

Review of the 2018 freeze-thaw

UUW response to Ofwat information request

Version 2

(27 April 2018)

**Containing additional appendix setting out more detail on
our approach to customer communications**

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Appendix: Supplementary information request: Communications

We want to understand, in more depth, how companies engaged with customers before, during, and after the freeze/thaw period.

Request - Can you fill out the attached spreadsheet and can you provide links to your social media accounts.

We have completed and attached the spreadsheet, which includes links to our social media accounts.

To add some additional clarification and detail to the information contained within this spreadsheet we would like to emphasise the following five points:

A - We communicate with customers using a range of channels and are constantly seeking to maximise the effectiveness of our customer engagement and campaigns

We use statistics and data analytics to monitor and improve our communications – our analysis is generated using Google Analytics embedded within the website, Social Studio (Facebook), Facebook Business Manager and Twitter Analytics, in addition to specific campaign measurement and evaluation. This analysis drives understanding of the effectiveness of our proactive campaigns but also that of key customer journeys which are designed to facilitate help and support across billing, water and wastewater services. This is used to drive improvement by campaign and by channel.

We use “boosted posts” to enable us to reach more people – during the freeze thaw period we used ‘paid for’ boosted posts on Facebook to reach more people, including those who may not follow us, but would benefit from the help or information we’re promoting. This has proved not only effective in terms of our targeting but also cost effective. For example, we boosted messaging to a wider general North West audience as well as specific audiences, such as people who lived in areas more affected by the cold snap, such as Cumbria, where we knew the forecast and conditions were likely to be more severe than elsewhere in the region. We also targeted radio advertising in the same way.

We actively segment and target customers - we used different and creative styles and then targeted them to appeal to different audiences - such as young families, grandparents and those with home related hobbies; and relevant timely content such as ‘how to’ ads with frozen and burst pipe help during the cold snap.

We target specific audiences through the use of “dark posts” - we used Facebook dark posts (also known as unpublished posts) – these are posts that are targeted at a specific audience and are not published in the newsfeed on our page. We find that these dark posts are a good way to promote messages targeted at a specific audience without cluttering our page with posts which some customers wouldn’t be interested in. The benefits of using dark posts are: we are able to be hyper-targeted with messaging that appeals to specific audiences (e.g. by age, hobbies, location etc); we can do testing of different copy or creative to give variety and measure what resonates with those audiences; we can target our paid for posts better and guide our organic (non-paid for) social posts to achieve better reach and engagement; and avoid customer frustration by only targeting them with relevant content.

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B - Our communications during the freeze thaw were a managed extension of our existing and proactive winter communications strategy

We initiated a winter programme at the start of the winter - Planning for our annual WinterWise campaign began in the summer and the campaign itself was activated from November 2017 in recognition of the fact that a prolonged cold spell could happen at any time and having learned lessons from the last time the region was affected by a significant freeze thaw in 2011.

This campaign included providing 'how to' advice on the website, interactive content suitable across all our social channels, outreach material which other organisations supporting some of our more vulnerable customers could use and share, together an on-going radio advertising schedule.

We go out to see and meet customers - We also held 17 'pop-up' shop events at key towns across the North West from February through to the end of March at which WinterWise advice packs were given out to customers. The same information was carried by our water quality officers and provided to householders during water quality testing visits.

We carefully target the contents of our communications - The main thrust of the campaign was to initially encourage customers to prepare for the cold weather to help protect their homes and themselves which then developed into specific help and information about what to do if they had a problem, with a frozen or burst pipe for example. The communication messages were refreshed by day or more frequently to ensure they kept pace with the impact the weather was having on customers at that time and so the advice was relevant.

The overarching messages from the ongoing Winter campaign were:

- Pipes like people need wrapping up this winter – lag your water pipes in cold places
- Know what to do if your pipes freeze or burst – find and test your stop tap
- Look after loved ones and others in the community by offering to lag their pipes

We believe that this campaign was effective - The digital campaigns, for example, across Facebook, Twitter and YouTube performed well – with 4.4 million views of our information and advice between 17 January and 9 March.

We provided detail of the information campaign in an appendix to the initial submission.

