

Manage communication

by commusoft 

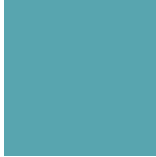


Increase your repeat business

Repeat business is the most profitable, and once your customers are in a database that is fit for purpose, communicating to get repeat business gets a whole lot easier and more effective. Engaging with your customers regularly and sensibly will help you to grow your plumbing, oil heating, electrical or gas service business with less effort. All too many companies focus their marketing communications on advertising for new customers. The reality is that new business comes primarily as a result of referrals from satisfied existing customers. So communicating with them effectively not only gets you profitable repeat business – it is also a good way to get new business.

The question is: how much communication? Too little and they might forget you – or think you don't value their business – and go to a competitor. Too much and they will think that you are being a nuisance or that you are "desperate". In fact, maintaining a healthy relationship with a customer is a fine balancing act, rather like maintaining a healthy and successful romantic relationship!



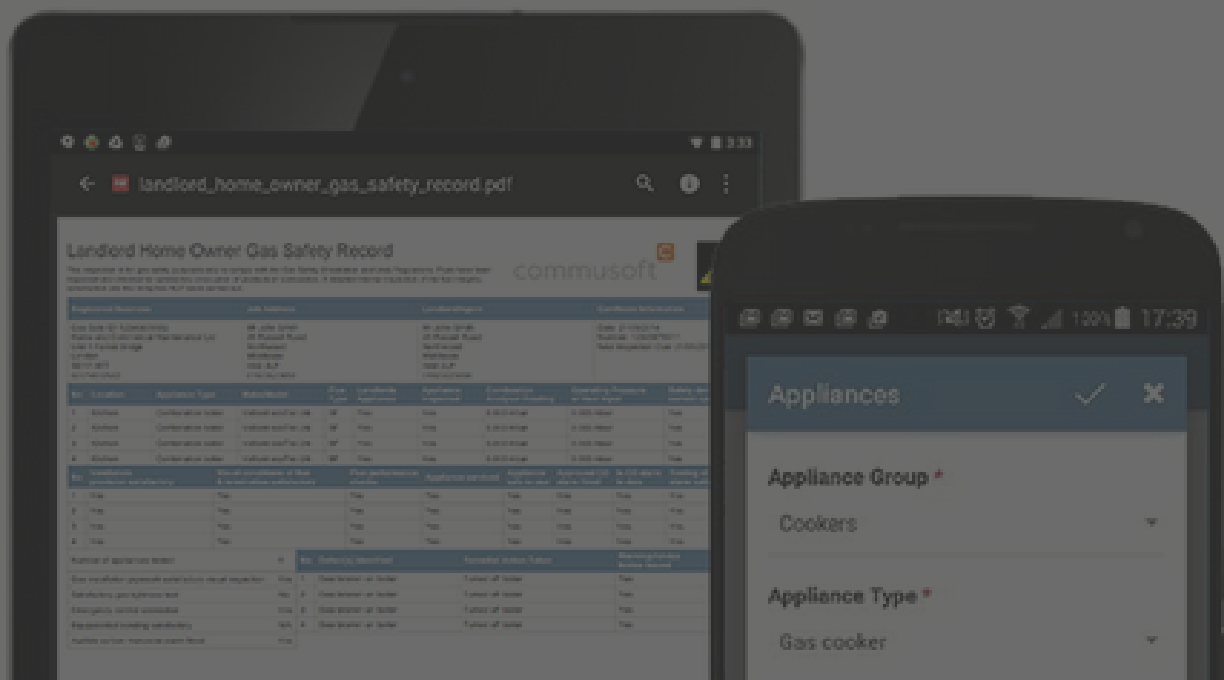


So how do you keep customers “warm” – without spamming? Here are a few simple ground rules.

As in a romantic relationship, everything needs to be based on give and take, in other words, as close as possible to 50-50. If you can provide something useful in each communication, you will often be rewarded. A simple and timely service reminder – one that is not too pushy, but rather focuses on the benefit of regular servicing – is not only the simplest, but probably the most effective of all. With a customer database, identifying which customers are due for a service reminder becomes a matter of pushing a couple of buttons.

But you can get more creative in your communications. For example, business customers like to read case studies and testimonials, so long as they are relevant. Have you recently installed a new boiler for a hotel? Then let customers in similar lines of business know about it (be sure to get the customer’s permission to do so first, however).



People like pictures (they are often worth a 1,000 words). However, once again it is worth investing some time and effort to make the photograph as appealing as possible. A link to a video (for example a tutorial posted on your website or YouTube) can be even better.



Consider communication holistically

Bear in mind the full spectrum of your communications and make sure they are working together effectively. Your email campaigns will include a link to your website, so take a look at it. Does it inform, or merely promote? Consider writing a regular blog that provides useful tips to consumers of water, electricity or gas. Don't give everything away at once – update regularly, and when you do update, let the relevant customers know with a short “teaser” by email or via social media. Again, this is an opportunity to give something rather than simply promote, which makes your communication more useful to the recipients.

