
Communicating with students: how do you do yours?



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My experience of communicating en masse to further education students is a bit like being a herder of cats... seemingly impossible.

So not wanting to reinvent the wheel and wondering if I had missed out on the screamingly obvious, I asked my fellow lis-link colleagues for some suggestions/tips/good practice/solutions/ideas on effective ways of communicating with students as a whole. Current practice came in thick and fast as did the realisation that there appears to be no definitive 'cure all' answer. And with the exception of VLEs, we all tend to rely wholly on paper based notices, newsletters, posters and flyers with a sprinkling of:

- student radio station announcements
- using scrolling news screens
- VLE/Intranet student mailboxes
- mailing information
- leaving news messages on the front page of the OPAC
- email (see below)
- bribery - e.g. fill in survey and be entered into a £50 prize draw.

Depending on lecturers and tutors to pass on messages and information was pretty hit or miss: tutor has to remember and student has to turn up ...not the most reliable combination. One college seemed to have cracked it with a college-wide daily newsletter that lecturers highlighted in tutorials with students.

I thought that a student college email address would be an, if not the, answer ...but it seems that (firstly) students have to know they've got one and (secondly) they have to look at the contents.

Another (more worrying) aspect of college e-mail addresses for students is:

'The consequences of being able to send anything to anybody has potentially serious implications for companies and individuals. Such consequences include, legal liability for anything from breach of confidence (e.g. sending client lists to competitors), defamation (Norwich Union paid £450,000 in one instance), sexual, racial and other harassment (several cases have involved use of e-mail), as well as numerous potential offences ranging from breaches of the companies acts to hacking and breach of copyright.'
<http://www.weblaw.co.uk/art080998.php>
[8th November 2004]

So WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD?

Eduserv Chest are investigating developing SMS text messaging software for colleges and universities (I like the idea of SMS text messaging, as SMS is the 'new black' of conversation, but as mobile phones are required to be switched off in our library, surely someone is bound to notice the hypocrisy of us communicating with students with the darned thing we ban in our spaces!)

So we're now reviewing our mobile phone policy – is it the actual phones and conversations that we object to or is it the irritating the noise of the darned ringtones?

Plans are in the pipeline for 'go get 'em' 'out and about' campaigns which combine a heady mix of stupidity (library staff have offered to get dressed up in fancy dress), paper (information giving postcards, bookmarks) and bribery (sweets). The desire to promote all the service to all the people at once has been jettisoned: we're going to do one bit of our service at a time. It all seems a bit more possible.