



Communications technology is advancing at breakneck speed, and for pension schemes it presents opportunities for engaging with members in new ways. The internet is already well established as a communications tool but smartphone apps and social networking media are now coming into the frame as well.

In the UK, web-based delivery of pension information was given a boost with the change in rules last December which permitted electronic delivery of annual benefit statements.

Louise Harris, head of pensions communications for Capita Hartshead explains: "The changes allow greater flexibility for pension schemes to use online communication as their medium of choice. The annual benefit statement, I think, is the one thing that members really do look at and take note of. You can see your pension account changing from one year to the next. It's a prompt to manage your account – it says you have this much, this is how much it will be when you retire, and you think, is it enough?"

For pension scheme members to use the web to engage with their pension, it

Getting the message across

Christine Senior explains how recent technology has opened up new ways of potentially improving member communication

has to offer something more than providing the same scheme booklets or benefit statements that people would otherwise get through the post. It has to make use of the web's versatility. So e-magazines and e-versions of newsletters may resemble at first glance a traditional hard copy publication but their interactivity enables readers to pursue a particular theme of interest to them. One click can take them to a video where someone speaks to them in more depth about a topic they are curious about, or clicking on interactive graphs can illustrate a point visually.

But the technical wizardry must clarify the message and not dazzle the audience. "You have to be sure you don't get carried away by the gimmicks," says Hannah Clarke of Ferrier Pearce's creative team. "You still need clear engaging copy that makes sense with the images."

One way to grab attention is personalisation of the message, whether that

is welcoming people by name when they log on or sending out customised information. It's talking to people as individuals, not just churning out the same message to all.

'Segmentation' is the buzz word in pension communication. Getting the right message to members at each stage of their working life is the most effective tool in getting a response. "In engagement campaigns to do with paying more contributions or joining share saving plans, if you are clever with data and segment your audience by job role, age, salary, life journey, you can get the order of priorities for people. You can catch them with the things that make the most sense for them," says Clarke.

It also helps if the images of people used match the target audience, so the member feels this is a person they can trust, or someone who is at the same stage of life or at their level in the company. People are more willing to take advice from those they identify with.

One example of a project managed by Ferrier Pearce was for Arup, a firm of designers, planners and engineers. The company was closing one pension scheme and instead offering a group personal



pension. The communications exercise needed to get across to members the implications of the change and persuade them to make active choices. The design of the campaign drew strongly on the company's ethos, and used the theme of harmony and balance which chimed with that. The exercise took staff through a process of educating themselves about the new scheme and making choices. "We developed a website, which included an interactive quiz to take people through their attitude to risk which they hadn't had to think about before," says Clarke. "It was an animated website that looked friendly and didn't mention the word pensions too much."

The whole exercise was deemed a great success by the company: the number of people signing up was 83%, well ahead of the target of 75%, and of those who did sign up, 82% opted to pay the maximum contribution.

A complete redesign of a pension scheme, or closing the DB scheme and setting up DC, are obviously huge changes, which require a big attention-grabbing campaign. But it's regular engagement of members with their pension scheme that can be more difficult to achieve. Yet it is essential for people to review their contributions and investment choices regularly to ensure, as far as possible, their savings will meet their living expenses in retirement.

Texting and emails can play a part in persuading people to do the right thing. If, for example, there's an opportunity to join a salary sacrifice scheme only once a year, a reminder by email is a good nudge in the right direction. Segmenting the membership by age can facilitate targeted messages, reminding people what is appropriate for this stage in their careers.

Birthdays also provide this oppor-

tunity: "Sending an email saying 'Happy birthday, do you realise you have x payslips to when you retire', that can be scary," says Clarke. "People think, 'I have to do something'."

Social networking could be the next big thing to get people to engage with their pensions, but it's still at an early stage. Surprisingly, the first generation to use this for pensions could well be the silver surfers. Ferrier Pearce has a client which has set up a Facebook area for its pensioners.

Clarke says: "The client has a programme of entertainment for their pensioners to try to keep them engaged, and there's an active pensioners society. The chairman of trustees has set up a Facebook account to let pensioners know what is going on."

Friends Provident is also pursuing a pilot scheme with one client to use Twitter and Facebook to engage its scheme members. For a month it will run a campaign which involves providing a Facebook page and regular tweets.

"It will be almost like open access to the people managing the pension scheme, involving people in the HR department backed up by Friends Provident to provide information," says David Millar, manager of Friends Provident's pension communication team. "Because it's such a limited time period you can build up some interest. Hopefully people will follow it because that's how people are consuming media now."

Capita Hartshead has as yet no clients using social media, but in the meantime is getting geared up for future demand by testing out a Facebook presence for a notional scheme to look into its future potential. "We have set up a Facebook page for a make-believe scheme called Snowfall pension, so we could play with the kind of content you would put on there and

see how it would work for a pension scheme," says Harris. "Until you see it and use it, it's quite difficult to understand how it would be applied."

But Kevin Shilling, CEO of SHILLING Communication, has some reservations about just how useful social media will be in pension communication. "It's something we have delved into," he says. "At the moment in the UK and Ireland people are happy to socialise on Facebook or Twitter, but to get intimate about pensions, I'm not sure."

But SHILLING is working with a client on a pension app for iPads which is still at the development stage. "At the moment it takes people through to an electronic version of the booklet and the pension scheme website and from that you can read about the pension scheme and investment choices and contributions," he says. "You wouldn't get access to your statement initially. That probably would be something that comes in the future."

There are some pension apps around already. Aviva's Time to Act iPhone app is a modeller that allows people to input their own data on contributions, projected retirement date etc, to work out what their pension pot might be at retirement. The app is a simplified version of Aviva's modeller, the Pension Tracker, which provides personalised information to Aviva's customers. Once customers register they can see their own data and future projections based on their current pension pot and different variables which they can input. Whether this app, available to anyone, not just Aviva customers, will be the shape of things to come, only time will tell.

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