Working Draft Indian Standard
GUIDELINES ON COMMUNICATIONS IN SERVICES

FOREWORD <Text to be developed on the following lines>
(Formal Clause may be added later)

- Importance of communication in business environment
- Increased importance of communications in the services sector due to special (instead - Different Nature) nature of services – spontaneity, simultaneity, heterogeneity, more involvement of customers for service transaction, intangible, inseparable, empathy
- Special need to standardize communications

1   SCOPE

This Standard provides guidance for communications ~~that is associated with service provision~~ from service provider to a service recipient or customer.

It includes those communications that are internally provided to personnel who are responsible for onward communications to the recipient.

2   REFERENCE

3   TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

4   PARTIES ASSOCIATED WITH SERVICE COMMUNICATION

a) Service provider
b) Customer
c) Regulator / Ombudsman
d) Service delivery personnel
e) Intermediary Channel Providers

5. TYPES OF COMMUNICATION

a)   Service Provider to Customer
b)   Customer to Service Provider
c)   Service Provider to Service Delivery Personnel
d)   Service Provider to Regulator
e)   Customer to Regulator / Ombudsman
f)   Service delivery personnel to customer
g)   Customer to Customer
h)   Intermediator Channel Providers

6. PHASES OF COMMUNICATION DURING THE SERVICE DELIVERY CYCLE

6.1 Pre - Delivery Phase

a) Communications providing information about the service – website, standard letters, brochures, displays, mails, pamphlets, broadcasts, billboards, newspaper advertisements, social media advertisements, blogs, Mobile applications.

Information may include:
   1) Service scope with inclusions and exclusions, and provision for flexibility.

<Detailed of services>

2) Service standards (e.g. Citizens' charter) (Minimum set of requirements to fulfil customer perception)
3) Regulatory and statutory Requirements
4) In case of regulatory related non-compliance recourse available to consumer
5) Grievance redressal channels
6) Service delivery modes
7) Service channels and outlets / access points
8) Service duration (Division of duration of service if different access points involved).
9) Service repeatability
10) Actions required from customers (Remedies available to customers).
11) Price together with potential variability in price
12) Service Level Agreement (SLA)
13) Customer Reviews

b) Queries from customers prior to service agreement or service procurement – This may include
1) more information than proactively provided by ~~customer~~ service provider
2) customization of services
3) clarifications
4) negotiations on scope including service delivery modes, price etc.
5) Feedbacks from previous experiences before generating another service request (TESTIMONIALS)

c) Response to queries, from service provider – This may include(Service provider response toqueries from consumer)

1) Response to customer's queries, clarifications, requests for negotiations. This can be provided through help desks, helplines, bots, text messages, phone calls, emails
2) Acknowledgement ~~and request for time to respond, if response cannot be immediately provided (e.g. automated responses)~~
3) Communication requesting for more time, if response could not be provided in the committed/reasonable time (Reason should be mentioned & it should be before servicedelivery) (Time frame given to customer at initial stage)
   (Factual, relevant, brief information avoid confusion)

d) Communication of acceptance / agreement / contract - This may include

1) Confirmation of service supply order from customer – this could be oral, over text, email,social media, clicking on the web-page, or signed contract as per service design
2) Service provider's confirmation of Service supply order – This could be oral (e.g. individual service providers such as plumbers, hair dressers etc.), over text message, social media, on the website, email or letter.
3) Communication of formal service ~~agreement~~ contract – Applicable to services where legal contracts are essential due to financial, liability or legal implications. The communication must include copy of the formal contract document. Refer (proposed) Indian standard on Contracts and Service Level agreements for details of contractual terms. The contract communication should

- be authorized signatures (ink signed or digital)
- Communicated over secure channels
- Be treated as confidential
- Require a confirmation of receipt by the customer
- Require an acceptance by the customer, if not agreed earlier during supply order confirmation

Confirmation of contract may not be applicable for some services that are transacted over service counters,call centers or availed as publicly accessible services.

Judicial contract must be highlighted and Contact should incorporate oral communication.

5.1 Communications during service delivery

a) Communication regarding commencement of service. It should include Date and time as planned or of actual start. Communication could be oral, over text message or email. This maynot apply to services that are transacted over service counters, call centres or availed as publicly accessible services.

b) Communication of Information by the service provider on the progress of service delivery – applicable when service is provided over a prolonged period or in stages. This may include actions taken, any delays or deviations from the agreement or contract. In formal situations, theinformation may be structured in the form of reports (e,g outsourced services for maintenance)

c) Enquiries, clarifications sought by customer, during the service delivery phase

d) Requests from customers for service provision where service is intermittent

e) Response to clarifications, requests, by the service provider - this could be oral, over text message, email or status progress webpage.

f) Complaints by the customer and response by service provider. For detailed information on communications for complaints handling, please refer IS …. Indian Standard on Complaintshandling

g) Communication regarding any disruption in service (planned or incidental). This should be informed at the earliest together with estimate of resumption and alternate recourse available tocustomer.

