



Fiction and Fakery:
**How to Rebuild Trust
in the Public Sector**

*Perspectives on the challenge for communicators
and examples of effective practice.*

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A time of great consequence in public sector communications

// By Mark Hynes, Chief Executive Officer, Granicus

The new reality

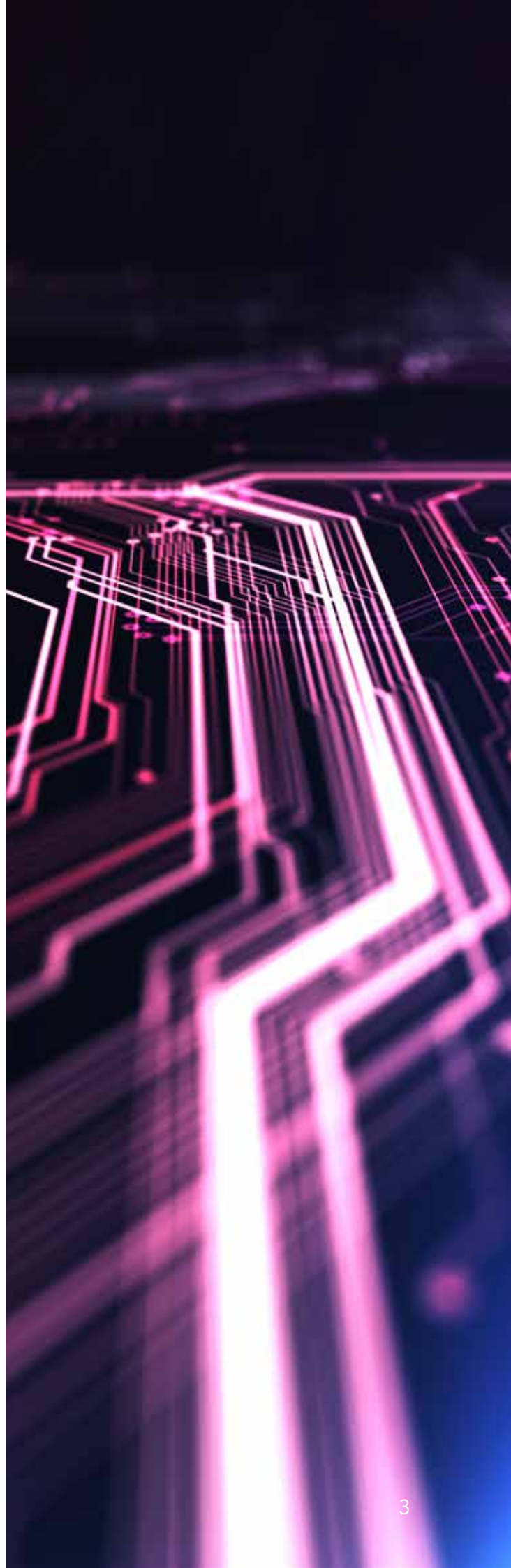
Teams working at all levels of government and across our public services cannot afford to be complacent in their efforts to strengthen connections with the people they serve.

The public sector must build relationships with citizens and earn the trust of communities. Organisations must find ways to engage people (at scale) in public programmes and services, and deliver positive change.

Government and public services must carefully lead citizens on a journey from inaction and apathy, to awareness and understanding, to action and advocacy, if they are to have a chance of influencing people's lives. Now is the time for government to ensure it has a robust and effective public engagement strategy – to navigate the good, the bad, and the uncertain times of today and tomorrow.

This need for proactive engagement and for organisations to stay relevant is more important than ever. We're facing what has the potential to become an even greater influence on modern digital communications: I call it the great assault on information credibility – others know it as "fake news". It is undeniable that the publication and consumption of digital communications have been forever changed.

For years, the Internet has been defined by the absolute freedom of information; held valuable for its lack of content authority and broad accessibility. But recently the nature of that liberty has been corrupted and misinformation has been



weaponised against our societies. Bad actors are waging targeted engagement campaigns fuelled by lies and misperceptions in order to influence behaviour to advance negative agendas. They are using similar tools and similar communications methods to corrupt rather than inspire.

That makes our jobs as government communicators, dedicated to positive outcomes and better lives, so much harder. I fear that now that this attack on information credibility is painfully clear to everyone, that the natural response will be to swing the pendulum too far in the opposite direction. As people continue to experience an onslaught of information that is purposefully designed to mislead them and act in ways that they would not otherwise, there is a risk people will begin to abandon their faith and belief in nearly all digital information.

The messenger matters

But here is where you and we come in. Knowing that this environment exists, knowing that we face the risk of information paralysis, communication paralysis, outcome paralysis — we, as government communicators are faced with a great responsibility. There must be a beacon of trust that citizens can unquestioningly rely on. A source of information that under the most extreme circumstances, and most importantly under extreme circumstances, can be trusted without fail.

As the keeper of our towns, cities and counties, and of our country's most important information, we have the obligation to be that beacon. We have the responsibility to do more and to do better.

The foundation of trust is built through countless small interactions that demonstrate reliability and good intent — a foundation that can then be relied upon in extreme circumstances to be the bearer of truth whenever that may be in question.

The trusted source in a time of need

While I remain fearful that the world pivots to a place of mistrust and all of the paralysis that might result, I am also incredibly hopeful and optimistic that as government communicators we are able to embrace this responsibility, at a pivotal moment — to up our game, to develop consistent and trusted relationships with our citizens.

In my view, this is the moment when between us, we have the ability to develop the trust backstop and foundation from which others can build.



About this resource

Through a series of opinion pieces and real examples, we explore how public sector organisations are strengthening connections and building trust with the people they serve. We discuss why public trust matters to the survival and success of services and programmes, and our democracy.

Explore each section to understand:

- **Why trust is vital to the organisation's strategic objectives**
- **The risks posed by misinformation and disinformation**
- **How the organisation is building stronger relationships**
- **The role and impact of communications**
- **Examples of effective public engagement**

A local government perspective

// By Matt Nicholls, Head of Communications Support, Local Government Association

Local government is not immune from public distrust

The sharp fall in trust with public institutions across the world, which can be traced back to the 2008 crash, is well documented.

Local councillors, and local government as a whole, has remained resolutely more trusted than central government. In the Local Government Association's (LGA) poll of resident satisfaction with local authorities in June 2018, 72% of respondents said they trusted their council the most when it came to local decision-making – compared to 17% for the Government.

But it would be foolish to think local government is immune from growing public distrust during a time of unparalleled change in the way people communicate. The same poll showed the lowest level of trust in councils since 2012, and a sharp drop in the number of people who think their town hall keeps them informed and acts on their concerns.

Years of tightened local authority budgets are clearly starting to have an impact on people's perceptions of the everyday services they use. We also know how "fake news", myths and fear can travel faster than ever in our social, digital and mobile worlds.

How should local government respond?

How should local government respond? How should any public service respond in the face of growing distrust among the people they intend to serve? Research shows us that the more people feel informed about the work of their local council and other public services, the more satisfied they are likely to be. In short, effective communications has a pivotal role to play in ensuring that the erosion in trust is stopped and rebuilt.

