communication is key. After all, you might have crafted an excellent email, but your clients' inboxes are probably full. So double up your message with a social media message, or even offer a video call.

Here is the technology that is transforming businesses into digital communication pros.



Voice/VOIP

Voice Over Internet Protocol, or VOIP, is a phone service over the internet. As long as your internet connection is good, you'll get a reasonably clear phone service delivered online as opposed to a phone company.

Pros

- Lower cost
- Increased accessibility
- Easily scalable across a business
- Clear voice quality
- Supports multitasking

Cons

- Reliable internet connection is required
- Possible latency if internet speed slows
- No location tracking for emergency calls

Note

A hosted VoIP system can cost from £10 per user per month up to £50 per user per month. Total costs will vary depending on the number of users, one-time hardware costs, and any required network enhancements.

Equipment

VoIP hardware consists of a router, modem, and either an ATA or IP phone.



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Email

Email isn't just one of the oldest methods of digital communication. With the growth of mobile and wearable tech, inbox providers are redefining engagement and deliverability, and email service providers (ESPs) are redefining personalisation and targeting. The channel is constantly evolving and becoming more versatile, and businesses need to keep up with the latest developments.

Pros

- Capturing all customer engagement in a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system
- Setting email reminders
- Monitoring open rates
- Having the possibility of regular newsletters
- Sending clients links to interesting news items
- Setting up triggered auto emails

Cons

- Possibility of information overload, meaning some messages are dismissed and unread
- Lack of personal touch versus a phone or video call
- Mistakes and misunderstandings can have serious consequences
- Emails can contain viruses
- Emails have to be brief to be engaging

Equipment

Email only requires a computer and an internet connection.



Social Media

Social media platforms let you connect with your audience to build your brand, increase sales, and drive website traffic. The major social media platforms (at the moment) are Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, YouTube, and Snapchat.

Pros

- Low cost
- Access to large audiences
- Fast, with messages becoming out of date within a matter of minutes on some platforms
- Direct interaction with customers
- Brand loyalty - regular interaction builds trust, which can lead to more business

Cons

- Time-consuming
- Tone of voice used needs to reflect the platform. Eg Twitter is casual while LinkedIn is professional.
- Return on investment can take a while, depending on your audience and the time you dedicate
- Risk of poor publicity if a customer has a bad experience and takes it out on you through social media
- Loss of control if negative reviews go viral
- Brand voice can become diluted if too many people manage your account and don't have a synchronised strategy

Equipment

As with email, you only need a computer and an internet connection.



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Video Chat

Video chat is a powerful communication platform that provides real-time assistance to your customers. Chatting face to face builds trust between the customer and your brand.

Pros

- Even more personal than a voice call
- Shows professionalism, especially if all your staff are trained on best practices
- Record calls for training
- Builds a strong connection with the client
- Zero distractions, the client knows they have 100% of your attention
- Reduced cost as it can replace some face-to-face meetings which would involve travel

Cons

- Training is vital, and costs need to be considered
- Can take time for staff to adjust to using the technology
- Cost of setup needs to be considered if your staff need cameras or microphones

Equipment

You will need a computer or video-conferencing machine, a webcam or camera, a monitor, an external microphone and an internet connection.



Instant message

Instant messaging, or IM, is a real time and interactive communication tool that is generally preferred by customers wanting immediate responses to problems versus other tools such as email or SMS. Popular applications include Messenger, WhatsApp, Viber, Telegram, and We Chat.

Pros

- Cost effective as you avoid long distance tariffs on traditional phone calls
- Real time communication with immediate responses
- Convenience as the tools are available across a range of devices
- Avoid trawling through your inbox for messages
- Easily archive whole conversations to save an audit trail

Cons

- Cost of staff training to handle live issues with care
- Mistakes can be damaging to your reputation



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Client Portal

A client web portal is a secure website that provides your clients with a single point of access to company information that is relevant to them, such as policies, mortgage information, communications, fees payable etc.

Pros

- 24/7 access for the client to view their information
- Improved client experience and retention levels
- Enhanced visibility of transactional information

Cons

- Some portals are overloaded with unnecessary services: try to keep it simple
- Portals can become out of date if not maintained

AND FINALLY

Be prepared to adapt how you communicate with different generations as they will all have their preferences and habits.

Storing and using data is vital, and a central CRM allows you to do that and share it with other members of the team to know when and through what technology clients like to be communicated with.

So as we get used to the available technology, the modern world is set to become frictionless. The future is about self-serve and clients wanting communication on their terms.

REMEMBER: don't use too many new channels for the sake of being new and different, especially social platforms - think about where your audience is, what your competitors are doing and what your customers prefer.





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