h) Communication of cessation of service. This could be on completion of the service delivery, onexpiry of service contract, on breach of contractual conditions by customer (such as non-payment, or no response) or winding up of service.

i) Soft language during service delivery ---- Local/familiar language during delivery --- LOCALSENSITIVE

j) Transparency with customers about everything that may affect their experience.

k) Modification in contracted service requirements during the period of service delivery

l)

b) Communications in the Post-delivery phase

Communication in the post-delivery phase may include

Suggestions:

a) Confirmation that the service recipient has received the services
b) Feedback on the service quality – this could be oral over phone, or through email or webpageetc. (replace from modes of communication – not to repeated every time). For more details - please refer IS….. Indian standard on customer rating.
c) Remedial provision for unsatisfactory service
d) Requests for subsequent support from customers where agreed as part of original contract
e) Communications from service provider in response to such requests
f) Service rating / reviews / comments with related relevant comments

6 Modes of Communications

6.1 The modes used for communication regarding services are varied and used based on considerationsof ease of communication, operational efficiency, effectiveness of conveying information, type of service, risks of communication (inadequate, misunderstood, delayed). The modes used may include the following:

a) Modes used by Service Provider for communicating with Customer
1 Oral – in person / on phone
2 Recorded messages
3 Radio
4 Display boards (Pamphlets)
5 Website
6 Telecast / Webcast
7 Broadcast (e.g Social media, TV advertisement, Blogs)
8 Emails
9 Posted letters
10 Text messaging
11 Podcast
12 Apps

b) Modes used by Customer for communicating with Service provider

1 Oral – in person / on phone
2 Emails
3 Filled up forms
4 Posted letters
5 Text messaging
6 Mobile apps

c) Interactive modes of communication between provider / customer

1 One to one - in person
2 One to one -over phone
3 One (Provider) to many (customer) – in person/ webcast, telecast, public address,

meeting,exhibitions, websites, portals, apps.
4 Exchange of correspondence through email
5 Exchange of Correspondence through posted letters
6 User interaction through web-interface, apps.
7 User interaction through IVR
8 Chat through text messaging
9 Chat through chatbots
10 Interactive screens

d) Communication from Service provider to service delivery personnel
< To be elaborated>
1 Exact location of service delivery
2 channel of delivery
3 Communicating the delicacy of the product to be handled, instructions for customer if any.
4 Automatic tracking of service
5 Communication of timelines
6 On time delivery of service
7 Feedback mechanism
8 Customer grievance

6.2 The advantages and risks of different modes of communication are described in the table:

Mode of communication	Advantage	Risk
Oral – in person / on phone	• Ease of communication • Queries / clarifications can be resolved in real time • Personal touch • Helpful for solving conflicts/disputes.	• Messaging is not structured • Dependent on individual's competence and knowledge • Cause dissatisfaction if query not solved • Can influence personal expectation • May be time consuming • No records • Language limitation • Clarity of communication • Possibilities of misunderstanding <MISINTERPRETATION> • Problem in adaptability to individual customer needs • High quality of service expected • Lack of consistency • Dependent on behavioral skills, etiquettes

Recorded messages	• Operational efficiency – replaces human effort • Structured messaging • One message can reach to masses	☐ May not be understood / cause confusion to recipients who are new to service, uninformed, low oneducation or experience ☐ Generic in nature ☐ Can be tempered through technology ☐ May not suit to entire audience ☐ One-way communication
Display boards	• Operational efficiency – replaces human effort • Ease of access at the servicepoint • Creates common reference for service provider and recipient	• Information may be outdated, if not up-dated regularly • One-way communication • People perception associated with displayed image
Website / Web-interface	• Operational efficiency-replaces human effort • Ease of access – from anywhere • Structured messaging • Facilitates interactive communication	• Information may be outdated, if not up-dated regularly • May not be exhaustive to satisfy all queries • May cause confusion, especially for interaction, if not designed properly
Telecast / Webcast / Public Address (one sided)	• Operational efficiency – relays information to large audience • Structured messaging	• Customer attention may not be uniform – risk of assuming that message is conveyed
Broadcast (e.g Social media)	• Facilitates communication to a wide, dedicated audience • Structured messaging • create confidence in the minds of consumers	• May not reach to all – risk of assumption that messageis conveyed • May be easily influence others (positive or negativeimpact)
Emails	• Personal touch • Queries / clarifications can be resolved through exchange of correspondence • Create a record of communication and enhance accountability	• Messaging is not structured • Dependent on individual's competence and knowledge • Cause dissatisfaction if query not solved or if pre-structured responses are provided