For this to happen, it requires a fresh and more strategic approach to the way we communicate. The days of just broadcasting what we perceive to be good news through press release, printed publication and social media need to change. And thankfully they are changing, as more and more communications functions align closer with strategic objectives and outcomes.

Storytelling, listening, and two-way conversations are essential

Of course we must proactively tell the story of how government organisations are striving to change people's lives and places for the better. But this has to be about explaining, listening and understanding more than promoting. We have to own our bad news as much as the good. In times

where the public sector is having to make very difficult decisions and also ask citizens to do more for themselves and their communities, a two way conversation is essential.

Ask any organisation, and they will claim to listen to their customers and stakeholders. But is this actually the case? Listening needs to go way beyond traditional “tick box” consultations. Organisations must seize more regular and meaningful opportunities to engage people, whether it is through community events or a rigorous approach to resident research and insight.

In the context of local government especially, we also need to break down the internal barriers that exist in the town hall between communications, customer services, consultation and insight to bring together the talking and listening functions.

There needs to be a joined up focus on the resident, who does not distinguish between which department in the council they are communicating with, or receiving information from.

Equip councillors with the information they need to be advocates

We also need to think more about the voices we use and who our advocates are. A spokesperson for the council in a media statement is not going to build enduring trust with the public. The LGA’s latest polling shows that 68% of people trust local councillors compared to 13% for MPs. We have more than 18,000 foot soldiers to take the council’s message into their communities who most people trust. This is an incredible communications asset that we are not making the most of.

Sometimes contact between a communications team and elected members is limited to clearing press releases, the rest left to democratic services.

Councillors regularly say to teams on LGA communications peer reviews that they do not feel informed about what their council is doing.

Members need to be equipped with as much information as possible to be advocates for the authority, and to have often difficult conversations with residents about important issues. The expertise in communications teams can be invaluable for councillors, and a bit of time spent providing social media training or help setting up a ward-based Facebook page could reap real dividends.

Empower staff – arguably your organisation’s most powerful comms asset

The other overlooked group that can really help build trust with residents is our own staff. It sounds glib to say that people will listen more to a family member who works for the council than a comms officer, but it’s true. In some areas, if every member of staff had a conversation with just one friend they would easily reach a bigger audience than the local newspaper. Yet internal communications is rarely afforded the same level of importance as external activity.

Stakeholder relations does not sound as glamorous as creating compelling content for social media. But within every local authority area there is a multitude of different organisations who represent and work with the community, all of whom can be either powerful advocates or vocal opponents of a council. Time taken to map those relationships with partners, and to have an open and honest dialogue with them, is fundamental to building trust.

None of this is the sole preserve of a comms team, and nor should it be. Communications is a shared, council-wide responsibility from the chief executive down to the first person a resident sees when they walk through the door of the town hall. No other organisation has as much contact and dialogue with communities than the local council, and therefore nobody has as much responsibility and ability to build trust with the public.



CASE STUDY

Driving confidence in the police

// By Amanda Coleman, Head of Corporate Communication at Greater Manchester Police

1. Why is it vital people trust your organisation specifically, and what risk does misinformation pose to your “missions”?

Trust is essential in policing. It is what drives confidence in what we do which means people are comfortable in coming forward to provide information and to assist officers. If this doesn't happen it means criminals are not caught and victims are not supported. It matters on a day to day basis and when a crisis happens, then the police have to be the trusted voice. You can't do that in the middle of an emergency; you must build trust each and every day.

When there are inaccuracies they must be challenged. It is why we continue to try to explain to the public that there is no “canal pusher” causing deaths in Manchester canals. The story has been created by the media.

2. How are you building stronger relationships with the people you serve: what is the role of communications?

Trust comes from every interaction that takes place every day. Officers receive support and are given channels to communicate with local people. This has been developed with a growth in social media

which allows police officers to engage online with local people and keep them updated about what is happening in their communities.

The Greater Manchester Police (GMP) communication strategy is focused on listening and understanding the issues. It is only when we have this that we can develop effective engagement. We closely monitor social media and responses to issues that arise as well as undertaking face-to-face engagement.

The heart of our strategy is accessibility, honesty, accountability and transparency. It means bringing people into policing.

We recently carried out a major piece of consultation about the future of policing which involved attending more than 40 local meetings and inviting people to respond to an online survey which more than 2,500 people did. This sort of work supports our existing consultation about services and experiences that take place on a local level with communities and formal independent advisory groups.

3. Can you give an example of when proactive public engagement was paramount to building trust and responding to a situation?

The situation - Misinformation during the 2011 riots

Back in 2011 we faced a huge challenge when riots hit two cities in Greater Manchester. Riots had been sweeping across the country and it felt like only a matter of time before they reached Greater Manchester. There was a huge amount of misinformation circulating on social media with people discussing what they were going to do and rightly the public asking the police whether they should be concerned.

Before problems emerged we set a strategy to be the trusted voice and to continue a dialogue with people through social media as it was the channel being used. This required us to respond to concerns, answer questions and be open about the information we had.

We did this before problems occurred and when the inevitable happened and rioting broke out we drove the communication by being honest, approachable and continuing to be the trusted voice. People were urged to come to the police for the accurate information and to encourage others to do the same.

The response - Open and honest dialogue

“At the core of the communication was a desire to help people to understand what was happening and to encourage them to help identify the offender and bring them to justice. The reputation of the organisation was never at the forefront of the communication priorities.”

There were two main priorities for the communication activity. First was the need to keep people updated about what was happening primarily through the media and social media, and second was the drive to encourage people to come forward with information that would identify offenders. There was a round-the-clock social media response, regular media updates and an early press conference with a senior officer, and it was all followed up with a “shop a looter” campaign that ran both on- and off-line

The result - Public support to bring people to justice

The result was a huge amount of public support, with messages flooding in through social media. More than 1.5m people accessed a special Flickr site that was established to provide photographs of wanted people. Many people were found through people accessing that Flickr site.

The “shop a looter” campaign received widespread coverage and supported additional information being provided to the police. This included the launch of an A-frame poster in Manchester city centre: a man spotted a relative on the wanted board and agreed to take them to a police station.

In a report on the police response a whole chapter was devoted to the communication work and the focus on social media. It found that the activity was likely to have contributed to the fact that there was only one night of disorder that was swiftly brought under control. There were many elements of the response that could have been developed, including sharing more information during the most turbulent time when it was difficult to say exactly what was happening, because the events were quickly unfolding. All this learning has helped to develop the communication strategy on a day-to-day basis and during a crisis.



The key to the response was to be ahead of the issue, get prepared, start and continue the dialogue and above all be honest and open.



CASE STUDY

Being brave for change

// By Melissa Thermidor, Social Media Manager, NHS Blood and Transplant

1. Why is it vital people trust your organisation specifically, and what risk does misinformation pose to your “missions”?

The role of trust and credibility is not just vital to our organisation’s reputation, it can mean the difference between life and death in some respects. If donors don’t know that we need their help to save and improve lives, people won’t come forward.

Public engagement helps us respond positively to the need for more blood donors – by building relationships animated by dialogue and partnerships, rather than automated one-sided content generation.

