Balancing member engagement with GDPR

❯ Has GDPR impacted on pension communications and the industry's ability (or not) to be proactive with their engagement messages?

GDPR certainly gave the pensions industry some additional hoops to jump through before engaging with scheme members. But rather than being seen as a hindrance, it actually offers a number of opportunities to be more strategic with communications. Utilising data enables us to be more targeted in our interactions with pension savers. This therefore increases the chances of being more successful with the outcomes we want to achieve.

The challenge is balancing compliance with GDPR while still managing to be proactive with engagement.

GDPR landed at a time when schemes were really starting to up their digital communications approach. But the Data Protection Act 98 had been around for so long, the concept of protecting personal data wasn't a new one – just a shift in focus.

While there's emphasis on GDPR giving individuals greater control over their data, the regulations can also help schemes to build trust with their members by allowing them to effectively exercise their rights to access and amend any data errors. Going to lengths to reassure scheme members their data is secure and being processed in accordance with GDPR should also help with building confidence in the scheme.

Gaining consent to communicate with scheme members about elements not wholly related to the admin of their benefits can be a challenge, but it doesn't have to solely be a regulatory burden. There's the opportunity to engage throughout the process by utilising existing communications, segmenting the information which is issued to different populations and making it more personalised and targeted. Pension scheme members are all individuals driven and motivated by different needs, desires and financial capabilities.

Understanding nuances in demographics, attitudes and behaviour is important when planning your communication strategy, and it provides an opportunity to create real value for members. Much like a consumer buying a bicycle, scheme members will be thinking and engaging with their pensions at different stages. With digital experiences and the use of quality data, you can create segmented engagement approaches, which present the right information to them at key points in their lives, matching their current needs. Segmentation models and messaging can be constantly refined and tested to find approaches that work, thereby increasing engagement.

Improving data-led decision-making through the effective identification, collection, analysis and use of data isn't as difficult as it sounds, even with the additional responsibilities GDPR presents to us.

Obviously, it's critical the data we hold is accurate. It may be challenging to maintain perfect data for all types of scheme members. But ultimately a focus on accurate data is good news for communications as they can be tailored to the individual's current circumstances. It's also no bad thing for the industry, given the introduction of pensions dashboards will put even more emphasis on schemes to ensure they have up-to-date, accurate information about their members and their benefits.

The security of data is probably the thing which has the most potential to keep pensions professionals awake at night. The risk of data breaches may put off some schemes in sending out member communications. But on the flip side, there are opportunities for schemes to hone their channels of choice and set up robust systems which all work for their membership.

Overall, schemes are having to up their game when it comes to communications as a result of GDPR. They now have to deliver messages that actually benefit their members, like updates on pension performance, personalised retirement planning, and information on how legislative changes could impact savings.

By focusing on providing real value, schemes can keep members engaged, even within the limits of the GDPR rules.

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