Posted letters	• Personal touch • Queries / clarifications can be resolved through exchange of correspondence • Create a record of communication and enhance accountability	• Slowest form of communication – prolong resolution of queries / clarifications • May not get delivered
Text messaging	☐ Personal touch ☐ Can delivered to masses ☐ Instant communication & status of delivery known ☐ Queries / clarifications can be resolved through exchange of messages veryquickly ☐ Create a record of communication and enhanceaccountability	• Messaging is not structured • Dependent on individual's competence and knowledge • Cause dissatisfaction if query not solved or if pre-structured responses are provided • Risk of getting delivered to non-target customers due to technical glitches/errors
Forms	• Facilitate structured communication from customer • Information can be processed faster and also used for customer analysis	• Risk of incorrect / incomplete information if not understood • Tendency of securing signatures from customers on blank forms – may lead to fraudulent practices • Limitation of queries
IVR	• Operational efficiency-replaces human effort • Ease of access – from anywhere • Facilitates structured interactive communication	• Information may be outdated, if not up-dated regularly • May not be exhaustive to satisfy all queries/ service requests • May cause confusion, especially for interaction, ifnot designed properly • Access time may be prolonged if communication lines are inadequate

Interactive Screens	• Operational efficiency-replaces human effort • Ease of access to information at the service point • Facilitates structured interactive communication • Can be combined to act as aservice delivery channel	• May not be exhaustive to satisfy all queries/ service requests • May cause confusion, especially for interaction, ifnot designed properly • May not be operational due to system outages, softwarefailure
Chatbots	• Operational efficiency-replaces human effort • Ease of access – from anywhere • Facilitates structured interactive communication • Capable of addressing known type of queries based • on intelligent processing	• May not be exhaustive to satisfy all queries/ service requests • Interaction may become cyclic

7 Attributes of Good Communication

7.1 Attributes relevant to communication from Service Provider to customer:

a) Alignment of content to the purpose of the message
b) Structured to serve the overall serviced design
c) Clear, concise, culturally fit and relevant
d) Easy to understand
e) Polite / courteous
f) Timely
g) Up to date
h) Easily accessible with clear visibility of communication touch points
i) Legally valid <Legitimate Sanctity>
j) Factually correct

7.2 Attributes relevant to communication from Customer to Service provider
a) Clear articulation of message /query (Service provider can aid this by prompting proper responses through menu selection, or guidance)
b) Timely (e,g response to service provider's communications)
c) Polite / courteous (to elicit more personalized response)
d) Data privacy / security (to be ensured by the customer as well as service provider)

7.3 Attributes relevant to interactive communication between Service provider and customer
a) Language of communication – ease of understanding for customer regional language.
b) Easy to navigate – for example in Web interface IVR

c) Behavioral aspects – patience, clarity, courtesy, responsive
d) Waiting time
e) Interaction time
f) Easy access to communication channel

8   Communication cycle (originator to recipient)

The service provider should ensure that the communication cycle is appropriately designed and controlled, with a view to enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of the service delivery. The service modes should be selected based on the advantages and risk (Table 1) and the communication attributes should be integrated through appropriate training, service design, service process design, andmonitoring controls. The following constitute the elements of the communication cycle.

a) Selection of communication mode (based on context, distance, one-way or two-way, purpose,risk). NOTE – communication channel
b) Articulation of content (formal/ informal; standard / customized)
c) Packaging of message - sequence, presentation style, associated aids (e,g gestures, demonstrations as by air cabin staff), security (e,g password protected)
d) Delivery of message Based on increasing risks, the following may also be essential
g) Ensuring receipt of message delivery (acknowledgement, receipt response e.g courier Proof ofDelivery, delivery channel confirmation e,g WhatsApp)
h) Ensuring message has been read, heard – formal written confirmation by recipient, checkbox on websites, audio recording during interactive conversations)
i) Ensuring message has been understood – formal written confirmation by recipient, Proactive call to recipient to confirm)
j) Ensuring the recipient has taken action based on the communication

Note - Announcement of Nodal officer/ customer relationship officer (officer in charge for service delivery) for service queries should be appointment for queries regarding service.

PART B

SERVICE DELIVERY – TO COVER EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION GAP*
This section provides guidance for services where the communication of information itself is the service outcome.

9   Specific requirements for Communication as a service

9.1 Call Centres

Call centres have become ubiquitous and constitute a core constituent of business processes both forproducts and services. Call centres are established or outsourced to communicate with the customersregarding products, services provided by the primary suppliers. The services they provide predominantly include
a) Providing assistance on product usage
b) Providing assistance on troubleshooting user difficulties
c) Taking complaints
d) Providing information

e) ..
f) ..

<To add descriptors how call centres design their services, and how they integrate the processes of theOEM or principal service provider.

<To add typical content of Service level agreements on communication standards>

<To add what are the training considerations, quality control and quality assurance monitors, trend monitors>

BPOs < Similar descriptors as for Call Centres>

Information services such as enquiry counters, enquiry helplines < Similar descriptors as for Call Centres>

Any other service where communication is the purpose???