For example, during the Manchester Arena attack in 2017, a series of text messages emerged claiming that there was a blood shortage and people were being encouraged to turn up at hospitals and donation centres. This information was inaccurate.

Through the use of our social platforms we were able to provide up to date and accurate information to help alleviate heightened pressure during a serious crisis and allow teams to continue to save and improve lives.

The relationship between citizens and NHS Blood and Transplant is vitally important because we must be able to effectively communicate with communities around the need for change and the rationale behind the difficult decisions having to be made – whether that is closing a centre or reducing sessions.

Competence and credibility are a big part of trust—specifically, proactive impactful messages help the

NHS

Blood and Transplant

public commit the meaning of our messages to memory, and recall this knowledge to help reaffirm their decisions to give blood.

2. How are you building stronger relationships with the people you serve: what is the role of communications?

A definition commonly used in academic research is: "Trust is a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behaviour of another". Trust is a risk in itself, but we put our faith in our teams, stakeholders and staff, and understand the need to support these groups and empower them to communicate across different channels and be advocates of our "mission".

In engaging with the public, patients, staff and members, we take into account the needs of individuals and groups who may find it more difficult to engage with us, and whose voices are often least well heard.

Crucially, two-way communication underpins everything we do. We strive to make it easy for the public to enter into dialogue on issues that matter to them. It is this dialogue and transparency that encourage the development of trust and are the foundations for the legitimacy of our communications over the long-term.

3. Can you give an example of when proactive public engagement was paramount to building trust and responding to a situation?

The situation - A campaign to recruit black donors spurred false accusations of racism

We need 40,000 new black donors to help save the lives of those living with sickle cell disease. Our

recent push on outbound messaging (asking for black donors — especially people with the Ro sub-type — to donate blood to help those living with the disease) spurred accusations of racism — for calling for black donors. Comments such as these appeared on social media: "all blood is red", "black people have HIV", "just put a van outside KFC".

Ignoring such comments would undermine our core values of "Caring, Expert and Quality" — most importantly it would damage our community and society as a whole to remain silent and allow such commentary to permeate our platforms.

The Ro sub-type is complex and clinical, making it difficult to explain what it is and its link to sickle cell disease management and treatment. Our objectives were to get the message across in a cost-effective and simple, yet informative way.

We aimed to: educate individuals about the need for donors, explain the Ro sub-type and its benefits for sickle cell sufferers, and most importantly, influence a behaviour change that prompted black people aged 17-35 to donate.

We also aimed to reduce the negative sentiment and potential for reputational damage (to our organisation and our "missions") on Twitter.

The response - Bravery on social media to confront myths and fear

We created a 33-tweet thread using facts, stats and GIFs to explain the need for black donors, the Ro sub-type, sickle cell disease and why calling for black donors was not racist but necessary.

The thread was targeted to Black Twitter as the online community share culture, language and interest in specific issues, and to those talking about specific topics with a black frame of reference. Twitter gets a lot of attention for dragging — but it also serves as a mechanism for activism.

To meet the objectives, we embarked on a process to understand the barriers to participation, long-term need and appropriate tactics for the business needs and target outcomes.

We are at an advanced stage of social media adoption, with a verified account and regular monitoring, and an engaged 17–35 year old target audience group. Twitter was selected as the platform for disseminating our messages, as a lot of the negative sentiment was coming from Twitter. The platform also provides several APIs that allow real-time access to vast amounts of content aiding our understanding of content usage.

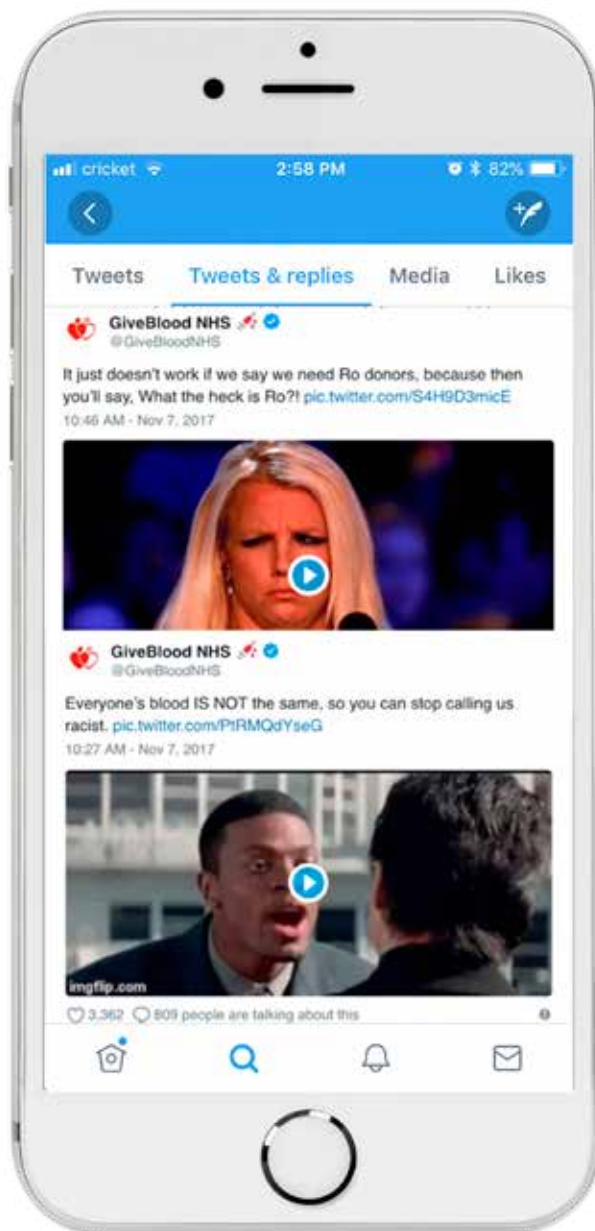
The result - Social media helps demystify complex subject and increases blood donations

The Twitter thread made a very difficult and scientific topic easy to understand and provided the information in an easy to digest and fun format, ultimately increasing new black registrations and reaffirming our position as trustworthy and credible. Including a narrative led to more effective communication compared to presenting “just the facts”.

Most importantly, we were able to prompt a behaviour change in the black community, recruiting more donors who provided the right blood matches for those living with sickle cell disease.

There was a realisation that policy and guidelines don’t always reflect or consider human behaviour; they aren’t always effective at engaging people in real action. But by standing up boldly to controversy online, we can bust myths, break down fear and barriers to participation, and encourage better behaviours.

Being on a stage as huge as social media comes with inherent risk, and the key to handling such risk is finding your organisational identity and persona and not being afraid to steer a conversation and tackle misinformation head-on.



Empower employees to be your best advocates

Your colleagues all carry the means to broadcast a story about your organisation in their pocket. With the push of a button, the average employee can reach 500 LinkedIn connections, 200 Twitter followers or 330 Facebook friends.

With such opportunity to lose or gain public trust through employees' personal networks, organisations cannot afford to neglect their staff engagement strategy.

People put their trust in people, so empowering employees to become stronger storytellers could turn them into one of your organisation's most powerful communications channels.

