

# Why you need to put customer communications on the boardroom's agenda today

 By Jacques van Wyk

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It can be tempting to take a scattered approach to customer communications to attract new customers and upsell your current base. However, how you choose to communicate with customers could be the crucial factor in pulling ahead of the competition.

Research commissioned by Ricoh called Communication Crackdown, conducted by Coleman Parkes Research, reveals that consumers receive an average of 47 pieces of communications from businesses every week.

A quarter of it is considered junk and over half of survey respondents say they'd stop being customers if the communications they receive are poor quality. And it wastes billions of rands.



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The evolution of digital technologies means businesses can communicate via direct mail but also e-mail, text message, and social media. The wider choice begs the question: which channel, or combination of channels, do customers prefer? And when might one be preferable to another?

It's all about relevancy to individuals. 70% of consumers want digital communications for the majority of purposes. However,

only 45% of customers want documents of greater perceived importance, such as contracts, in digital format.

Deciding how best to communicate with customers now requires more parts of the business work together. Marketing and communications can no longer decide for themselves, nor can individual departments, how to communicate with customers. The proliferation of digital channels requires executive heads to co-operate and collaborate to organise, manage, and use information creatively to target customer communications.

Eight-in-ten consumers are actually willing to help that process by sharing even more personal information as long as it's used to send them targeted and relevant communications. Businesses can begin by pooling the data they already have from billing, for example, to develop individual customer demographics and create a picture of customer needs. The next step is to learn when and how to communicate with those customers to help secure repeat business.

Another issue to consider is that there is a general trend toward selling services versus products to secure long-term contracts with customers and generate annuity incomes. A crucial step in that process is openness and honesty, traits undermined by confusing industry jargon and other obscure lingo in customer communications and terms of agreements. Customers don't feel valued if they think companies are out to trick them. And they crave to feel valued.

It's a worldwide trend highlighted in South Africa by various regulations, including the Consumer Protection Act (CPA) that seeks to remove confusing Latin and legal jargon from contracts. This trend is so widespread and far reaching that Harvard Business School identified leading a company through shifting regulation and legislation as a top challenge for modern CEOs.

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