MODS Communication Working Group:
Final Recommendations Report

Summary:

MODS has created a working group to investigate communication practices within the organization and make a series of recommendations for future communication requirements. The group's findings are summarized into six recommendation statements. Each statement is provided with its own benefits to provide context, and proposed steps for successful implementation. MODS should consider these recommendations in developing their own communication strategies. An appended section provides materials for MODS staff to consult when communicating with their membership.

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Section 1: Introduction

The MODS Communications Working Group was created in order to provide recommendations to MODS staff regarding good communication practice. The group was formed in October, 2018 and is expected to dissolve at the end of February, 2019.

The working group began by assessing the current state of communication within MODS, focusing on the connection between MODS as an organization and its members. This was done by identifying strengths and weaknesses of MODS communication, with a focus on efficiency and necessity of the messages MODS sends its members. The group then generated two lists to drive future discussions: (1) a series of stakeholders within MODS (e.g. captains, volunteers, members at large) and (2) a list of questions that they sought to answer through a series of meetings, discussions with members, and discussions with MODS staff. The following questions also served as the backbone to this report:

1) How should MODS structure their communication procedures?
2) How can MODS leverage their successful communication practices to improve unsuccessful ones?
3) What messages does MODS need to send?
4) Who should receive these messages?
5) When should these messages be sent and possibly resent?
6) Is there a need for a communication lead within the board/staff?

Many of our findings were transferable between different groups within the community, i.e. captains, members, juniors and parents of juniors, and touring players. These findings can be broken down into four guiding principles:

1) Communication should be consistent in format and timeliness
2) MODS should maintain transparency in their communication
3) Members should have control over the content they receive and read
4) MODS should share information that is relevant, professional, and focused

The recommendations made within this report represent the findings of the working group. Their implementation is ultimately up to MODS staff members. We suggest that MODS staff review these recommendations and develop a communication strategy to be implemented for future communication requirements. These recommendations are intended to improve efficiency and allow MODS staff to strengthen communication between MODS staff and its membership. However, we understand that some recommended changes are major projects that have significant resource requirements. Ultimately, resource availability of the MODS staff will dictate the degree to which these recommendations can be satisfied. Recommendations that cannot be satisfied by current resources should be reassessed by MODS staff and board members at a future time.

Section 2: Recommendations from the Working Group

This section summarizes the recommendations made by the working group. Recommendations are categorized into six overarching directives. The six recommendations, in no particular order, are:

1. MODS should create templates for their various messages and communication platforms
2. MODS should develop, maintain, and follow schedules for distributing information to members regarding its events and programs
3. MODS should sharpen the chain of communication between captains and players
4. MODS should use communication software/tools to assist with message delivery, where applicable
5. MODS should identify feedback channels for their members
6. MODS should implement a strategy for their multiple communication platforms

These recommendations are provided with three pieces of information to provide context and guidance to MODS staff.

1. A graphic displaying which of the 4 key guiding principles are addressed by the recommendation
2. The proposed benefits of the recommendation
3. A proposed method and/or list of considerations for implementing the recommendation

Recommendation:
MODS should create templates for their various messages and communication platforms

Consistency	Transparency	Control	Relevance

Benefits:
The expected benefits of moving to a template-based communication system include:

- Reduced staff workload. Common message types (e.g. tournament announcements, beginning-of-season captain emails, etc.) won't have to be created from scratch each time
- Definition of the most effective format for each message, and the ability to easily maintain that format
- Reduced email fatigue for recipients, as it will be easier to find the key information
- Reduced erroneous or missing information. Less effort to generate the message should allow more time for ensuring the key information is correct. Templates make it easier to identify when typically-included information is missing

Implementation:
MODS produces a substantial and varied amount of information that they must share with their members. Additionally, they serve as a portal for distributing messages from their members to other members. As such, the method for building and implementing templates varies by the message source.

For MODS-generated messages:

- Identify common message types (e.g. captain's emails, tournament information, rain announcements, etc.)
- Identify which platforms are used for these messages based on the communication strategy
- List the key information that is transmitted for each message and each platform
- Templates should be designed for the platform and message type being used (e.g. emails for tournament announcements or league-specific Twitter posts). Their design should consider:
    - What does the reader need to see first?
    - How much time will they spend on this format (e.g. email vs. Twitter)
    - Will they need to quickly refer back to this email (e.g for a date, field location, etc.)
    - Will they want to forward all or part of this message to their team or others?
    - What time of day will the messages be sent?
    - Does the format/layout work well on desktop *and* mobile?
- Templates should standardize the format and layout of each message, including the use of appropriate fonts and imagery