Did you know that content posted by an employee:

- **has five times the potential collective reach of official social media channels (Nielsen)**
- **is re-shared 24 times more than content posted through official social media channels (MSLGroup)**
- **is more trusted, with 84% of people valuing information from people they know above all other forms of communication (Nielsen)**

West Sussex County Council strengthens connections with staff

The original problem?

With 5.4k staff spread across multiple locations, the council needed a cost-effective way to:

- 1) keep staff informed of Cabinet and Leadership team decisions
- 2) give employees a chance to voice their opinions on the council's direction
- 3) share successes to highlight the importance of everyone's work.

The solution?

West Sussex County Council launched its "One Voice" staff email update, delivered using Granicus' digital engagement platform: govDelivery. The regular update brings people together with core goals in mind, increases the visibility of the great

work being carried out and helps boost morale. The internal comms team also tracks the content tactics leading to high engagement rates to refine the messaging strategy.

The result?

- 68% of staff regularly engage with One Voice
- Easier access to corporate updates
- Increased awareness of the council's goals and future plans
- Increased participation in staff consultations and surveys
- Increased job satisfaction linked to improved communication
- More staff informed and empowered to be "external" brand advocates

Get help to reach and engage more employees

Take the first step toward improving the culture of your organisation: book a meeting with a Granicus digital engagement specialist today.

// Let's get started together: email info@granicus.com

Maintaining trust in the fire and rescue service

// By James Morton, External Communications Manager, Hampshire Fire and Rescue

1. Why is it vital people trust your organisation specifically, and what risk does misinformation pose to your “missions”?

Arguably, there is no more trusted brand around than the fire and rescue service (FRS). But that gives it much further to fall, so it is imperative public confidence and trust are maintained.

The overarching goal of the FRS is making people safer. That can encompass anything from physically saving someone from a burning building or crashed car, to educating school kids on the dangers of fires.

Almost all the information shared and disseminated by FRS will help keep people safe in some way. Therefore it has to be absolutely trusted by the public to be accurate, current and relevant.

Any erosion in confidence in the FRS and the information it is providing, or a spread of misinformation, could have a potentially life-threatening impact on people’s lives.

2) How are you building stronger relationships with the people you serve: what is the role of communications?

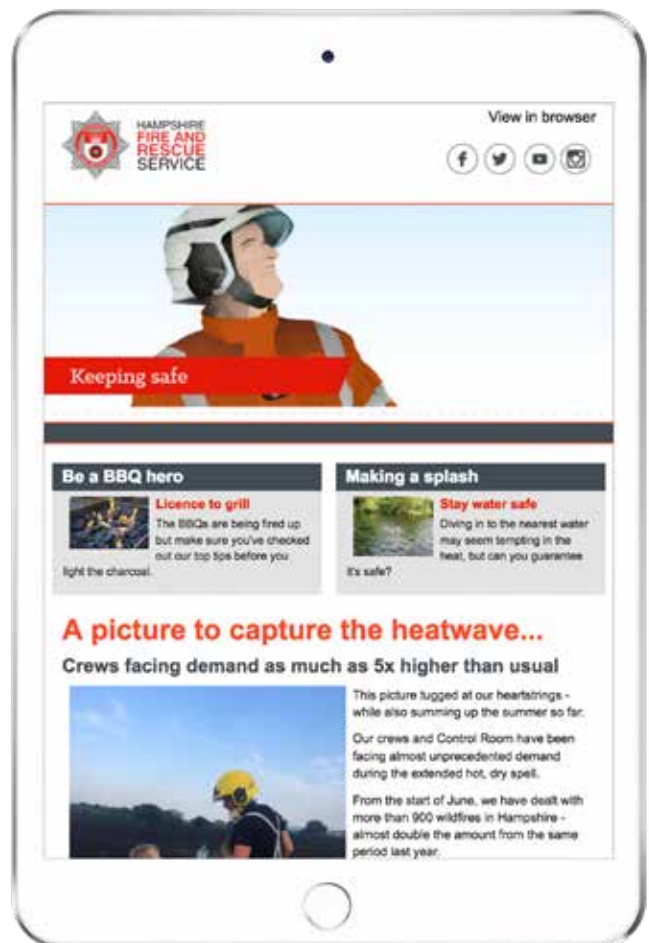
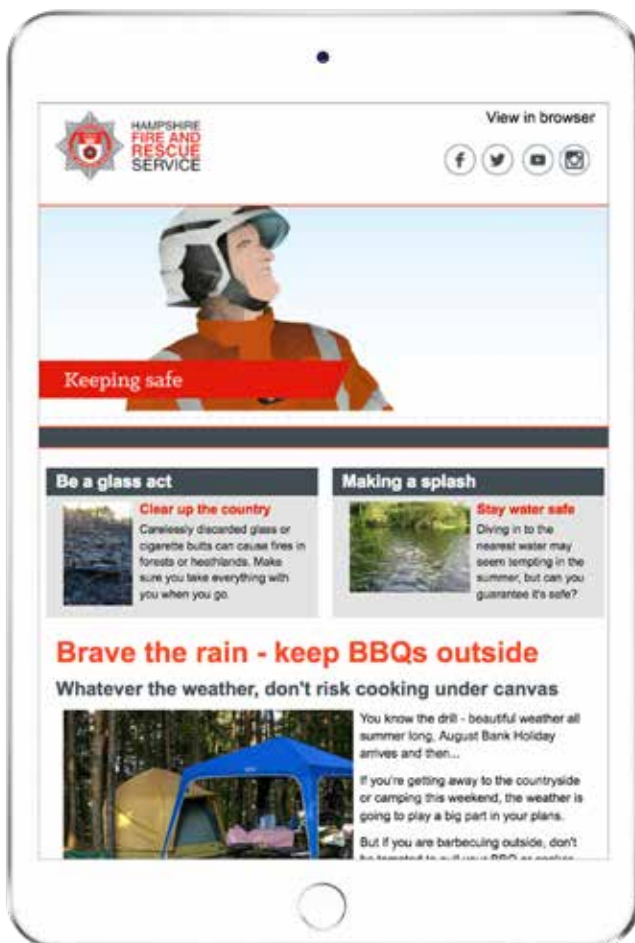
Achieving trust and maintaining confidence in the FRS comes through retaining a human tone to communications and engagement. With the FRS being regarded so highly by the public – firefighters in particular – the visibility of frontline staff in communications helps to build trust and engagement.

In Hampshire, we have been open to frontline staff using social media to engage with their own communities. This allows them to quickly provide accurate information around incidents and prevent any spread of misinformation locally.



HAMPSHIRE
FIRE AND
RESCUE
SERVICE

Example email bulletins to help build trust and keep people safe:



As an organisation, transparency and openness are also vital to retain trust. We need to ensure we can provide information to the public and our own staff, and facilitate two-way communication. Tools such as govDelivery by Granicus not only provide a way to do this, but also allow us to evaluate the impact of our communications – crucial for ensuring our approaches are working.

3) Can you give an example of when proactive public engagement was paramount in building trust and responding to a situation with potential ramifications?

