# COMMUNICATION PLAN

Regular and informative contact is appreciated by the board, proprietors, and most members. Inclusiveness is established through such contact; members become involved and remain interested in association issues and activities. Whatever the means of communication, it is important that the association initiate and maintain interactive communication with its members.

A communication plan is a formal strategy for relaying and receiving information between the association and its members. The basic elements of a simple written communication plan are:
- Audience
- What information is distributed
- Method of distribution
- Schedule of distribution
- Venue for audience response
- Record keeping

A good communication plan reflects the needs and interests of the membership and provides a venue for membership feedback. The following sections provide details on possible tools the association can use in its communication plan. It is suggested that records/copies are maintained of all communications.

## Creating a Web site

Web sites, even very basic ones, provide avenues for direct and personal contact with members, bowling center proprietors and coaches. A Web site also offers an opportunity to sell advertising space to local businesses. Keep in mind that income derived from selling advertising space is most likely taxable. Contact an attorney familiar with 501(c)(3) organizations for more information.

### Content

An association's Web site should be personalized to reflect its members' concerns, interests and needs. Local association information that can be posted might cover:
- League and tournament details

- Weekly/monthly high score or achievement updates

- Award ceremony information

- Membership benefits

- Local scoring records

- Coaching tips

- Local coaching information

- Bowling center events and discounts on products and services

- Links to BOWL.com and other bowling related sites

- USBC program announcements such as scholarship opportunities for youth members

- Community events such as the USBC Bowl for the Cure®

The Web site can also be used to post photos of members (if permission is granted) receiving awards and as a source for downloadable forms and online tournament registration. Over time the association could add items such as:
- An electronic yearbook

- Electronic awards submission

- A league secretary information page

- An electronic newsletter

Regardless of how simple or ambitious a local association's Web site may be, it exists to serve its members. All content should remain unique and special to the membership. Update the content often to prevent the site from becoming outdated.

**Design**

Some design ideas:
1. The design and maintenance of a Web site provides an excellent opportunity for members to become more involved with their association. Different levels of experience and expertise with technology may exist within the membership. Volunteers could be recruited to assist with a design project.

2. Research a free or low-cost Web site building and hosting service. It can present ideas for layout and design and offer easy to use Web building programs. Several examples are:

   - www.wix.com

   - www.web.com

   - www.sitebuilder.com

   - www.weebly.com

   - www.duda.co

3. If the revenue is available, contract a local Web development firm.

4. Contact other associations with Web sites and ask how they went about building theirs.

5. Contact local high schools or technical colleges. They may be willing to build an association Web site as a class project.

These are just a few ideas. However, the logical approach is to examine the Web sites of other companies and other associations. Make note of what is helpful and what is confusing about the Web sites. From these notes draft a design that will promote the association in a clear and attractive fashion – do not overlook the importance of proper branding.

The following are some association Web sites that can be accessed for review:

**Metro Detroit USBC**
www.mdusbc.com

**Minnesota State USBC**
www.mnstatebowl.org

**Chicagoland USBC**
www.chicagobowling.com

**Lynchburg Area USBC**
www.lausbc.com

# E-mail

E-mail is a convenient and relatively inexpensive way of maintaining regular communication with members, bowling center proprietors and coaches. Be aware there are federal regulations that must be adhered to. Refer to the CAN-SPAM Act rules for regulations related to e-mail transmissions. Information on SPAM and the CAN-SPAM Act can be found at:

- https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/articles/0038-spam

- https://www.ftc.gov/tips-advice/business-center/guidance/can-spam-act-compliance-guide-business

Personalizing e-mail is important. Anything that is not personalized may be regarded as SPAM (junk) and discarded by the recipient. Personalize an e-mail message by adding a name or slogan in the "subject line." Many e-mail programs support personalizing messages, including bulk mail. Microsoft Outlook, for example, can merge information into an e-mail document just as information can be merged into a Microsoft Word document.