- Where possible, set up the templates so that key information only has to be entered once
    - For example, suppose MODS is announcing a tournament using Facebook, Twitter, email, and their website. Each media will have the same key information (name, date, location, etc.) surrounded by some boilerplate text appropriate to the medium, and/or locations where flavour text/images, etc. could be added. Fields can be set up to automatically link the key information that is repeated in each message. This will reduce effort (once the templates are set up) and reduce errors

For information submitted by other groups:

- Identify the common message types that are submitted (e.g. MODS article submissions, calls for touring team tryouts, etc.) and define where those messages should be shared in the communication strategy
- Define characteristics of submissions for members, including:
    - Word limits
    - Photo size and resolution
    - Key information that must be included
- Consider publishing a template for submissions that would reduce the need for MODS to transcribe user-submitted posts

Additional considerations for emails:

- Where possible, emails should have a specific subject line so that readers can easily categorize the information and find it again later. The MODS newsletter currently does this; it may be appropriate for other message types as well
- Emails should be concise and contain critical information to reduce strain on readers. Link to more information on the MODS website wherever possible
- Footers should include links to the MODS social media accounts
- Format emails to be compatible with mobile viewers
- Consider the use of a style guide to inject professionalism and consistency into the language used in emails

Recommendation:
MODS should develop, maintain, and follow schedules for distributing information to members regarding its events and programs

Consistency	Transparency	Control	Relevance

Benefits:
The expected benefits of using schedules for timing communication deliveries include:

- Ability for staff to plan ahead and see what communication-related tasks are coming up
- Reduced number of last-minute deliverables that are more prone to errors
- Serves as a sort of “checklist” for communication ensuring that nothing is forgotten
- Reduced staff time spent on communication once a schedule has been established
- Ability for members to predict and understand when and how they receive information
- Reduced overloading of information on members by ensuring communication is spread out over time and the various channels that are used

Implementation:
MODS has the unfortunate task of distributing information that is sometimes liable to change. In this way, not every communicated piece of information can be scheduled. However, repeated pieces of information (registration announcements, weather status updates, etc.) become significantly stronger means of communication by following planned release schedules. In order to develop these schedules, MODS should:

- Compile of list of messages that are sent out and determine their frequency and levels of urgency, e.g.:
    - Recurring and urgent - game status, payment deadlines
    - Non-recurring and urgent/emergency - field changes, score inputs, payments
    - Recurring and not urgent - program registration, membership purchases
    - Non-recurring and non urgent - special events, new programs
- Decide which medium is best used to disseminate each type of communication (newsletter, targeted email, social media). Sometimes, multiple platforms will be used. Platforms may have different schedules and format requirements (e.g. character limits).
- Prepare a release schedule for each platform, ensuring that messages are adequately spaced out to reduce overload and not so disparate that they are forgotten
- Be systematic in releasing information, for example:
    - Newsletters follow consistent release days, e.g. 2nd Tuesday of every month
    - Social media posts follow a weekly theme, such as:
        - Mondays - Rule of the week
        - Tuesdays - touring team highlights/info
        - Wednesdays - Women’s highlights/info
        - Thursdays - Rec League highlights/info
        - Fridays - Men’s league info/highlights
    - Game status updates released at 4:00 pm every day during the summer

Recommendation:
MODS should sharpen the chain of communication between captains and players

Consistency	Transparency	Control	Relevance

Benefits:
The expected benefits of sharpening the MODS-captains-players communication chain include:

- Reduced consideration by MODS as to where messages should be delivered
- Reduced resource drain on MODS answering inquiries regarding as yet unreleased information
- Developed expectation of players and captains as to where they should look to receive information
- Developed expectation of captains as to which information must be shared with players and the urgency of said messages

Implementation:
MODS has undergone considerable growth as an organization. This growth has made direct communication with membership difficult, and so more onus has been put on captains to distribute relevant information to their players on behalf of MODS. This organizational system is sustainable, so long as all links in the chain of communication understand their roles. At times, this has broken down, leading to uninformed players and overloaded captains. In order to re-focus this chain of communication, MODS should:

- Compile a list of messages that are sent out and determine their targets and release platforms based on urgency, e.g.
    - Team schedules are non-urgent, can be released to captains via email and the website for players to view
    - Field changes are urgent, can be released to captains and players via email and to the website for players to view
- Follow schedules, as described in the above recommendation, so players and captains can understand when and where to expect information
- Always provide an alternative source of information to the captain (e.g. emails sent to captains are simultaneously posted on the website)
- Clearly indicate why a member is receiving information, and whether their role dictates that they should communicate it further, e.g.:
    - Newsletters are received by subscribing to the newsletter, captains and players may elect to share this news with their teams (optional)
    - Schedules are delivered to captains but are non-urgent and available online, captains may elect to share with their team or direct them to the website (optional).
    - Player registration has an impact on team registration, captains should explain these requirements and the registration process with their players (expected)

Recommendation:
MODS should use communication software/tools to assist with message delivery, where applicable

