

How to write a marketing and communications strategy

Bringing together all you've learned and all elements of the marketing mix to make a positive impact on your target audience, here's a simple accessible guide to creating future campaigns and a communications strategy.

1: OBJECTIVES

What do you want to achieve?

Concentrate on setting out one or two (certainly no more than three) objectives. The following questions may help you think about these objectives:

- What do you hope your communications efforts will achieve?
- What will be different as a result of your communications?
- How will it change people's awareness, knowledge, attitudes or behaviours about the issue you are talking about?

SUMMARY OF STEPS TO STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS

- 1: Objectives
- 2: Target audiences
- 3: Evidence-based approach
- 4: Key messages
- 5: Barriers to overcome
- 6: Tactics: communications tools
- 7: Evaluation
- 8: Communicating your positive impact

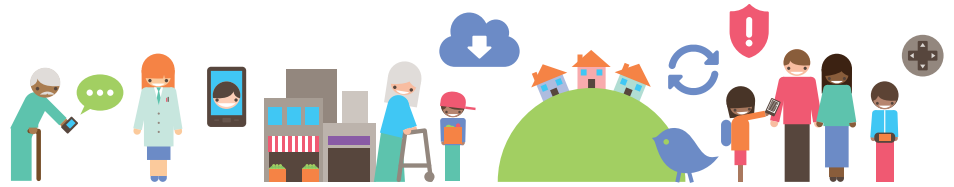
Once you have clearly defined objectives, try to refine it so that you can measure whether or not you have achieved it. For example:

Example – 'General' objective

Build awareness about the cost-effectiveness of social work interventions for patients with depression.

Example – 'Measurable' objective

Persuade the local health system to adopt changes in its x% of reimbursements for social work interventions for patients with depression in 2012/13.



2: AUDIENCE

Identify, understand and prioritise.

In order to achieve your objectives, who do you need to engage and communicate with? Often, this is relatively clear from the objectives, but you should list your target audiences as precisely as possible.

For example, which stakeholder might be an audience you identify? Also do you want to target all stakeholders or just a particular category, e.g. over 50's mums specific to a region and socio-demographic?

Remember: be specific. If you don't correctly identify your target audience at this stage you won't achieve your objectives, and ultimately therefore your communication objectives will not contribute to the bottom line and your organisation's success - it's that simple!

Once you have listed target audiences, consider who are the most important. Considering your resources, prioritise your approach. List the most important as 'primary' i.e. those who are the main audience, the one that is most critical.

This will be the audience that has the most powerful impact on your ultimate goal. Be discriminating. If necessary, marketing and communications activities can be broken down into Phase 1 – primary audience approach and Phase 2 – secondary audience approach.

Once you've defined your audience list, take the time to try and really understand them – what are their media habits, where are they likely to be found (i.e. understanding their social behaviour would be important if you were planning a taster event in an area of high footfall).

3: USE AN 'EVIDENCE-BASED' APPROACH

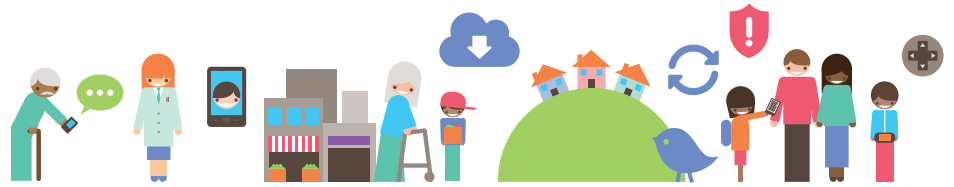
Put your audience at the heart of the process.

We highly recommend an 'evidence-based approach' to support successful devising and implementation of a marketing and communications strategy.

Putting your audience at the heart of your strategy is a fantastic opportunity to test the resonance of your ideas and get an idea of how emotionally engaged they are to provide you with the best possible foundation for future success.

What do we mean? Simple – rather than trying to guess and understand your audience in order to maximise the success of meeting your communications objectives, simply ask a sampling what they think and want. Put the audience at the heart of all you do.

This can take many formats and is dependent on both the time and resource of your audience. One simple format we recommend is bringing a group together that best represents a sampling of your internal and external stakeholders, and



using a fun workshop-based approach, brainstorm new ideas or test existing ones, in typically no more than four or five questions in a one-hour session.

