



TOP 12 COMMUNICATION HACKS FOR 2020



With clear, proactive internal and external communication, we can overcome the industry's most pressing challenges in order to provide the essential resource our customers rely on: WATER.

As a meter technology company, we understand the importance of approaching challenges with smart solutions and proactive communication. Ultimately, our technology is all about helping customers and utilities to feel empowered, connected, and capable of taking on problems.

The American Water Works Association's 2019 State of the Water Industry Report sheds light on the top 30 issues facing the water industry. Medium to very large utilities rated aging infrastructure as their top issue; small utilities were most concerned with water sources and water rights. Overall, industry leaders ranked the top five issues as:

- Renewal and replacement of aging water and wastewater infrastructure
- Financing for capital improvements
- Long-term water supply availability
- Public understanding of the value of water systems and services
- Watershed/source water protection

The first step to solving any of these issues is clear communications, both internally and with the public.

Our interactions with customers matter. Whether we are planning to raise rates or implement a new conservation measure, we must first communicate the reasons behind these changes to our customers.

Excellent communication and positive relationships can make our jobs easier. According to [J. D. Power's 2019 Water Utility Residential Customer Satisfaction Study](#), overall customer satisfaction scores were 84 points higher when a customer received proactive communications from their utility.

When our customers are happy with the product and service that we provide, they serve as advocates for the utility in the community. Their voices amplify our messages much louder than utility bill inserts or emails.

Invest time and resources into communications, and you will be amazed by the positive changes you see in your community.



12 HACKS OF COMMUNICATIONS

Master Meter, Inc. created a list of the top 12 communication hacks found to be most successful in 2019. Implement these tactics in 2020, and watch your utility connect with your customers and build trust with your community.

- 1 Start with the why:** In any communications, lead with 'why' and you'll answer your customer's first and most important questions: Why do you do what you do? Why should the customer care? Transparency about your "why" allows your customer to empathize with you.
- 2 Listen:** To your community, to your team, to your communications department, to your field technicians, etc. Listen without judgment. It might frustrate you when people misinterpret your communications, but these responses are likely the MOST valuable. You can address the confusion head-on and modify your communications strategy for next time.
- 3 Interact with your audience:** Communication is a two-way street. We often forget this online. When a customer comments on a post, asks a public question on an app, like Nextdoor, or shares a statement in a community Facebook group, respond! When customers feel heard, they are more likely to see you as responsive, attentive, and trustworthy.
- 4 Know your mediums** - To make an informed decision, know your [options](#). Is a video the right way to go, or a billboard? What about Facebook vs. Twitter vs. Instagram vs. Snapchat? Each of these mediums can accomplish different things. Where does your target audience spend time? What grabs their attention? If you're unsure, take the opportunity to do some research!
- 5 Measure outcomes** - Identify specific metrics based on your goals to measure engagement. Facilitate focus groups, and ask which types of content resonate with your audience the most. Get out in the field and ask questions of your customers. What do customers struggle to understand about your projects or goals?
- 6 Own it** - Your worth, your story. When we take ownership of our stories, we get to write the endings. Whether it's in crisis communications or the long haul, own your story and write the ending.
- 7 Ask the right questions:** What are we trying to communicate and why? Who are we communicating to, and for what? What do we know about our audience? What does our audience know about us? What resources do we have? What does our team need?
- 8 Focus on relationships:** At its core, communication is all about relationships. Relationships happen when people come together and have the opportunity to feel heard. They can happen online and in person! Knock on doors. Attend community meetings. Host gatherings, open houses, and events. Meet people where they're at (literally and figuratively)
- 9 Tell a story!** - Human brains have been evolutionarily hard-wired to think and process ideas in specific story terms. Stories are also proven to motivate voluntary cooperation.⁴ Want your community to cooperate with rate changes, initiatives, and projects? Tell a story.
- 10 Incorporate visuals** - The brain processes images 60,000 times faster than the time it takes to decode written information.² People interact with videos and images much more than they interact with written information. If you want your audience to understand the greatest amount of information in the shortest amount of time, incorporate images!
- 11 Be consistent** - Consistency and authenticity go hand in hand. Make sure every employee at your utility understands the story you're trying to share. Use casual language. Write the way you would speak to a friend or neighbor. Your audience is made up of people, after all, and not many of us spend our free time reading academic journals or research papers.
- 12 Be bold** - Did you know that the attention span of the average adult is less than the attention span of the average goldfish? That's eight seconds.³ To make your audience receive and retain, the story you're sharing, look outside the industry for creative ideas. Be bold, be original!