The situation - Fear grows following the Grenfell Tower fire

The Grenfell Tower fire in London in June 2017 presented a significant challenge to the public’s trust in the FRS and the information it was providing. People living in high-rise buildings across the UK understandably felt vulnerable and questioned whether the information they were being provided on the safety of their homes was right.

This was arguably the biggest test of public confidence in the FRS in decades and required a concerted effort to reassure people and explain, as clearly as possible, certain policies or guidance.

The response - A proactive human approach to reassuring the public

In the days that followed the Grenfell fire, we took a multi-channel approach to provide relevant and critical information to people living in high-rise blocks in Hampshire.

Retaining the human and transparent approach was vital, to reflect the very real nature of people's concerns.

Our proactive communication included:

- **Promotion of our online home safety assessment tool, Safe and Sound** – We provided an instant, practical way people could review the safety in their home, with steps provided to address any issues.
- **Social media** – We signposted high-rise residents to guidance on what to do if there was a fire and the importance of knowing the building's evacuation plan.
- **Email newsletters** – We used our subscriber lists in the GovDelivery platform to provide advice to residents on keeping safe in high-rise blocks and where to find more information.
- **Working with partners** – We provided information and links to partners to also disseminate to their high-rise tenants. Both Portsmouth and Southampton city councils were able to use their housing-specific email subscription lists built through the govDelivery platform to target tenants directly.
- **Engagement events** – FRS crews and staff held events in high-rise areas in Southampton and Portsmouth, providing information to people and answers to their questions.

The result - 100% increase in email subscribers and greater engagement with FRS

Our approach was put to the acid test when a fire broke out on the 15th floor of the Albion Towers high-rise block in Southampton on 5 July, just three weeks after the Grenfell fire.

Residents of the block followed the building's evacuation plan and the guidance from the fire crews on the scene, which helped the incident be dealt with quickly and safely.

The local media painted a fairly dramatic view of the fire, but we were able to use our own channels to provide a truer picture of what had happened and reflect the work that had been done since Grenfell.

We were also able to evaluate whether our high-rise information was being received or shared:

- Visits to the high-rise pages of our website and the use of Safe and Sound rose by 17,000% in the month after Grenfell.
- Link clicks from Twitter rose by 30% in the month after Grenfell.
- Subscribers to our email bulletins powered by govDelivery more than doubled in the month after Grenfell.



Email - For the majority, any time, anywhere

Amid the social media hype, data scandals and detoxes of today, email is the comms companion standing the test of time. Take control of the story and get the right message to the right people at the right time.

// Book a meeting with Granicus to find out more: info@granicus.com

Strengthen connections during unusual and extreme circumstances

In unusual circumstances such as severe weather or an emergency situation, people seek information about public service changes and closures, so it's important you have the tools you need to meet customers' needs and expectations.

Being proactive about communicating with the public (even if it's just to let people know you are aware of the situation and will provide updates as soon as you can) will help build trust, alleviate fear and confusion, and reduce the risk of misinformation being shared in communities.

For many residents, an extraordinary event could be the first time they're visiting their council's website, or following the local police and fire service on social media. These moments are a rare opportunity to attract new audiences for your comms updates – for example new email subscribers – who you may not normally reach.

Make your email and SMS subscription options as prominent as possible to drive sign-ups, especially your updates for "Emergencies" or "Severe weather alerts" which could become your central point of connection.

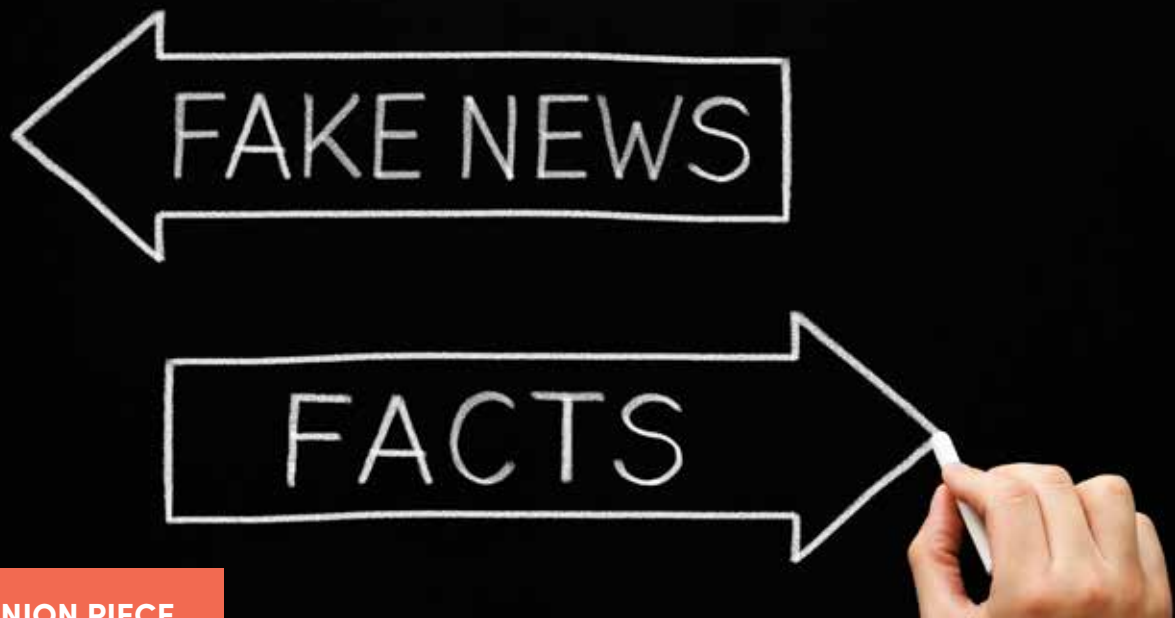
How to capture new subscribers to your email updates:

- ✓ Add a web overlay to capture subscriber details on your homepage and most popular pages
- ✓ Include "text to subscribe" instructions on printed/ambient media
- ✓ Update your call centre hold message to encourage sign-ups
- ✓ Cross-promote your "Emergencies" update in other email updates, including a button to sign up
- ✓ Cross-promote your sign-up links on social media
- ✓ Add a popup message to your customer apps
- ✓ Add a widget to your homepage showing the latest updates

Do you need help with your winter communications plans?

Do you want peace of mind that your organisation could reach the right people at the right moment in the event of severe weather or an emergency?

// **Get in touch to discuss how we can help: info@granicus.com**



OPINION PIECE

“Spectacle, outrage and disinformation”

// By Eddie Coates-Madden, Head of Communications at Sheffield City Council and LGcommunications National Secretary

The denial of facts runs counter to democracy

In July 2018, Barack Obama said, “We have to actually believe in an objective reality... You have to believe in facts... Without facts there’s no basis for cooperation. As with the denial of rights, the denial of facts runs counter to democracy. We have to guard against a tendency for social media to become purely a platform for spectacle and outrage and disinformation”.

Obama lays out clearly the need for truth in public services. If the denial of facts runs counter to democracy, being credible and believed in making our facts public is essential to the well-being of our councils.