Alternatively, ask questions via a face to face workshop; a monthly e-bulletin to your database asking a ‘question of the month’; a quarterly newsletter with incentivised feedback, or use social media to encourage discussion on your ideas. Using an evidence-based approach will ensure your communications and activities best suits the needs of your audience. It will successfully shape, influence and enhance your communications ideas.

4: KEY MESSAGES

What do you want to say?

A message can be the mission statement of your brand; it can reflect what your organisation does and believes; it may reference a specific campaign and an activity as part of that initiative.

A message or set of messages are the building blocks for all of your communications, e.g. press release to the media, speeches, testimony, presentations, social media output or film.

Think about your objectives and audiences and carefully consider what is it that you want to say to these audiences to convince them, to move them, to contribute to the action of your objectives.

Itemise and ensure messages are clear and concise – remember – keep it simple and memorable!

TRY THIS

Considering this it is often helpful to develop your overarching message, appropriate for many or all audiences, then according to your specific campaign add sub-messages to influence particular groups e.g.:

We are...xxx

We work to...xxx

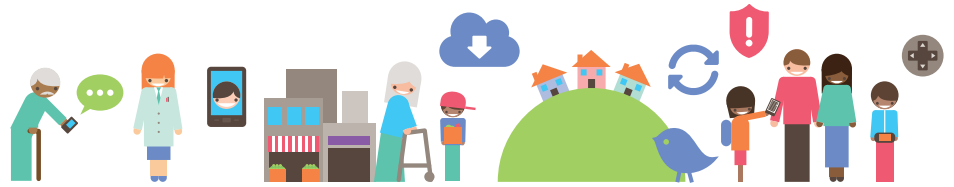
Our Campaign ‘xxx’ aims to xxx by xxx

We are having an event xxx

We believe in xxxx to xxx

Get involved and xxx

Insert your own details (xxx) using the above basic example and remember to test these messages with your target audience. Do not forget the ‘why’, i.e. answer why your organisation does what it does. Get feedback on whether the language is appealing and engaging to educate or influence your intended audiences.



5: BARRIERS TO OVERCOME

What do we need to consider to ensure we are successful?

In order to engage our audience, we need to ensure our messages demonstrate our understanding of them. We also need to take a step back and consider any potential barriers which we will need to overcome.

What kind of barriers? These are the things that may restrict the success of our communications strategy, and it's our consideration of them now that will enable us to create the right mix of tactics and tools that will positively influence our audience.

Barriers to success can range from micro to macro, local to national; it may be related to political change and how policy development may affect your organisation's funding; it could be on a local level and the difficulty of staff recruitment etc. Keeping it simple and realistic, **list the top three barriers to overcome, and for each an idea of the solution.**

HERE'S A SIMPLE EXAMPLE:

Barrier: As part of a campaign to connect to over 60's in West London and drive awareness of local service provision on home care, we had to consider that 75% of our target audience did not regularly use social media and go online.

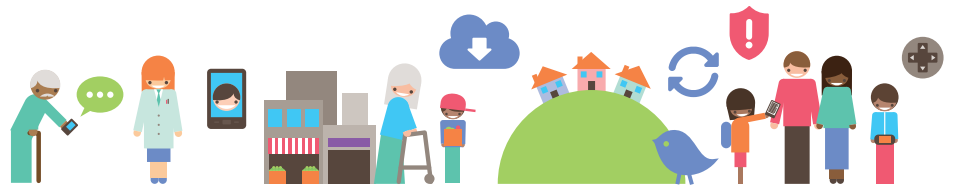
Solution: We created an event where a large proportion of our target audience came together.

6: TACTICS: COMMUNICATION TOOLS

Develop high impact tactics to communicate the message to your audience in a memorable way.

Communications tools represent a wide range of mechanisms that carry what you want to say to whom you want to say it. An integrated marketing and communications approach that makes best use of all tools across the marketing mix as part of your regional, local or national initiative will provide the best opportunity to stand out and resonate with your audience.

Maintaining ongoing awareness month in, month out may lead to consumer brand fatigue and limited engagement with what you want people to do. Therefore, being strategic with your resources, aim to make use of all marketing tools one to two times a year as part of a 'campaign' of activity related to a specific cause of your organisation. Co-ordinated and strategic spikes of awareness will have more value than ongoing activities that are not carefully thought out, and most importantly are not strategic i.e. they do not contribute to the 'bottom line' of your organisation.