Consistency	Transparency	Control	Relevance

Benefits:
The expected benefits of using software specifically catered to communication include:

- Reduced workload for staff when sending repeated messages, or follow up reminder messages
- Reduced workload for staff when creating or updating mailing lists within the growing MODS membership population
- Enriched communication process by collecting useful engagement metrics

Implementation:
MODS has predominantly used email for mass communication. We recommend that MODS continues to use emails for quickly sharing information targeted at specific audiences. Numerous software tools (e.g. Mailchimp) are available to MODS as an option for facilitating email development and distribution. These tools may be available for free or for purchase/subscription. This recommendation is specifically aimed at easing the workload for MODS staff when communicating with groups of members. In using such a software, MODS should:

- Create lists within MODS membership that should receive specific pieces of information (e.g. captains of rec league teams) that are updated routinely
    - Integrating this with the new website may allow for “follow-up” type emails like outgoing surveys and registration reminders
- Collect engagement information to inform future communication decisions by using features such as user-specific links
- Be systematic in distributing emails. Features such as built-in schedules and unsubscribe links can help with other recommendations in this report as well (e.g. software can maintain schedules for re-sending registration reminders with a predetermined cadence)
- Use software features to design posts that fit specific release platforms (e.g. Twitter has different formatting requirements from email)
- MODS currently uses such a software for newsletter distribution. We recommend that this use be broadened to most email communication (and, if applicable, other communication methods) wherever possible
- Use software to “train” members on how to follow specific procedures (e.g., player registration)

Recommendation:
MODS should identify feedback channels for their members

Consistency	**Transparency**	Control	Relevance

Benefits:
The expected benefits of identifying channels for members to give MODS feedback include:

- Less staff time spent addressing emails
- Clearer indication for members to share concerns or ask questions
- Clearer indication for members as to what is being done with their feedback
- Improved response time to inquiries

Implementation:
MODS membership often defaults to sending comments and questions to MODS staff. This is an ineffective feedback loop, as it overloads the MODS staff and, in some cases, adds an extra step in communicating messages to the appropriate bodies. In order to clearly identify feedback channels for membership, MODS should:

- Compile a list of common and expected feedback types (i.e. any messages shared from membership to any MODS affiliate)
- Associate each of these feedback types with an appropriate person or group of people that can be expected to adequately address the feedback, e.g.:
    - Sponsorship request - business and sport development director
    - Field concerns - fields committee chair
- Create a “contact us” page on the MODS website that features these feedback types and associated bodies. The page should feature an approximation of the response time to said feedback
- Create a policy to acknowledge the feedback and give context to actions to be taken, while respecting confidentiality as necessary
    - Ensure that all affiliates listed on the “contact us” page are aware of their responsibility to commit to this policy
- Create feedback-specific addresses that collect membership feedback with simple to understand addresses, e.g.:
    - Fields@mods.mb.ca may be built for the field committee chair, who would then commit to checking this inbox regularly or set up automatic forwarding to their personal email
- Consider using automated email responses to set up response time expectations

Recommendation:
MODS should implement a strategy for their multiple communication platforms

Consistency	Transparency	Control	Relevance

Benefits:
By focusing on the purposes of each communication platform, MODS will:

- Allow members to select the information they are receiving
- Be able to create content that caters to the members that are receiving it
- Be able to quickly identify the appropriate communication channel(s) for a particular piece of information

Implementation:
MODS communicates using a multi-pronged approach, constituting social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram), their website, emails, phone calls, and in person meetings. This recommendation targets the mass communication channels (i.e. social media, website, and emails) to improve communication with large groups of MODS membership. In order to achieve the benefits listed above, MODS should:

- Focus on the new website as being an information "hub"
    - The website should host **all** MODS-related information in a series of organized categories/headings where interested parties (members or otherwise) can seek information
    - The website front page is an invaluable tool for displaying key information and should be used as such. High priority information should be posted here for members to quickly see without any other engagement requirements, and remain there for an appropriate length of time
    - As such, the website should be properly maintained so information is up-to-date and reflects the efforts and offerings of MODS staff
- Social media platforms should be refocused to channelize subsections of information. This is critical since they require an opt-in from members who are seeking alternative communication channels. Members should know what they are following/subscribing to get from MODS. For example:
    - The MODS Twitter account can be retooled as a recurring information distribution centre. Weather status updates may be posted here routinely (using a schedule and specialized software, to fit in with other recommendations), program registration dates can be announced.
    - The MODS Facebook account can be used to focus on events and stories. Posts may link to or share stories from other organizations (e.g. disc golf MB, Women's committee events, MODS teams, disc sport groups outside of MB, etc.) or focus on programs and events that MODS runs.