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C – We extended this approach to add specific detail in advance of (rather than in response to) the onset of the freeze thaw

We planned and prepared well - In preparation for the freeze thaw, our customer and media facing message updates changed focus from frozen pipe advice to what to do in the event of a burst pipe in your home as the weather conditions determined. We made sure the advice was changed regularly, daily if necessary. The use of #winterready made it easy for customers to access our information in one place.

We provided specific messaging reflecting the specific issues which was accessed by large number of customers – headlines from the campaign were:

- A specific digital marketing push from 17th January to 9th March had 4.4 million views of our winter advice ads.
- 10,800 people clicked through for more advice after seeing that digital advertising, in the period between 17th January to 9th March
- 16,000 page views on our main WinterWise web page from January to March, with 2,808 views on 1st March alone when the cold snap hit
- Over 100 social media winter advice posts made during Dec 17 –Mar 18
- Series of videos with subtitles are hosted on YouTube giving simple pipe lagging, find your stop tap advice and also has a ‘help others in your community’ message –had 234,702 views in total – over the period of the campaign which began in November
- Our Radio ad with winter advice ran throughout on regional stations reaching around 3 million people and ran throughout February
- 1,000 winter packs given out at customer roadshows across the North West, and through water quality team’s home visits, which ran throughout February and March
- We reached customers who may be in vulnerable circumstances through our “All Together Now” newspaper with 110k distribution, readership of 500k across the North, with a special WinterWise wraparound feature in the December-January edition.
- We had more than 175,000 views of our web incident pages between 27th February and 8th March. The highest volume of views, 75,091, was on the 4th March, we also had almost 3,000 page views of our main WinterWise web page on 1st March.

We sought to be as accessible and proactive as possible with our communications - Between the 16th February and 16th March we received 35,000 inbound calls relating to network issues and sent a total of 350,000 proactive messages to customers. Over the weekend when the severe weather hit (3-6th March) we made 70,000 proactive communications to customers.

The ‘high call volumes’ banner on our website, to encourage customers to use the website and digital channels so they could to get further information more quickly, was seen over 58,000 times. At this time we also used a recorded global IVR phone message to help direct customers to other channels where they would find help and information relating to customer side issues.

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D The way we handled our communications, appears to have ensured that the freeze thaw has not had a detrimental impact on our reputation

This has been reflected in our brand tracker - In the most recent of our quarterly brand tracker survey, which was undertaken following the freeze thaw period in March, we have delivered strong scores and ratings – in some cases, generating the highest scores we have recorded since the tracker was introduced in 2011.

- Brand traits, such as trustworthy, socially responsible, innovative, great customer service and good reputation have all increased and are back to one of their highest levels recorded.
- Satisfaction, value for money and the love ladder ratings remain the same or higher
- Efficiency and reliability have increased
- Website visit frequency remains high at 70%.

E We aim to learn lessons from the way that we operate and handle incidents and to continually improve our customer communications and engagement

Increased use of digital assets - We have made better use of digital assets and made sure we had a bank of those assets which could be utilised quickly and easily so the advice was always at its most relevant, e.g. preparing for Winter (lagging and knowing where your pipes and stop taps are), then freeze (dealing with a frozen pipe) and then thaw (what to do if a pipe burst). The how-to videos proved particularly effective on social media.

Customisation of our website - We have brought in a tool, Recite Me, which enables customers to customise the website/and mobile view of the website to better meet their needs, such as visual impairment, hard of hearing or language – in order that we can make sure our online information is more widely accessible.

We actively segment and target our communications - In recognition from the feedback from our research that one size does not fit all, our campaigns are segmented to understand and build messaging which is appropriate by customer – whether that is driven by their access (use of digital or otherwise), their lifestyle (parents, elderly, young families), by affordability (limited financial means) or potential vulnerability (our Priority Services) – and to make sure the information and help is relevant and reaches them in the most effective way.

We work more actively with third parties - We have identified key third sector partners with whom we can provide collateral so they can share on their channels to further increase our reach and engagement. We also make regular use of a newspaper, All Together Now, which has a readership of 500k across the North West and is also distributed to hospitals, doctors' surgeries and supermarkets.