

Engaging clients – English as a second language

Introduction

Based on extensive research, this guide is designed to give you practical examples and top tips on how to communicate effectively with communities where English is not the first language spoken. It will help you understand why some members of the community do not approach advice services, and offer solutions on how to engage them.

The guide looks in turn at: barriers to accessing advice services; practical solutions to the challenges of engagement; examples of good and bad practice; and effective communication channels.

Barriers to accessing advice services

Research conducted by the Legal Services Research Centre in 2006 shows that a significant proportion of people fail to act on their problems. The same research confirms that those who are aware of advice services are more likely to act. Interestingly, it is those who do act that are more likely to resolve their problems. This shows that awareness of advice services is key to people's ability to resolve their problems.

As you know, building awareness is a challenge in itself, but more so with some communities than others. Linguistic and cultural barriers make a lack of awareness even harder to address, meaning that people for whom English is a second language can shoulder a disproportionate burden of unresolved problems.

These barriers will be explored in more detail in the next section. To illustrate briefly, though, marketing materials, press and even word of mouth promotion can be lost on those for whom English is a second language. This means that a smaller proportion of people within these communities are aware of advice services than in the population as a whole. Of those who are aware of advice services, some assume they are inaccessible because they are unaware of the availability of interpreters and other linguistic support. Others feel unable to discuss their problem because they feel ashamed, or unable to trust or interact with an adviser. In fact cultural differences present several challenges that are unique to the advice sector.

The issue of engaging people for whom English is a second language is one that cannot be ignored. Firstly, they represent a sizeable section of the population; according to the Central Office of Information, for example, 4.6 million people are from minority ethnic communities. Secondly, this group is one of the most in need of support; the linguistic and cultural barriers that increase the difficulty of reaching them are symptoms of social exclusion, which is widely acknowledged to cause problems that require advice.

So, you may now be asking, how is it possible to break the cycle of social exclusion being both the cause of problems and the barrier to solving them? The next sections will look at this in detail.

Practical solutions to the challenges of engagement

Below you will find a grid that looks at the challenges you face and outlines practical solutions to help you overcome them.

Challenge	Solution
<p>Lack of awareness Many members of the community do not have access to the internet and do not consume English media such as newspapers, TV or radio.</p>	<p>You can reach them by non-traditional media, such as Asian Times, Polish Times, The Voice or BBC Asian Network. See the 'Effective communication channels' section.</p>
<p>Lack of understanding There is a general lack of understanding regarding the services the advice sector offers and how to access them.</p>	<p>You should promote and provide information about the availability of interpreters and linguistic support.</p>
<p>Lack of trust For many who have encountered racism or who have had a negative experience with authorities within the UK, it is hard for them to trust anyone outside their own community.</p>	<p>You need to get the message across that advice services are there to help by building a position of trust. You can do this by meeting with the communities and cultivating relationships with key figures within each community.</p>
<p>Lack of relevance The nature of a problem needing advice may bring shame, or may not be acknowledged in some communities. Many do not believe that problems associated with 'western culture' happen to them or their families, particularly when the problems are related to domestic violence, drug addiction or debt.</p>	<p>Ensure the message gets across that problems can happen to anyone and communicate the fact that you can help with problems that people might think are unique to their culture. Illustrate this with appropriate case studies.</p>
<p>Language and literacy Even those with limited spoken English may not be able to read or understand complex messaging in promotional or information materials.</p>	<p>Get your message across with images and simple instructions in an appropriate language.</p>
<p>Culture It is not acceptable for people in some cultures to discuss problems outside their own community and there is a significant barrier to accessing advice services based on a preconception of lack of cultural understanding.</p>	<p>You need to show the independence and confidentiality of advice services, and present information in a way that shows respect and understanding of other cultures. See the 'Examples of good and bad practice' section.</p>

Challenge	Solution
<p>Lack of motivation For those within some communities there is a belief that ‘nothing can change’ as it has ‘always been this way.’</p>	<p>Show the community that your services can help them. Promote examples where change within their community has previously happened.</p>
<p>Lack of familiarity with UK systems Advice services differ or simply do not exist in many countries and living exclusively within a tight community means that people may have little or no idea how things work in the UK.</p>	<p>Get information into local communities about the services you offer and how to access them.</p>
<p>Religion Some beliefs prohibit certain actions and interaction. If a problem results through one of these prohibited areas then it is hard for some to come forward and admit they have acted in a certain way.</p>	<p>Communicate the message that your services are non-judgemental and entirely confidential. Ensure it is clear that advice services offer solutions even where clients’ beliefs may prohibit interaction with male/female advice service staff; create materials that illustrate your understanding of religious views.</p>
<p>Perceived appearance of advisers Research participants believed that advisers were older people, who were likely to hold conservative views and may be prejudiced towards minority ethnic community members or those for whom English is not their first language.</p>	<p>Use posters to show the diverse workforce that advice services have. This will help question the views held by communities about the advice sector.</p>

Examples of good and bad practice

Below you will find good and bad examples of how to communicate with people for whom English is a second language.

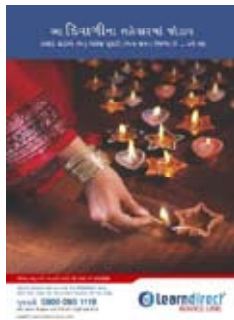


Use credible spokespeople relevant to that audience, someone they would trust and identify with, preferably from their own community. These two posters illustrate good practice as they utilise images of people the targeted community would feel comfortable with.





