



How Virginia529 **uses a centralized content hub** to drive efficiency and improve the quality of their customer communications





BACKGROUND

Supporting a Growing Customer Base

For more than 25 years, Virginia529 has helped millions of families and individuals plan and save for their future through its commitment to affordable and accessible savings programs, and financial education. Available nationwide with account owners in every state, Virginia529 is currently the largest 529 plan, managing almost \$90 billion in assets (as of August 31, 2023). In addition to being the industry leader for higher education savings, Virginia529 also administers a disability savings program (ABLEnow) and manages a state-facilitated retirement savings program (RetirePath Virginia).

During all phases of the customer journey, from onboarding to servicing, Virginia529 sends communications to customers in order to deliver key account information, facilitate informed decision-making and comply with regulated disclosures. Over time, the systems and procedures for creating, approving, and producing these communications became cumbersome and outdated.



CHALLENGE

Managing Communications Consistently and Efficiently Across Multiple Platforms

The processes and systems that Virginia 529 relied on for managing communications were becoming unwieldy.

Slow, manual content management

Virginia529's 85 letters were managed as individual Microsoft® Word templates. This meant that content which appeared in multiple documents, such as basic customer service information or disclosures, would have to be updated through a highly manual and repetitive process. Even small changes could take hours to make, as individual templates would need to be updated one-by-one.

Brand inconsistency

Without a centralized view, it was difficult to ensure content and branding elements were consistent across all communications. Kelly McCarthy, Virginia529's customer communication specialist, remarked that "our messaging was inconsistent, including various sizes of logos, outdated footers or a writing style out of step with our brand."

Readability issues

Virginia529 wanted to ensure communications were clear, readable, and accessible to their diverse customer-base. However, the absence of a tool to assess content readability made it challenging to identify which content might be difficult for some customers to understand.

Version Control

Microsoft Word alone did not provide robust enough reporting into what changes were made to letters making version and quality control challenging.

A lengthy, fragmented approval process

Virginia529 had multiple teams involved in drafting, reviewing, and approving changes before they could be put into production. The process for submitting and reviewing changes and gathering approvals made it challenging to stay on schedule and maintain visibility into the process, especially when multiple changes were happening simultaneously.

Manual print fulfillment process

Amy Shiflett, Director of Administrative Services at Virginia529, described the process for letter production as “labor intensive.” They relied on Microsoft Word’s legacy Mail-Merge function to produce print-ready communications. The batch processing of communications was lengthy, and the post-composition tools used for insertion and mailing had outlived their useful lives.

Virginia529 was in search of a solution that offered the scalability and performance required to process the volume of letters they were sending, particularly at peak times of year, such as the back-to-school period.





SOLUTION

A unified platform for efficiently managing content, approvals, and composition

During their search, Virginia529 evaluated several customer communications management (CCM) solutions and considered outsourcing to third-party service providers. Ultimately the team decided on Messagepoint, because they offered a far more efficient way to manage, control and optimize their content, while also meeting performance requirements.

Many departments at Virginia529 were involved in the selection process, and each found compelling features in Messagepoint. The Communications team was impressed by Messagepoint's unique modular content management approach, viewing it as an efficiency game-changer. What further caught their attention was the built-in Assisted Authoring tool - a feature not seen in other CCM solutions they reviewed - which could support them in the future. Departments responsible for content review, such as legal, compliance, and marketing, found value in the QA Module. Its project management and workflow tools, coupled with the direct integration with Messagepoint, meant that entire content change cycles, from authoring to approval, could be seamlessly managed inside Messagepoint's platform. Another key factor which separated Messagepoint from other CCM solutions was its no-code business user authoring, which enabled non-technical communications teams to continue to manage content and targeting rules instead of having to rely on IT teams.

Messagepoint: An Intelligent Content Hub for all communications

Virginia529 now manages 85 letters within Messagepoint's intelligent content hub, which has led to numerous benefits:

Faster, more accurate and efficient content updates

Messagepoint's content sharing capabilities greatly simplify Virginia529's change management process. Content that appears in multiple communications can now be centrally managed as shareable SmartText™. If changes are required, edits only need to be made once to the SmartText object, and the change would automatically appear everywhere the SmartText is in use. The results of this new approach have been dramatic, with content changes implemented in a matter of minutes, and remaining consistent across communications.

Virginia529 standardizes branding elements like headers, footers, and formatting through a single parent touchpoint, ensuring consistency across all their communications. When creating new letters, they benefit from Messagepoint's variation management system. They simply create a new child variant that inherits content and formatting from the parent touchpoint, which reduces the effort needed.

"Even the smallest changes, such as changing a phone number, could take half a day to change in all templates. The same process can now be done in 10 minutes with Messagepoint."

Kelly McCarthy

Improved communications with AI-powered content optimization

Virginia529 uses Messagepoint's built-in Assisted Authoring tools to help assess readability and deliver clear communications.

Greater control with comprehensive version control

The entire history of all changes made to a communication, including the person who made them and timestamps, are now tracked with Messagepoint.

QA Module: Streamlined and secure approvals

Utilizing Messagepoint's QA Module, Virginia529 can more efficiently manage their complex, multi-stakeholder document approval process. Instead of managing the process using email, they now use custom multi-step workflows which ensures all required stakeholders approve changes before they are put into production. Side-by-side comparisons of different versions of communications and detailed on-screen annotations make it easy for reviewers to see exactly what content has been changed and requires their attention. If further changes are required, their feedback is captured and assigned directly to a content author to fix. Reporting dashboards provide visibility into project progress, enabling the reassignment of resources or tasks which help ensure deadlines are met.

"We are now effectively using the QA module during our change cycles to quickly identify bottlenecks and send reminders that push the process forward."

Kelly McCarthy



Messagepoint Composer: Efficient and scalable communication composition and production

To streamline composition processes, Virginia529 uses Messagepoint Composer. They have been able to eliminate the onerous process of manual mail merges by directly integrating their customer data sources with Composer. Messagepoint Composer's high-performance engine offers the scalability and performance required for large batch production runs that were difficult with their prior solution. Composer is also able to support Virginia529's post-composition requirements, applying address and barcodes, while ensuring communications are optimally organized for automated insertion and mailing.

"A process that would take about 3 hours to merge files and print each template individually, now takes about 30 minutes and we are ready to mail our letters."

Amy Shiflett





IMPACT

Speed, efficiency, and control over the entire communications lifecycle

Leveraging Messagepoint, Virginia529 has transformed its management and production of customer communications, crafting a process that is far more efficient, provides the scalability and performance to manage their growing volumes, and ensures customers receive accurate and understandable information.

Looking forward, Virginia529 is exploring the management of more communications from various teams within Messagepoint, driven by the efficiency and consistency it has already delivered. While Virginia529 prints all its letters in-house, the enhanced control over the composition process has given them the flexibility to explore partnerships with third-party print service providers, which could provide a continuity back-up option.

Benefits

- + **Change cycle times were reduced by 95%**
- + **Increased visibility and greater control over quality assurance and approvals**
- + **Content was optimized to ensure communications are easier to understand**
- + **6x reduction in time to produce large batch communications**

To learn how Messagepoint can drive more efficiency and improve the quality of your communications, contact us today.

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