Our ability to be believed when we speak, is critical as the basis for cooperation; in our delivery of the day to day services upon which people rely, and our work across the vast range of relationships that any local authority requires.

The risk of “fake news”, especially in the use of social media for what Obama calls “spectacle and outrage”, undermines not only the organisation’s ability to be believed on the matter or campaign at hand, but can cause damage across the broad range of issues it needs to communicate, and in which it needs to maintain integrity.

Remaining confident, credible and human

Sheffield City Council’s communications strategy specifically addresses the issue of trust. It says,

“Recognising that different audiences and channels require tailored and appropriate messages, we need to be clear about the tone, personality and voice of the organisation.

“We will seek to be confident, credible and – above all – human. We will seek to gain trust, be interested in everything that happens in the city, and celebrate the city’s successes. We will ensure customers are informed about services and activities that matter to them and understand their own responsibilities”.

The communications strategy takes a clear approach to segmenting our audiences, differentiating the tools and channels we use to reach each, and that we will support the council in its strategic priorities, communicating and reinforcing the values, priorities and initiatives of the corporate plan through key themes and messages.

In terms of communications' role, we set out (through ensuring the voices of customers, staff and key stakeholders are heard) to play a role in the design and delivery of services. And recognising that great communication is everybody's business, we also aim to oversee and support provision of high quality information.

The challenge of "spectacle, outrage and disinformation"

A presentation at a recent Granicus event on the rise of "fake news" provided a number of highly visible examples of "spectacle, outrage and disinformation".

A number of councils present identified times where that had happened for them, including disputes over streetlights, dog wardens, and spice use.

It was clear that those issues can sometimes overwhelm councils' ability to communicate on the wider range of issues, and that the disputes can result in highly visible media attention. Councils gave examples of how that can further obscure facts at the heart of their work too.

However many times they are suggested to be guilty of "spin", local authorities' communications have always been required to be, and have sought to be, honest, direct, and factual, using a range of channels, including direct email, the media, web and social.

That is not to suggest that resulting debate is not entirely proper – it is the very nature of the democracy – but the nature of the debate in a social media "echo chamber" can seem to mean that there are times when that legitimate debate can be overwhelmed by "spectacle, outrage and disinformation", with facts becoming distorted, and prejudices reinforced.

And concerns raised by "spectacle, outrage and disinformation" are by no means confined to councils, nor indeed the public sector. There are many examples of the problem, from the describing of Easter eggs, through who writes Tracey Ullman's comedy sketches, to the very serious concerns about disinformation on global warming, or vaccinations. Just a few minutes on Twitter would provide an endless supply of examples, and Facebook is taking a very high-profile approach to concerns about abuse of the platform.

The challenge for communicators in all of those areas is how we can obtain a better understanding – maybe through independent and respected advice – where there is dispute on factual issues.

There are lessons to be learned about how we maintain broad strategies of confident, consistent, truthful credible and human communications, to the right audience, in the right channel, at the right time, often through speaking directly to audiences.

And, more broadly, there are surely lessons to be learned in terms of how to handle strongly held views and challenges to policy, which also draws down on and respects the views of those not engaged in organised protest or interest groups.



CASE STUDIES

Trust-building communications in action

Example 1 - Preempting customers' needs at different stages of life

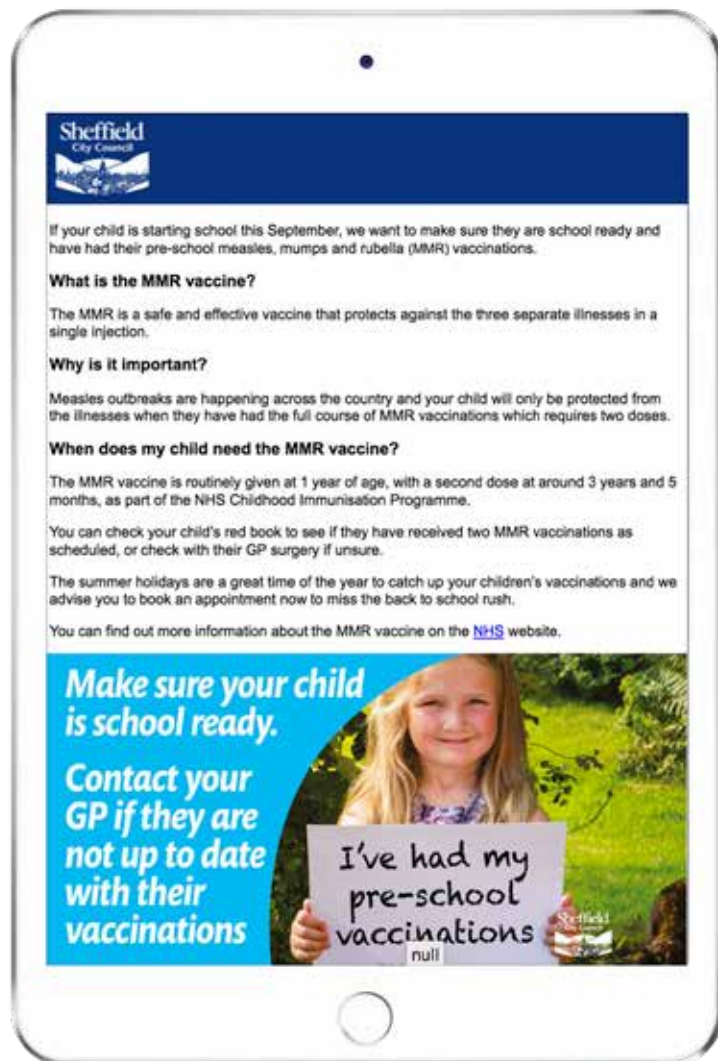
Sheffield City Council uses email and SMS communications to strengthen connections with over 50k people who have opted to receive updates on the topics that matter to them.

The council sends targeted updates relevant to specific life milestones and customer touchpoints, providing greater value to residents.

For example, nearly 7k parents are subscribed to receive information about their child's early development and the steps to prepare for starting school.

By being proactive in helping people access the services and opportunities that they may not even know they need yet, Sheffield is able to have a direct impact in people's everyday lives.

Every positive customer experience can help build trust and credibility over time, putting the council and communities in a stronger position to face the future together.



Example email bulletin for people subscribed to receive info about early learning and schools.