To stand out with carefully considered objectives, messages and marketing tools, the range of tools you should consider aiming to use as part of your integrated campaign include;

- Local media PR – engagement with media to secure editorial e.g. survey, photo call, press release on your story
- Social media – e.g. CEO updates on Facebook, Twitter comment
- E-newsletter (and/or hard copy dependant on preferences of your target audience)
- Online website presence
- Taster sessions – experiential marketing i.e. something your audience can experience
- Small group presentation
- Conference speeches
- Authored articles
- Sticky marketing e.g. merchandise
- Targeted email shots
- Digital – e.g. three minute film on ‘who we are’
- Leaflets and postal distribution

Think hard about your relatively limited resources and which tools are the most influential on your target audiences. What activities have you done previously might be done on a greater scale for greater impact as part of your campaign?

Detailed here, this simple template is designed to assist you in planning and managing your communications and marketing activities.

MARKETING AND COMMUNICATION PLAN - TEMPLATE

Activity	Date	Actions	Quantity	Deadline	Frequency	Time/Cost	Who	Status
New Website	Sept 2012	Brief - DB to arrange meeting with designer	N/A	Oct 2012	Review every six months	£1k Director £3k Print	DB	Complete
Social Media Comment	Ongoing	Schedule for Sept TBA	N/A	End August	2 Facebook comments per week	TBC	All SMT Meeting	Ongoing



7: EVALUATION

Design and implement evaluation mechanisms that will contribute to future funding applications.

Too often in communications, people do not assign sufficient time to evaluate what has worked best. How will I know if my communications work has been successful?

After a campaign has finished and you want to know how it resonated with your audiences, whilst exhaustive qualitative evaluation may be overkill, strategic, systematic, and low-impact data collection will provide a baseline understanding of your audience's awareness or understanding of your work and will be affordable. For instance, this may take the shape of an e-survey to your members or for instance, a workshop with a similar sampling before and after your campaign to measure perception via a few simple questions.

As previously described in 'evidence-based' marketing (Step 3), use this approach to test the response to how your campaign was received. Applying this to both the development of your ideas and measurements of your campaigns afterwards will ensure a robust approach.

A series of testimonials; how many people you engaged; and local media coverage are all influential tools to show your funders.

8: COMMUNICATING YOUR POSITIVE IMPACT

You've created a successful strategy, and implementation has contributed to reaching all your goals and objectives.

What next? Make sure you communicate to the people that matter to you the impact of your success – what you did, how you did it, who for, when and where.

This is a fantastic opportunity to drive awareness of your organisation to existing supporters and importantly potential new ones. Thinking about where you're at as an organisation, consider the benefits to shouting loud about what you've done and what you'd like to achieve in future, e.g.; diversify funding streams, build credibility amongst your peers etc.

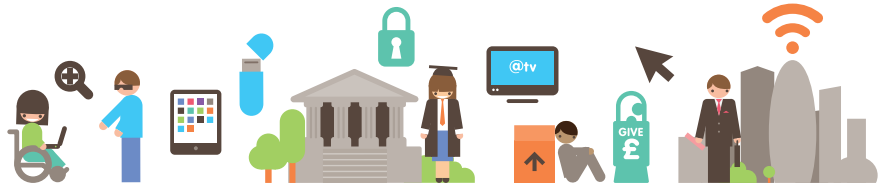
This in mind, firstly take the simple step of mapping all your target funders and stakeholders – ensure those you're trying to positively influence are aware of your success stories.

FIVE W'S & ONE H >

Secondly, write up a concise punchy summary of your campaign applying the simple summarising tool of the Five W's and the H:

- Who we are
- What we did
- Why we did it
- When we did it
- Where we did it
- How we did it

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Lastly, consider how will you tell your target audience. Go back to thinking about your different audiences and consider their media consumption and how best to reach them using the right marketing mix.

So for instance, distribute this on your website as a news story and send it to your followers as an e-newsletter with a timely Twitter link; send it as a personal letter from your CEO to your target funders and stakeholders; use the content as the platform for a press release to your local media. Be strategic from beginning to end.