



# Latcham

**Insight:** Delivering member value at a distance: maintaining member engagement and loyalty during and post Covid-19.



**Insight:** Delivering member value at a distance: maintaining member engagement and loyalty during and post Covid-19.

**Maintain the physical in your member communications and make it personal. Member value is still possible, even with social distancing in place..**

---

“With recessionary winds in the air it is now more important than ever to find ways to demonstrate the value of membership to ensure member retention and loyalty” explains Latcham Managing Director Mike Hughes. “Now is the time to reinforce the value of membership by delivering targeted, tenable, relevant and personalised content that sticks out from the crowd!”

---

Member organisations are facing challenging times in the wake of Covid-19. One crucial such one is retaining value for members where social distancing will become the norm, at least for the coming months. If a member organisation provides value for members largely through physical events and face to face training or providing and maintaining physical spaces for their members to visit, there is an obvious danger that organisations could lose members who may elect to come out of membership until times get better, or worst still, forever?

Once members have decided to leave it tends to be much more difficult to win them back in the future. That is why member retention is more key than ever, and membership organisations will have to evolve what they are offering to their members, to keep them during social distancing.

Already we are seeing a rush to digital to deliver membership communications and services. This has become almost the default solution. Digital solutions are fast and inexpensive, and the tools are widely available, easy to use and rely on already existing technology. Webinars and video conferencing are becoming the new normal, and virtual tours are being touted as, if not a replacement, a placeholder for when the “real” experience can return.

This digital shift is understandable for member organisations, but perhaps we need to challenge ourselves a bit further if we want to deliver a full and rich experience to make our members feel truly valued. Sure, the membership renewal can be sent by email, and probably in itself doesn't add a lot of value to the member.

But the use of physical items such as journals, magazines, catalogues, samples and merchandising can enhance the membership experience.

Let's take the simple example of the experience of reading a journal digitally to the one you have when the printed journal is in your hands. People commonly report that digital books and e-readers are no match for the sensory experience of printed materials – the feel, the scent, the vivid illustrations deliver a far more immersive experience. This is supported by research. There have been several studies, neatly summarised by Forbes, that suggest paper outperforms digital on a large variety of metrics. A study of paper marketing materials by Canadian neuromarketing firm TrueImpact found that paper marketing had a lower cognitive load (easier to understand), was more persuasive and held attention better than digital display marketing. Furthermore, fMRI studies by Bangor University showed that physical material is more “real” to the brain and involves more emotional processing. This suggests that membership organisations should be cautious of a shift to purely digital communications and that a blended approach is the way to go to retain member value. Multi-faceted and blended solutions are still possible – and arguably even more essential – as they offer a sensory and emotional richness that simply isn't possible from purely digital communications. Instead of an approach which relies heavily on digital, a blended, multi-channel communications strategy that incorporates the benefits of paper with speed, accessibility and ease of use of digital communications will be key for retaining member value through this crisis and beyond.

Digital engagement is up across the member sector – the viewership of recent Memberwise webinars is evidence of this – but there remain people who are digitally disengaged. Physical, tangible, communication has a premium feel and can cut through the noise of the rapid rise in digital communications. Digital fatigue – already a well-known concept before Covid-19 – looms large. The higher cognitive load of digital communications, in tandem with the recent onslaught of organisations vying for attention in the digital space, can lead to information overload, poorer information retention, and ultimately disengagement.

The richer your data, the richer your personalisation can be – and personalisation is a huge driver of member value. Digital communications are certainly useful, and during lockdown, a lot more people will be interacting with the membership organisation digitally simply because other avenues being no longer accessible. This is an opportunity for membership organisations. You can only get personalisation as good as your data. Digital behaviour is easier to track and manage, and slowing down in some areas may be a good opportunity to redeploy resources into CRM and gathering information on your membership. This is a chance for organisations to get their “ducks in a row” for their CRM and with regards to customer behaviour while we're distanced. And of course, personalisation will benefit not only your digital but physical communications too.

### **The power of personalisation**

Ultimately, deep personalisation displays two things to your members – that you know them, and that they are valued. In the loneliness of social distancing, these factors become more relevant than ever. If you can tailor your communications with your members so they speak to them directly, they will continue to feel connected to you, appreciated, and understood.

Personalisation can also be in terms of what type of media your members prefer. Different member organisations have different media requirements for their membership. For some, the speed and accessibility of digital communications will be an excellent fit, but for others, the more premium “feel” of a tangible, physical communication in its widest sense, will help to close the value gap while the ability to physically access member benefits is diminished.

Many people will use both, with digital being the default for 'transactional' communications such as bills, notifications and renewals, but magazines, journals, books and catalogues also offering a more immersive experience in which people can be inspired.

### **The power of the physical**

Physical communications can help to continue deliver value when other face-to-face methods of interacting with your members are inaccessible. Loneliness and isolation become issues during a prolonged period of social distancing. Digital is accessible, but it can also be depersonalising. This means we should be looking more closely at the things that have the potential to bring us together and foster a sense of belonging, particularly within the membership sector.

For membership organisations like the National Trust and the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS), for example, members need to be reminded that the sites they love need to be maintained, so they will be there when this is over. For that, the evocation of memory and emotion that print can bring could be a key factor, and personalising adds another dimension to that emotional connection. Previously, Latcham worked with the RHS to bring a deeply personalised campaign to their members, sending them unique packs that contained deep personalisations based on preferences such as visited locations, favourite colours, favourite flowers. This is the kind of campaign that could find even greater value now that people cannot physically visit the sites themselves. This is one example, but demonstrates the potential of personalised, physical communication and shows how with some creative thought, it is possible to develop truly engaging and unique interaction with members.

If you can't get together face-to-face, you need to foster that sense of belonging in other ways. Making it personal and keeping the physical in your member communications can play an important part in this.

---

Contact us to find out more...

**T** 0117 311 8200 **E** [connect@latcham.co.uk](mailto:connect@latcham.co.uk) [latcham.co.uk](http://latcham.co.uk)

Follow us  

© Latcham Direct Ltd