

## **Where The Eyeballs Are**

*By Stephen V. Smith*

You have a story to tell, information to pass along, important news and updates to share. But you're not communicating if no one sees your message. You need to be talking where most of your people are listening.

I love this old adage: "Doing business without advertising is like winking at a girl in the dark. You know what you are doing, but nobody else does." The same can be said for communicating in general. If no one is seeing your communication efforts, you're just making noise.

Utilities can fall into the trap of one-dimensional thinking. It's easy to post a message on your website or add a line of text to the bill and say, "OK, I have communicated." This is especially true when your marketing/PR/advertising/et cetera staff (often a staff of one) has many other things to mark off the to-do list.

By choosing one channel and ignoring the rest, however, you miss the opportunity to reach those who could benefit from what you have to share.

That's why you need a cross-channel (sometimes called multichannel) approach. Consider the following:

### **Print Newsletter**

Whether it's sent direct mail or delivered in the monthly bill, this is the cornerstone of your communications program. No, not every customer will read it every month. Many will never read it. But many will, at least some of the time. And the consistency of a regular publication keeps your message in front of customers throughout the year, creating continual opportunities for them to engage with you when your message and their interests or needs align.

### **Email Newsletter**

This is the one digital platform that you own. Building your email list can be one of the best investments of time and effort you make for your communications program. Unlike social media channels, no one can change the rules and suddenly take away your platform. Mirror in email the message you are sending in your printed newsletter and you'll greatly increase the opportunity for customers to see your information.

### **Facebook**

Speaking of rule changes taking away your platform, Facebook announced earlier this year that it was changing its algorithms to make sure users see more of what their friends are posting — and less of what businesses are posting. But that doesn't mean the platform is now broken for companies, especially electric utilities. As a company providing a vital service to the community, you can share good content that people will engage with, and it will be seen more. You also have the opportunity to boost your posts for very little money, increasing your reach. Despite all

its recent problems, Facebook is still where you'll find most of the eyeballs online. You can't afford not to be there.

### **Twitter**

"I don't use Twitter, and I don't know anyone who does," you say. That's fine; people used to say that about Facebook, too. You may not be familiar with it, but millions of people use it every day. And it's a great platform for quickly reaching your followers with important messages, not to mention links to stories that are part of your standard communications plan. Include Twitter in all your messages and you'll steadily grow a following that appreciates these brief, instant communications.

### **Instagram**

You might think this is just where people post selfies and pets and sunsets and DIY projects. That's only partially true. Instagram continues to grow in popularity as the best platform for visual stories. Take advantage of it to post images of your employees, improvement projects and, of course, outage restoration. You will steadily grow a community that appreciates the quick peek into your operation, as well as information about your services.

### **Your Website**

Electric distributors, like many types of companies, sometimes fail to view their websites as dynamic communications tools. As a company that serves the general population, you should tap this valuable resource. Avoid the "one and done" mentality that leaves you with a static site. Updating it with fresh information can be as simple as posting your newsletter content to a blog-type page. In fact, every piece of content you share through all of the channels mentioned above should also find a home on your website — with links that drive traffic back to your site.

This may sound like an involved process, but when coupled with a well thought-out, comprehensive communications program, this cross-channel approach will ensure that your message finds the most eyeballs possible to engage with your message.

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*If you'd like more tips and inspiration for communicating with your employees and customers, [sign up for our newsletter](#). We'd love to engage with you.*

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Stephen V. Smith is President/CEO of WordSouth — A Content Marketing Company, serving electric and telecommunications providers since 1996. Stephen can be reached at [ssmith@wordsouth.com](mailto:ssmith@wordsouth.com).