Before any e-mail campaign is started, several aspects must be considered:

- Select a name for the association's e-mail account. (The association may want to consider maintaining a separate e-mail account to keep replies – to opt-out, etc. – separate from other association e-mails.)
- Who will setup, manage and maintain the e-mail lists?
- Does the e-mail system require HTML coding?
- Are there any local e-mail managers? (If none of the membership is familiar with the e-mail system, it may be advisable to obtain the services of an e-mail specialist.)
- Establish a schedule for e-mail transmission.
- Establish guidelines for what can be included in e-mail transmissions.

### Using WinLABS with Internet E-mail

WinLABS may be used to assist with some e-mail applications. Provided the association's e-mail system is compatible, WinLABS has two e-mail related features:

1. Ability to create e-mail address lists that can be pasted into an association's e-mail system.
2. Allows associations to send league rosters and average request forms as e-mail attachments.

To obtain information and instructions for using WinLABS and Internet e-mail, contact the WinLABS help desk at (800) 514-BOWL, ext. 8952 or labshelp@BOWL.com

### Opt-out Language for E-mail

It is required to provide the option of not receiving e-mail from the association. Any state or local association must provide such an instruction on mass e-mail transmissions. The following is an example of opt-out language:

"You are receiving this e-mail as a benefit of your membership. If you would prefer not to receive future e-mails, please reply to this e-mail and type 'remove' in the subject line or contact us at 555-5555."

If a member requests to be removed, the association must remove that member's e-mail address from the e-mail list.

**Note:** A member's e-mail information cannot be sold or given to any other organization for any reason.

### Removing a Member Before Running the WinLABS E-mail Blast List

If a member requests, via e-mail or hardcopy letter, to be removed from the association's e-mail blast list, by federal law the association must accommodate this request. The e-mail manager must access the individual bowler's profile and check the "exclude from third party e-mail box" for that specific bowler.

Before the report to acquire the e-mail blast list from WinLABS is run, check the "exclude people who don't want third party mailings" box on the WinLABS Report Wizard screen. This will protect the association from possible costly federal fines as detailed in the CAN-SPAM Act of 2004.

### Use Blind Copy to Send E-mail

E-mail lists are private. When e-mail is sent via the blind copy (usually a field prefaced by the letters "BC" or "Bcc"), only the recipient's name will be displayed in the blind copy field – all of the other names and e-mail addresses on the list will not be displayed. The blind copy feature must be used whenever an e-mail is being sent to more than one person, except in cases in which it is certain no issue will be raised with any recipient having his/her e-mail address disclosed to the other recipients.

Ensure E-mail from the Association is not mistaken for SPAM.

Request members to add the association's e-mail address to their list of safe senders and/or address book. This will prevent transmissions from the association from being directed to a junk mail folder.

## Voice Blasts

A voice blast is a pre-recorded message sent to multiple members simultaneously via telephone. It is a convenient and inexpensive way of getting association information to many members in a single call.

There are several companies which provide a variety of voice blast programs, many of which list costs and instructions for using their service on the company Web site.

### Benefits

- Eliminates time-consuming, repetitive calling.
- Pre-schedule a date and time for the call.
- Good method for broadcasting time-sensitive issues such as tournament deadlines.

### Drawbacks

- Answering machine settings (some machines can be set to drop unknown numbers).
- Wrong numbers.

Regulations

FCC rules allow calls to be made on behalf of a tax exempt non-profit organization. To comply with these rules, the association must include its phone number in the pre-recorded message so members who receive the calls have the option to be placed on the association's do-not-call list.

States also may have telemarketing laws which may be more restrictive than the federal regulation. Check with the state Attorney General's office for information.

Additional information about government regulations concerning phone communication (do not call) can be found at www.donotcall.gov.

## Printed Newsletters

A regularly distributed printed newsletter is a tangible association presence. It demonstrates that the association is active and takes a serious interest in its members.

Newsletters are a good way to keep members informed of such topics as:

- Advertisers/sponsors
- Bowling tips
- Calendar of events
- Contacts
- Honor score awards
- Member benefits
- Proprietor information
- Remembrances

- Tournaments

A newsletter is also a good opportunity for member involvement. Ask members to volunteer to write articles and oversee the layout and design of the newsletter.