Translate materials into different languages for use within different communities to ensure rapid understanding and to show a willingness to engage. These examples illustrate the same message being presented in different languages.



Remember that cultural or religious beliefs may present barriers to understanding of even simple messages. So, think about how your message can really be aligned with a faith or culture, and how the beliefs fit with your message. Here are two good examples.



When looking at the design of your information, utilise images rather than words to get your message across. Clearly signpost by using visuals, step by step numbered points, check lists and bi-lingual instructions.



Use different images to reach different sections of each community. Tailor your communications to ensure they attract and meet the needs of specific target audiences within a given community. Here are two good examples.



Be careful to avoid staged stereotypical imagery. The images used must be truly reflective of the community you are targeting and not clichés. These two images were unsuccessful in getting their message across as the cultural groups found them unacceptable.



Effective communication channels

Translated materials: Multilingual materials are key to reaching out to groups where English is their second language. Bear in mind the possibility of low literacy levels in their mother tongue and consider using images to illustrate your message. Multilingual materials are only effective if they are actually read and understood by the communities you are trying to reach, so they need to be readily available in the places they visit.

Outreach work into communities: This is an excellent way to develop long-term partnerships with trusted third parties, such as religious groups, family centres, local businesses and/or support groups. Empower community influencers to act as advocates by convincing them of the value of advice services to both themselves and their community groups. Outreach work at appropriate events or meetings can address cynicism and misconceptions and, for many of whom English is their second language, word of mouth from within the community is the most trusted form of communication.

Minority ethnic media: Minority ethnic media is an important channel to reach older people, recent arrivals, non-English speakers and insular communities who are more comfortable with and reliant on media in their native language.

Importantly, using minority ethnic media not only enables you to engage with a specific audience, but is one of the most trusted sources of information. You could look into working together with a local minority ethnic radio station or newspaper on a sustained campaign to further increase levels of engagement within your target group. See the 'Who can I go for more support?' section for a list of minority ethnic media.

Events and festivals: There are many cultural and religious festivals including Diwali (festival of lights), Eid (Muslim festival following Ramadan) and Baishakhi (harvest festival), and are all ideal opportunities to get your messaging directly to your audience. You can do this through local advertising, for example in programmes, at stalls or on outdoor poster sites. Look into partnerships with local authorities who run or fund many of these events and try to get involved to raise your profile and build understanding of the services you offer. For details of religious festivals see the 'Who can I go to for more support?' section.

Outdoor marketing: Posters and information should be placed in cafes, doctors' surgeries, cultural centres, basically anywhere people from your target groups meet and congregate. Billboards at bus stops or in tube stations offer effective regional targeting with high visibility using strong imagery and simple language, but can be quite costly.

Online and social networking sites: The internet is a multilingual medium and, although it is important to remember that not everyone has access to the internet – particularly in socially excluded communities – it does continue to grow in popularity. Consider putting information and a link to your website on sites which are of interest to differing communities; such as certain YouTube channels, Polish films sites or faith-based sites.

Five top tips

- 1) Make your information culturally relevant, translate it into appropriate languages and ensure it is presented in a clear and easy to understand way.
- 2) Use case studies from the community you are targeting, which illustrate the accessibility, relevance and confidentiality of your services.
- 3) Test your material out on a small group from the community you want to reach to make sure it works for them, and adjust according to feedback.
- 4) Research into where your target audience meet, then ensure you have your materials available at these venues.
- 5) Create links with community leaders and engage in outreach work for a higher profile and greater acceptance within different communities.

Evaluation

Finally, to ensure you have reached the relevant audiences, you need to evaluate the response to your material and promotions. You will need to consider how you will evaluate your communications at the outset. Crosscheck your outcomes against your agreed objectives as the campaign takes shape. Monitor the take up of the service by your target audiences and if possible commission research to measure a change in awareness of your advice service and the impact on behaviour/attitudes.

Who can I go to for more support?

For more support from your network email:

Advice Services Alliance – admin@asauk.org.uk

AdviceUK – mail@adviceuk.org.uk

Age Concern and Help the Aged – adviceunit@ace.org.uk

Citizens Advice – corporate.communications@citizensadvice.org.uk

Law Centres Federation – info@lawcentres.org.uk

Youth Access – admin@youthaccess.org.uk

For additional information:

www.multicultural.co.uk > useful links and info > ethnic minority media list

www.bbc.co.uk > religion > multifaith calendar

www.mediatrust.org – for marketing and communications advice, training and support

www.coi.gov.uk/ – government department for communications and information

www.equalityhumanrights.com/ – for legal and rights issues

References

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- i) Uncovered: assessing media and communications needs and capacity of marginalised communities. ICAR, City University for Media Trust
- ii) Communications Common Good Research – Ethnic Minority Communities. Turnstone Research Connect Research and Consultancy for COI
- iii) BPRI research for Media Trust on third sector communications. BPRI for Media Trust
- iv) Experiences and perceptions of Citizens Advice Bureaux. Professor Gill Valentine and Dr Charlotte Kenten, Leeds Social Science Institute
- v) Causes of Action: Civil Law and Social Justice. Professor Pascoe Pleasence, Legal Services Research Centre



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