



11. Member Communication & Engagement

Introduction – The Importance of Effective Member Communication

Good communication is not always about finding new and innovative ways to speak with people, but often about doing the simple things well. Keeping in touch with your members throughout the year is vital to keep them engaged and promoting a sense of belonging. Golf clubs have a number of different communication channels available to them, from e-newsletter to member forum, and this guide will give you advice to consider how best to use them. Consistent, informative and engaging communication will help your club increase brand loyalty and improve retention.

Develop a Member Communications Plan

Whilst it is commonly argued that “you can’t communicate enough”, you should focus on establishing which channels will reach your members, developing those core channels and have consistent messaging to promote the key aspects of your club. We recommend the following channels as your core channels:

- E-newsletters
- Website
- Facebook
- Instagram
- Club noticeboards
- Members Forum
- Members Survey

Once you have established your channels, you then need to consider the key elements of the club you wish to communicate. For many members, competition information will be important, but those who don’t play in your medals want to hear about different things, such as social events or course maintenance. Ensure you have a good mix of content so you can engage different sections of your membership. To do this, we recommend you meet with key staff and committee members and discuss what each group wants to communicate and when.

Example Member Communications Plan

Week	Themes and Topics	Channel(s)
1	Membership Renewals	Newsletter
1	Member Benefits Reminder	Facebook
1	Course Maintenance: Bunkering Work	Newsletter
2	New Members: Buddy Programme	Facebook
2	Launch of Competitions Fixture List	Website
2	Junior Members: Parents Open Evening	Newsletter/Instagram
3	Membership Incentive: £50 Reward for Member Referral	Newsletter/Facebook
3	Members Forum: Date in the Diary	Newsletter/Facebook
3	Social Events: Burns Night Tickets on Sale	Facebook
4	Course Maintenance: Hollow coring	Facebook

4	Membership Renewals: Reminder	Newsletter
4	Pro Shop News: Pre-Season Coaching Offer	Facebook/Instagram
5	Social Events: 6 Nations Rugby Dates	Facebook/Poster
5	Clubhouse lounge closed for maintenance	Newsletter
5	Committee Update: Appeal for sub-committee volunteers	Newsletter
6	Membership Incentive: Update on New Member Numbers	Newsletter/Facebook
6	New Member Welcome Evening Date announced	Facebook
6	Junior Coaching Dates announced	Facebook/Instagram
7	Competitions: Opening Day of the Season – Tee Times now Live	Newsletter/Website
Add weeks	Add Subjects as necessary	

Writing a Good Club Newsletter

For the demographics of most golf clubs, E-newsletters remain one of the most effective ways of keeping your members up to date with club activities. Most club software providers provide this as a platform, but others are available online, such as Mailchimp.

We recommend regular, short format content as opposed to lengthy monthly or quarterly newsletters, although an exception may be an annual or twice-yearly Captain's Report to discuss a meatier topic. A weekly e-newsletter is widely used by many clubs, such as a Friday lunchtime ahead of a busy weekend, with a few short paragraphs, headings and links to more details on your website. Content should be engaging, information, positive and varied.

Given the importance of good written communication, you should choose someone with strong writing skills to do your newsletter, such as your marketing convenor, who can invite contributions from other convenors and edit those into a well-constructed newsletter. Consider also including relevant topical content from the wider golf industry, such as Rules of Golf, Handicapping updates or professional events that are likely to be of interest to your members.

Suggested topics and themes:

Competitions Summary

Most clubs will post results via their club software platform but its always good to highlight the achievements of your members. You can mention and congratulate the winners of each of your competitions from the previous week, or any special achievements, such as a hole-in-one, significant handicap reduction or success in an Open competition.

Forthcoming Events

Newsletters provide a great platform to promote your social events and get the dates into people's diaries early. A bullet point list of events and dates, with ticket booking information, is helpful, showing what's coming up at the club in the next month.

Around the Greens

The golf course is always a hot topic among your members and the newsletter give you and your greenkeepers the chance to explain any major work taking place on the course, why you're doing it and when you're doing it, such as Hollow Coring the Greens. You could feature a video interview with your greenkeeper to provide more detail or ask your greenkeeper to video or photograph their work to bring it to life. It helps to dispel a few myths and ensures your members can plan around any significant disruption on the course.

Member Benefits Reminder

Do you keep your reciprocal golf arrangements with other clubs a secret? The club will offer a range of member benefits and you can showcase one per newsletter to raise awareness of and increase engagement in them. This will act to remind members of what they get for being a member that a visitor doesn't and so aid retention. You can check out our [Member Benefits Guide](#) for advice on defining and presenting your clubs own member benefits.

Meet the Staff/Meet the Volunteers

It is people that make your club what it is. Consider doing a brief profile or Q&A with key people at the club. It will help make your staff more accessible and highlight the services they provide, while putting faces to names of the volunteers. It's a chance to highlight much of the unseen work done by committee members and help attract more volunteers when positioned in a positive way. You can also highlight other members, such as anyone celebrating a big birthday or achieving long-service at the club.