    - The MODS instagram account should be revitalized or disbanded. This may be a useful platform to hold contests (e.g. take your disc to work) and share pictures from MODS events.
    - MODS should search for a handle (e.g. @MODS) that is available across all platforms to use a single, consistent social media handle.
- Use emails to send incidental information. Allow users to opt-in to categories of emails where possible (e.g. newsletters, upcoming programs & events, volunteer opportunities, skills clinics, touring opportunities, etc.)

Section 3 - Conclusion

The working group has provided recommendations for MODS to consider in future communication endeavors. These recommendations represent the findings of internal and external discussions of the group. The appended section that follows this report provides resources for MODS that may further ease the implementation of the recommendations.

Along with the recommendations that make up the body of this report, the working group has discussed two specific future considerations for MODS regarding communication without providing formal recommendation.

1. A MODS-related podcast (the “MODS-cast”) - This proposed project was met with skepticism by the working group. A podcast would likely provide a channel for communicating with a wider audience, as disc sport podcasts are a niche market that could be tapped into by such a project. However, logistical issues were brought up - would the MODS-cast represent MODS and, thus, make MODS liable should issues arise (e.g. if a group within MODS is feeling underrepresented by the podcast)? As such, the group was not ready to recommend whether this project should be pursued or declined. Instead, the group suggests that MODS staff continue conversations with the proposed podcast group in light of the information within this report to find whether the podcast fits within the future communication strategies of MODS.
2. A chief of communication within the MODS organization - The MODS board initially suggested that a communication “chair” role within MODS would provide a stable source of accountability for MODS communication practices. Essentially, this person would be responsible for seeing the continued implementation of good communication practice, such as the recommended practices within this report. However, this role comes at the expense of added resource requirements from the organization and could potentially add steps to the communication process. Again, the working group has not crafted a formal recommendation regarding this idea. Instead, MODS staff should discuss the potential for a communication chair after considering the recommendations from this report and devising a communication strategy.

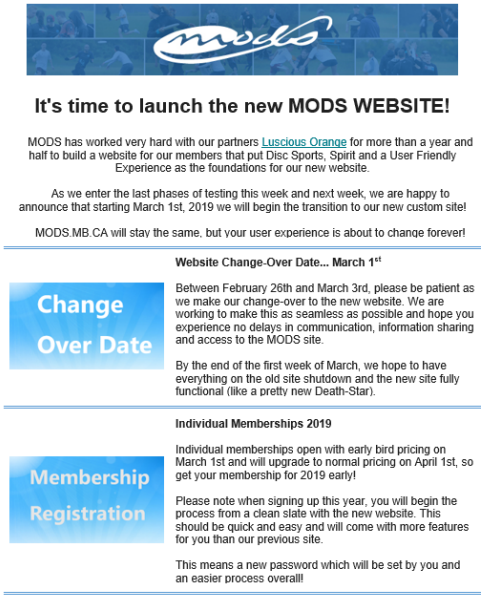
The recommendations and guiding principles listed above are the findings of the working group and are meant to represent the sentiments of the MODS membership. However, we do not expect MODS to be limited to the recommendations as listed. Available resources may dictate the eventual use of this report and its findings. We encourage MODS to develop their own communication strategies while considering the findings from this report and incorporating their own expertise.

Appendix – Additional Resources

Useful Links

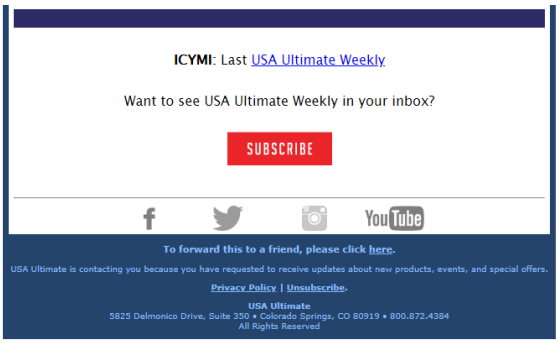
- For email tips/guidance - 7 Examples of Successful Email Templates: A Case Study
- For email design examples - Examples of Email Newsletter Designs (Google & Pinterest have countless examples as well)
- Style guide example for language in communication - Mailchimp Style Guide
- Custom email account examples - U of M Engineering Society (note that this could be improved by indicating where specific messages should be directed to)
- Twitter account example - OCUA Twitter account (note game status posts for outdoor leagues)
- Facebook account example - A U of M Student Chapter (note the weekly posts with links to interesting stories)
- GIF-making software (for online tutorials) - https://www.screentogif.com/

Examples



Custom Email/Webpage Template

- Feature important info at the top (with links)
- Add on "building blocks" below for multiple messages
- Space for a small image
- Be concise and add in links for more info



Email Footer Example

- Clearly link to social pages
- Include legal requirements
- Feature links to more info (like the MODS website)