Example 2 - Listening to customers to improve services and recruit volunteers

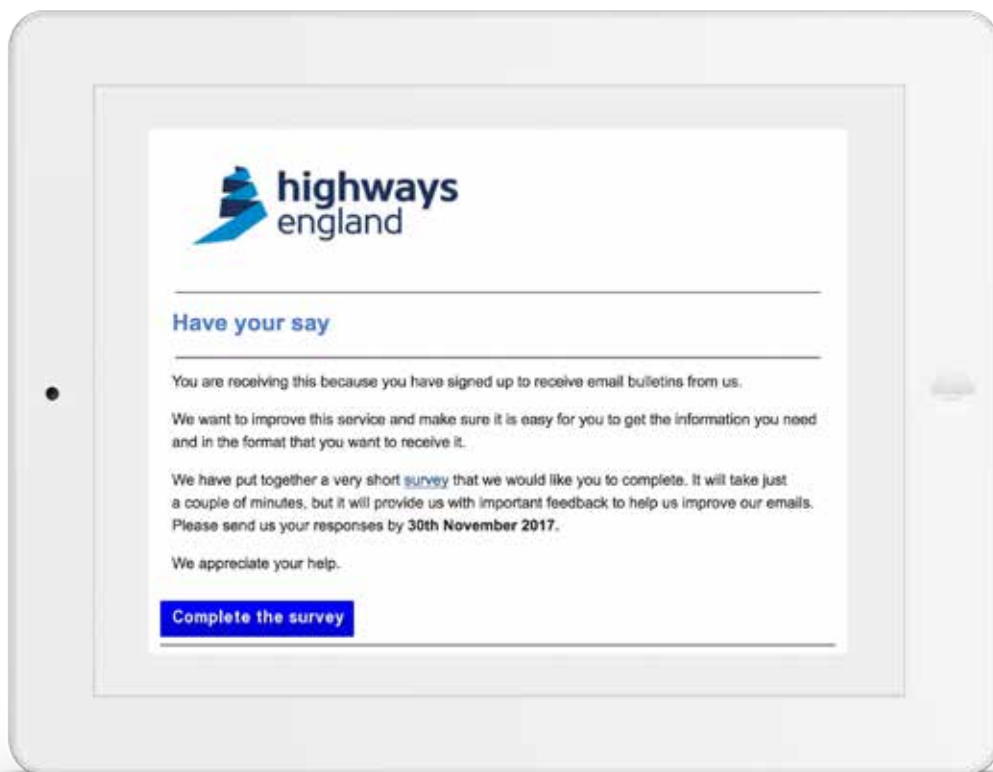
The quality and accessibility of the road network can have a big impact on our everyday lives and happiness.

Highways England recognises the need to build trust in communities, and the value of two-way dialogue. They use govDelivery by Granicus to deliver targeted email updates on roadworks and developments to an audience of over 113k subscribers.

They recently surveyed subscribers, leading to over 15k people giving feedback on their email updates service.

The high participation rate provided Highways England with ample audience insight, enabling the comms team to improve their messaging strategy in line with subscribers' needs.

The initiative also recruited 4k volunteers for future research focus groups, reinforcing Highways England's commitment to building effective relationships with customers. Services can be developed with customers, placing road users at the heart of the conversation.



Example email bulletin delivered using govDelivery to increase public involvement in service improvement.



Example 3 - Helping people plan their lives and make informed decisions

The Met Office delivers accurate forecasts and important weather data to millions of people, the government, businesses, and other organisations.

Establishing dependable communication channels (for example, the National Severe Weather Warnings Service powered by govDelivery, which serves nearly 300k subscribers) is critical to building trust in a brand.

To increase the number of people benefitting from the Met Office's services, they commissioned Granicus' Digital Engagement Services team to deliver a specific campaign to increase downloads of their new mobile weather app. The campaign exceeded engagement targets by 120%, resulting in 11k app downloads in one month.

"The Granicus campaign had a strong impact on our ability to reach, engage and convert new and existing Met Office audiences. We were able to attract new audiences through strategic placement in Granicus' network, giving us a means to immediately inform thousands more people about severe weather in their area to help them plan ahead and keep themselves and their loved ones safe."

Lisa Martin (Senior Marketing Manager, Met Office)

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CASE STUDY

Earning trust to stimulate behavioural change

// By Damien Currie, Communications Manager, Office of the Traffic Commissioner

1. Why is it vital people trust your organisation specifically, and what risk does misinformation pose to your “missions”?

The Traffic Commissioners for Great Britain are the industry regulators for truck, bus and coach operators. Businesses running these vehicles have to agree to a specific set of promises before they can have an operator's licence.

As well as trusting firms to be compliant, the commissioners need to show why the promises are important. Those who are doing things properly need to see the commissioners taking action against firms that don't meet the standards.

When a commissioner suspends or revokes a licence, it shows compliant operators why trust is important and that they won't have to compete on an uneven playing field. It demonstrates the value of being compliant with the rules.

If good operators don't see this, they may decide it's not worth meeting the standards themselves.

We procured govDelivery by Granicus to target and reinforce these messages to a highly engaged audience of compliant operators.



Office of the
Traffic Commissioner

2. How are you building stronger relationships with the people you serve: what is the role of communications?

One of the traffic commissioners' strategic objectives is to promote a safe road transport industry which supports compliance and fair competition.

In 2015, an incident involving a tipper lorry led to the deaths of three adults and a four year old girl. Faulty brakes were found to be the cause.

Following the incident, we launched a proactive campaign to get vehicle operators to review their brake testing procedures and see it as an important responsibility. This was our first industry wide campaign, not just targeting hauliers but those in specialist sectors such as scaffolding and manufacturing.

The govDelivery digital communications platform was our primary channel for communicating these messages. We knew the audience was highly engaged and a post campaign survey confirmed they'd taken the actions highlighted in our communications activity.

As a direct result of the messaging, the survey showed:

- **90.4%** of recipients were satisfied with the effectiveness of their brake testing regimes after doing a review
- **The majority** had taken action to review maintenance records and make sure brake tests were being carried out
- **85.39%** thought brake testing is very important to O licence responsibilities
- **86.54%** thought brake testing is very important in protecting the public from unsafe drivers and vehicles
- **78.95%** of respondents said they wouldn't have changed the way the campaign was communicated.

3. Can you give an example of when proactive public engagement was paramount in building trust and responding to a situation?

The situation - Maintaining trust through moving people from offline to digital channels

In 2016, we launched new digital licensing services for vehicle operators. The GOV.UK platform allowed businesses to submit licence applications online and make other digital transactions for the first time.

The digital take-up target for the service is 85%. A key component of this involves transitioning existing operators and new applicants from paper to digital applications.

We identified that one of the most effective drivers of behavioural change would be to remove paper forms from GOV.UK and make them accessible by telephone request only.

Traditionally, however, vehicle operators tended to be late adopters to digital platforms, so we therefore needed to look at whether there was a trust issue around digital services and new technology.

The response - User research and regular comms increase buy-in to decisions

We conducted user research with a variety of vehicle operators to identify any barriers to digital uptake. The insight found that operators regularly carried out digital transactions – including with government – and were comfortable with them.

They kept using paper forms with our service because that's how they'd always made operator licence applications, not because they didn't want to use our digital service.

The audience insight showed that we could remove paper forms from GOV.UK with no impact on perceptions of the service. We developed a blog to communicate the changes to vehicle operators and quoted the user research to build trust in our decision-making. The research showed operators that we were removing paper forms because we understood how they run their businesses. We also gave stakeholders advance notice of the decision to get their buy in.

We used govDelivery, our primary platform, to draw attention to the blog. The regular email bulletin had a 38% open rate (higher than the average and top 20 clients for other transport and regulatory bodies) and a 7% click rate (higher than the average and top 20 clients overall).

The result - Comms supports audience through development of digital services to increase take-up

Digital take up for the service is now above 80% following the removal of the paper forms, and user satisfaction remains high.