### Include Meaningful Information

Supplement promotional stories with a question and answer column, trends, statistics, how-to features, and technical advice. Do not overlook the value of an association newsletter name and logo.

### Involve the Audience

Request letters to the editor and story ideas, include a clip and return questionnaire, offer special pricing coupons, a calendar of events, and plenty of alternative methods for contacting the association – association's e-mail address, phone, and fax numbers (including best times to call or fax), and members' names and photos (with permission). Include stories about and letters from members.

### State What the Association Represents

Add a tag line (for example, the California State USBC's tagline is "The Best Bowlers Come from California") that explains what the association represents. This becomes beneficial publicity as more than members will read the newsletter – a valuable source of new member prospects.

### Keep it Simple

Good design can make the message more easily understood. Meaningless graphics, difficult to read text, too many different font styles, and too many visual elements on a page can stop an individual from reading.

## Electronic Newsletters

Where possible, an electronic newsletter can be a viable form of communication. Some items to consider when producing an electronic newsletter include:

- Make the format easy to e-mail and download – members must have a compatible system in order to open the newsletter.

- Plain text is an acceptable format; however, electronic newsletters in HTML are becoming easier to offer.

- It can be posted on the association's Web site. Members can access current news at any time.

- It can be distributed using an email marketing and communication platform such as MailChimp or Constant Contact (highly recommended)

- Offer advertising space by electronically linking sponsors to the newsletter.

   **Note**: Income derived from selling advertising space is most likely taxable. Contact an attorney familiar with 501(c)(3) organizations for more information

- Use opt-out language (refer to **E-mail Tips**).

## Flyers and Posters

Flyers and posters can be used to promote:
- Tournaments

- Membership

- Special events

**Note**:  Always get permission from the property owner before posting any flyer or poster. Also, after the event, be sure to remove all flyers or posters

### Tips

Make the content stand out by using one or more of the following design strategies:

### Contrast

For contrast, vary the size (of graphics), color, font, spaces, etc. Keep the presentation attractive by controlling the contrast. Too much contrast can distract the audience from the message.

### Succinct Headlines

Sum up the promotion with a few direct and descriptive words. Be simple, clear, and direct (this does not mean it cannot be dynamic and expressive).

### White Space

Do not cover the entire page with graphics and text. White space helps organize the information so that it is more easily understood by the audience.

### Questionnaires

Questionnaires are a good way to invite communication from the membership.

Questionnaire Considerations:

- Determine a purpose for the questionnaire – what issues do the membership consider important and how will responses influence decision making?

- Draft the questions – make sure all questions are direct, unambiguous, and relevant to the issue being explored.

- Determine the vehicle for the questionnaire – electronic, paper, interview, etc.

- Determine a time frame for the questionnaire – when will the questionnaire be conducted? When will the results be published? (as applicable)

- Publish the results (as applicable) – members want to see how others feel about issues.

## Communication Between Board Members

To make well-informed decisions, board members must know what is being communicated to and from the association.

Since the board appoints/selects the association manager and reviews his/her performance, each board member should be apprised of the tasks he/she performs. As a representative of the members, it is a board member's duty to inquire about the day-to-day operations being performed by the association manager.

Concurrently, the association manager is advised to maintain open lines of communication with the board, since he/she is accountable to them. A simple, yet effective way to keep the board "in the loop" is to copy them on all correspondence. For instance, the association manager could copy board members on correspondence to center management, members, tax consultants, potential sponsors, etc. Copying board members on letters and e-mails should be done as the correspondence is sent, not after the fact.

In addition, the association manager should forward appropriate information received from USBC Headquarters to other members of the board. For example, the "Association Manager e-News," which is a weekly e-mail correspondence of USBC operational updates, contains information pertinent to all board members and should be forwarded accordingly.

Do not overlook the importance of regular communication between board members. All meetings must include committee reports and updates on correspondence the association manager or president may have received or sent.