Junior Development

Juniors are the future of our game and your club. They also help a club have a youthful buzz and attract families. Unfortunately, the work being done in the junior section can go unnoticed by your wider membership, so use the newsletter to promote these activities to increase awareness. This can encourage other members to get their own kids and grandchildren involved, and help your older members understand and better appreciate the work required to develop a strong junior programme.

Team News

Many clubs have teams competing in leagues and friendly fixtures across all categories of their membership. The newsletter should be used to recruit new players, celebrate successes and provide information on forthcoming fixtures.

Two-Way Communication: Member Feedback

Scottish Golf has worked closely with clubs to encourage member feedback through two different platforms, with feedback then used to improve the services and experience you offer:

1. Members Forums
2. Members Surveys

Like any business, listening to your customers is vitally important in giving you insights to make informed decisions on how you take the club forward. It is key to member retention and delivering effective governance, so your big decisions are reflective of a consensus of views – not just that of the vocal minority.

Members' Forums

A members' forum is a great way of generating insights and feedback without the politics or formality of an AGM. A forum allows your club to bring different groups of members together to discuss a hot topic, general issues or establish new direction, such as a Business Plan, ensuring all voices are heard and more constructive debate can take place. It gives your members a sense of ownership through having input, and also provides transparency in your committee's decision-making.

a) General Feedback Forum

This is best delivered when you have not had a forum in recent times. Here the two rounds of questions are simply 1) what do you like about the club? and 2) what can we improve? This will enable

you to give members the widest range to voice feedback and enable you to get a high-level steer on what they like and wish to see addressed.

b) 'Hot Topics' Forum

In this format the club will specify 2 - 4 'hot topics' or issues facing the club. You can separate each topic into a different round of feedback or do it all at once. Topics could be 'how can we get more members using the catering?'; 'should we offer flexible membership?'; 'should we allow non-members to use the clubhouse to attract more business?' or 'how can we get more volunteers for the committee and sub-committee?'. A members' survey prior to this forum helps to give steer on what topics to discuss.

c) Ideas Generation Forum

This forum lends itself to a smaller group of members interested or passionate about a specific topic. Such forums could ask things such as "what are our key member benefits?", "how can we build a successful social events calendar?" or "what can we do to improve the junior coaching programme?" and so on.

How to Facilitate a Members' Forum

To encourage two-way member engagement at a forum, it is recommended that you avoid a 'theatre style' presentation set-up and move to a more informal room environment. We recommend that you set up tables for 4 – 6 people, with approximately 10 tables in total, or increase the number per table if you anticipate a larger attendance.

Each table should have paper and a pen with one person designated note taker and spokesperson. Set questions should then be asked (and ideally shown on a screen for reference) with each table discussing and committing to print as many suggestions as they can but with only 3 points to be fed back per table. This forces discussion and a debate on what makes the 'top 3'. This will help the big-ticket items and best ideas come out on top. Each subject should be given 10-15 minutes discussion with 2 minutes to decide on the 'top 3'.

Committee members should be encouraged to attend forums as ordinary members but particularly in the options 1 and 2 above, they should be spread throughout the room and not all sit together to avoid a perception of 'them and us'.

The facilitator should then go around the room asking each table for their top 3, noting the answers – perhaps on a flipchart, and collating similar themes and ideas. Be sure to ask the spokesperson to expand on short answers to get more useful and detailed information.

This format will encourage subjective and qualitative feedback to compliment the objective and any quantitative feedback of a survey. A summary of the facilitator notes will then provide a clear representation of the key themes and feedback points on the night.

Scottish Golf is Here to Help!

Your Regional Club Development Officer or our Club Business Manager can facilitate the forum for you, acting as a neutral third party, with lots of experience of working with other clubs. The risk of your club captain or manager facilitating a forum themselves is the perception of them having a vested interest, being biased towards a particular view or their lack of independence. Scottish Golf remove these factors allowing all club members and officials to participate with confidence that the facilitator is neutral.

Member Satisfaction Surveys

Surveying the opinions of your members through an online tool is a fantastic way of generating insights and feedback from a wide cross-section of your members, particularly from those who are less likely to attend meetings or be vocal in the clubhouse. This can be done to supplement the qualitative feedback of a forum, or act as a tool to prepare for a forum. Scottish Golf provides a free tool to help clubs with this – our Customer Feedback Tracker (CFT).

Why use the Scottish Golf Customer Feedback Tracker?

The tool is free to affiliated clubs and has been used to create more than 200 surveys with over 25,000 individual member responses gathered. The CFT also allows you to compare yourself with clubs of similar size, both in your region and nationally, on an anonymous basis across a number of different metrics.

Key benefits:

- Flexibility – you can ask as many or as few questions as you wish
- Tailored – you can ask club specific questions
- Fully automated – the tool is all online with information gathered and collated
- Helps you set SMART objectives – identifies where you are succeeding or where you want to get to if you are currently falling short (for more detailed guidance on setting SMART objectives see our [Membership Situational Analysis and Objective Setting Guide](#))

Contact your Regional Club Development Officer who can demo the tool for you either in person or on the phone and help you set it up, launch it, produce reports and understand the data.