The key lesson we can share from this activity is in the value of obtaining robust and targeted user research to inform decision-making. This challenged our assumptions and helped us to identify directly with our audience through communications activity. The risk of doing nothing would have compromised the ability to meet the digital take-up target.



Read more case study examples on our blog

Check out our blog for good practice tips and examples of how digital comms can help you reach and engage more people in your programmes and services.

Browse the blog: uk.granicus.com/blog



CASE STUDY

Involving customers in service design to improve outcomes

// By Mat Simpson, Care Quality Commission (CQC)

1. Why is it vital people trust your organisation specifically, and what risk does misinformation pose to your “missions”?

As England’s regulator of health and social care, it’s critical that people trust what we say and do.

Providers of health and social care services need to understand what they’re doing right and where they need to improve. Our inspection reports give providers crucial information about the performance of their services – but if they don’t have confidence in what we say, that insight will go to waste.

At the national level, our unique view of England’s entire health and social care system means we can identify and share broad themes about the state of care. We also locate and highlight examples of good practice. The independent publications we write are used by Parliament and MPs, policy makers, care organisations, charities and the media, as well as the providers and commissioners of services themselves.

The general public are at the centre of the work we do. When someone is looking for a care home for a loved one, seeking a new dentist and GP after moving home, or checking the quality of care offered by a local hospital before an operation, they need to know our reports and ratings give an accurate reflection of the service.

We also rely on the public to tell us about their experiences of care. The information given to us helps us decide when, where and what we should inspect.

We know that it can be difficult for people to share their stories with us – particularly when things have gone wrong with their care – so it’s important that we’re clear about what we can and can’t do with that information. We also have a responsibility to make sure that the process for giving us feedback is as easy as possible.

2. How are you building stronger relationships with the people you serve: what is the role of communications?

The first challenge is to make sure the general public know who we are and how we can help them.

We run regular awareness campaigns featuring real people talking about their experiences of care. The campaigns explain how people can find out about the quality of services in their area, and share their good and bad experiences of care with us.

We use a mix of channels including video, social media activity and voluntary sector partnerships to host the campaigns. We can also use our mailing lists in govDelivery by Granicus to target people by interest (by email). Our regular public awareness surveys show total public awareness of the CQC has risen from 22% in 2012 to 65% in 2017.

We know our campaigns have been a significant factor in this rise, and our data shows that targeted population groups now have a significantly higher awareness of CQC than other groups.

We also make sure that we involve people in our work. We use trained members of the public (with lived experience of using services) in our inspections and to help us train our staff. Whenever we look at how we work, we make sure we hear the voices and opinions of the public and groups that represent them.

3. Can you give an example of when proactive public engagement was paramount in building trust and responding to a situation?

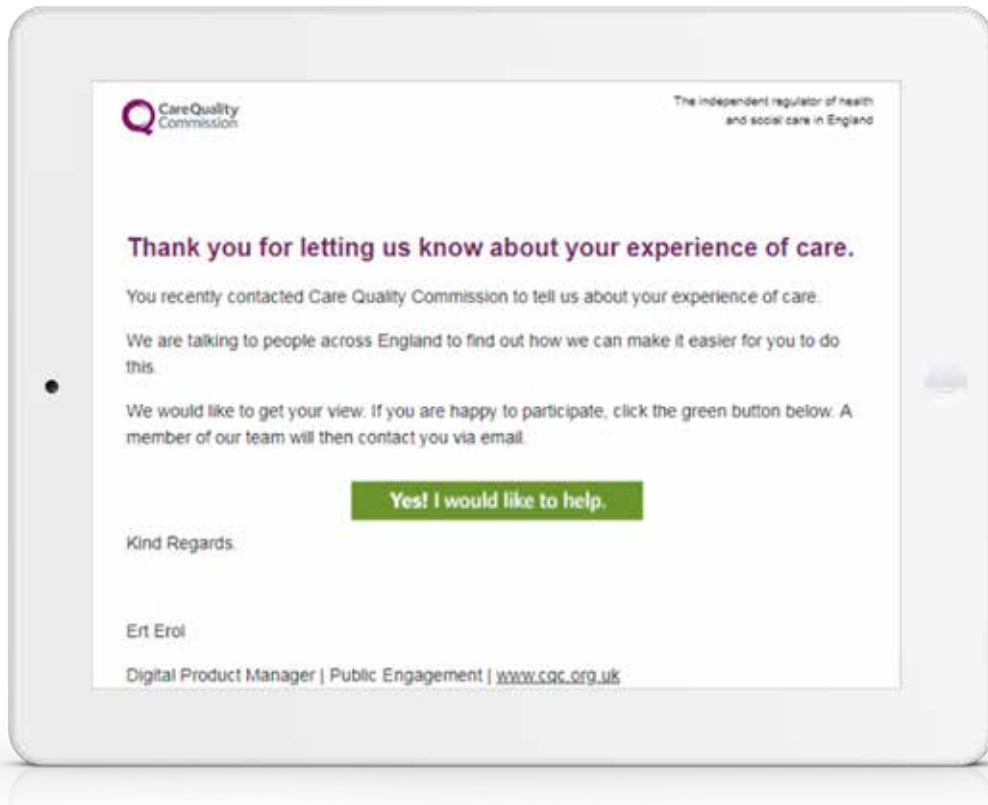
The situation - A need to make giving feedback on care experiences easier

The feedback we get tells us that it can be harder than it should be for our users to share their experiences of care with us. We also know that it hasn't always been clear when and how we can help people.

To fix this, we're changing how people tell us about their experiences of care. We need to make sure we get these changes right, so we looked at how we could speak directly with our users to find out what they've been trying to achieve and what frustrations they experienced using the service.

The response - A commitment to listening to customers

We had a list of people who had used the current service and said they'd be willing to be contacted by us. We sent this group an email with a button for people who were willing to take part in our user research.



We used govDelivery to track the people who clicked the button, giving us a quick, simple and accurate list of people we could speak with.



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The result - Better understanding of customers' pain points and needs

Our conversations and focus groups with users identified some issues with the form people currently use to tell us about care. In response, we're making sure that the new form will be compatible with all web browsers and screen readers and the questions specific to the users' circumstances.

There are times when we can't help. Although we ask people for their poor experiences of care, we don't have powers to take forward individual complaints. Our interviews with users identified this as an area of significant frustration, so we've been working with partner organisations to make it possible for people to privately, securely and simply share their comments with bodies who are able to investigate.



NEXT STEPS

Let's get started together

Government and public services must ensure they have dependable means to strengthen relationships with communities now and for the future. That means having the right tools for the job.

If you'd like to find out how Granicus' secure digital engagement solutions and campaign management services could help your organisation build public trust and nurture two-way conversations with the people you serve, get in touch today.

We'll help you lead more people to your programmes and services that foster happier, healthier and safer communities. And we'll help you deliver greater value for citizens at the same time.

Granicus is trusted by over 4,000 government organisations worldwide, including at the highest levels of federal government.

We already provide digital engagement technologies and services that connect nearly 200 organisations with more than 12 million people in the UK.

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