It costs five times as much to recruit a new customer as it does to retain an existing one. And the best form of advertising is a referral from a satisfied customer. Think of that when you plan your communications!



What we have described here is what marketers call content and context marketing. Content: provide something useful and informative with every communication. Context: provide the right information at the right time for the right customer. So once again we come back to the good old service reminder. Simple but effective: it demonstrates in a non-pushy manner that you are looking after customers (content) and (if you are using your customer database effectively) it does this at precisely the right time (context).

Finally, there is another very important word in every marketer's toolbox: empathy. In practical terms, this means putting yourself in your customer's shoes before you send any communication. Then ask yourself: would I welcome this communication? Does it make my life easier? Or am I just going to push the delete button? By looking at the information about the customer in your database, you are far more likely to make the right call, so that every communication is welcome.

Get these things right and you will build up a loyal following that will take your service company to the next level.



Manage seasonal fluctuations

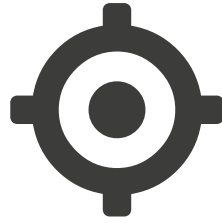
Another common challenge for gas and heating service engineering companies is the seasonal overload. Effective and timely communication is an important part of the solution.

Changing customer behaviour is hard. They typically only call when they have a problem, and that usually means in winter, when they turn on the heating for the first time in months. They are not going to test it early (testing boilers does not appear high on many people's summer "to-do" list and some might even be afraid of testing a boiler in case it breaks).

As a result, you may be left twiddling your thumbs through the summer months only to be pulling your hair out come October or November when you have to cope with all the leaks, boiler breakdowns and new installations. There simply aren't enough hours in the day.

Convincing customers to think about having their gas safety certificates done in August or September is never going to be easy, but if you get it right, you can create an excellent business opportunity.

Seasonal offers are a great way to smooth out the peaks and troughs in your plumbing and heating business. They could involve a discount or additional services that you provide for free – such as offering a free Legionella test and certificate. However, you should take a few things into consideration before you take any action.


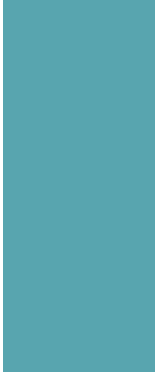


Target your marketing

First and foremost, it is not a good idea to make blanket offers. Targeted marketing is more effective – so you need to segment your customer database and think “What offer would make most sense to people in this segment?”

A blanket offer is like a machine gun – you may well hit a target but you will cause a lot of collateral damage and you will waste a lot of ammunition! For example, customers who have just had a new boiler installed are hardly going to welcome an offer of a discount for an early service. They have just forked out for an expensive appliance so it’s more likely that they will be infuriated.

A targeted offer is like a single rifle shot from a crack marksman. It hits the customer with precisely the right offer at the right moment. If you have a large number of customers, this is made much easier if you can do an intelligent search and filter of your database to create segments. You should then tailor your message to the different segments (or ideally to the individual customer). Remember the word I used above: empathy. Get the right message and the right tone of voice: the way you address a business customer is not the way you would address a young single person, or an elderly couple. Put yourself in the customer’s shoes and think, “Am I likely to respond to this offer?” If you are unsure, ask someone. For example, if you have a young, single son or daughter, they will soon tell you what sounds cool and what doesn’t.



It is of course tempting to make a generalised offer in the hope of getting a bigger response. Now that you have a customer database, you can and should resist this temptation.

Second, don't make the mistake of thinking that customers are only interested in discounts. Few people are likely to reorganise their summer plans based on a 5% or 10% discount. On the other hand, a more substantial discount will cut into your margins and perhaps make you look desperate or "cheap".

An offer of additional services is often the better option if it leads customers to think that they are getting some additional value or convenience, for example getting two things done with a single visit. Customers are not interested in how expensive or easy this is for you to do – so long as they have the perception of added value. You could make a summer offer of a boiler service plus a free home energy assessment. So long as you do this effectively (work hard on the presentation!) this could lead to further business, either for yourself or for a local partner that you trust. And even if it does not, you will have strengthened your relationship with the customer.

The key to effective communication is a reliable customer database. It is essential to the future success of the business you have worked so hard to establish.





About the author

Jason Morjaria is the founder of Commusoft.

Commusoft develops integrated software packages that meet the specific needs of plumbing, gas, heating, electrical and similar service companies.

The software covers customer databases, engineers' and office diary, estimates, job management, invoicing, certificates, service reminders, parts management etc. together with management reporting and integration to all widely used accounting software packages.

Based in London, UK, the company has 45 employees and 750 clients in the United Kingdom.

For more information visit **www.commusoft.co.uk**, phone 0203 0266 266 or just click below.

[Learn more](#)

by commusoft 