



UNIT - 2

Developing a Communications Plan

Staff Training Solutions

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Define the essential pieces of communication
- ✓ Customize these essential pieces for your company

Unit 2

Developing a Communications Plan

Introduction

As we mentioned earlier, business communications is like a multi-lane highway. Your communications plan is your atlas connecting your company to your various audiences. It will map out the route and destination for each audience.

Your company may already have several communications pieces that act as maps. For example:

- ✓ Annual report: Map for shareholders
- ✓ Weekly flyer: Map for store shoppers
- ✓ Website: Map for browsers and online shoppers
- ✓ Marketing plan: Map for sales and marketing team

As with any journey, you must decide upon the destination first. Then, you choose the route and vehicle. You also must decide who's driving, or the trip ends before it begins.

Selecting Your Communications Destination

On the communications highway, the destination for your message is your audience. As a company, you communicate with several audiences. These include:

- ✓ Staff
- ✓ Customers
- ✓ Suppliers
- ✓ Media
- ✓ General public

Just like a city holds several smaller destinations, an audience holds several different subsets. Looking more closely at your customer audience, you may have:

- ✓ Long-term customers
- ✓ Steady customers
- ✓ New customers
- ✓ Potential customers
- ✓ Customers you win from competitors
- ✓ Customers won by your competitors that you want to win back

A communications plan needs to address the needs of many audiences, so it works well when it is done in sections, with each section developed for a specific goal or need. Be specific as possible with your audience list so that you can be clear about goals for each audience.

For each group, consider these elements:

- ✓ What do they need?
- ✓ What solution or information can I provide?

- ✓ How do I provide this solution or information?
- ✓ Who should do this?
- ✓ When do I need to do this?

Text Your Knowledge

List an audience that you will be communicating with.

List any subsets within this audience.

Brainstorm a list of objectives for this audience.

What is unique about this audience?

What is challenging about communicating with this audience?

How important is this audience to your business? Why?

Choosing a Communications Route

There are many ways to reach a destination, and there are many methods and media to reach an audience. There is no single right or wrong method, only effective or ineffective methods. For example, if your goal for a road trip was to experience lush scenery and small-town charm, you will be disappointed with a busy highway as your primary route, even though it will get you to your destination faster. However, if you are running late for a family wedding, a high-speed highway will be the ideal choice.

The route, or delivery method, you choose for your business communications is “right” if:

- ✓ It reaches your audience
- ✓ It meets your goal(s)
- ✓ It meets the audience’s need for information and engagement

There can be multiple goals for a message or plan, such as:

- ✓ Cost-effective
- ✓ Measurable results
- ✓ Increased sales
- ✓ More customers
- ✓ Good attendance at an event

To meet your goals and connect your customers to your message, there are multiple routes, including:

- ✓ E-mail
- ✓ Postal mailout
- ✓ Posters
- ✓ Website content
- ✓ Social media
- ✓ Broadcast media
- ✓ Print media
- ✓ Special events

Consider your audience and goals:

- ✓ What does the audience need and want to know?
- ✓ When do we need to communicate?
- ✓ What is the preferred route for reaching this audience?
- ✓ For this specific audience and message, what is the most effective way to get your message across?

Several messages and a variety of methods or routes may be required to meet certain goals. Consider it a multi-phased road trip, which flows best when the various campaigns or “day trips” align and complement each other.

Multiple messages are also key to effective marketing. Customers, especially new or potential customers, need to be exposed to a message several times before recognizing the brand or remembering the message. This is a key difference between marketing and communications: marketing is the determining of when, how, and how often the message is repeated; communications is determining the message for the audience.

It is also important to remember that an individual may be a part of two or more audiences, or may be a regular recipient of information from two or more routes. For these reasons, make sure your messages are clear and aligned, even if they are developed for different audiences and routes.

Test your Knowledge

Consider the pros and cons of each media route below.

Route	Pros	Cons
E-mail		
Postal mailout		
Posters		
Website content		
Social media		
Broadcast media		
Print media		
Special events		

Establishing a Communications Vehicle

Choosing the Vehicle

With the destination and route selected, it is time to select the vehicle: an efficient, durable framework that meets the needs of the company and the audience, with the agility to handle the unexpected and the speed to deliver the message in a timely manner.

This step also involves identifying the driver, navigator, and leader(s). Depending on the size of your company, you might be the only person answering the phone and thereby responsible for any media or public inquiries. Or perhaps a journalist calls you but has to go through someone else first. Either way, everyone in your organization needs to know how to respond to media inquiries, who to direct a call or foot traffic to, and how they should reply to a persistent individual.

Setting up Media Guidelines

Media guidelines can assist with all of those things. They explain your company’s approach to relationship building with the media (both traditional and social), what information will be shared, what method will be used to share it, and how often it will be shared.

Your media guidelines could include things like:

- All media inquiries and inquiries from people you consider to be media (bloggers, citizen journalists, etc.) must be directed to the Communications Officer.
- Media inquiries must get a response within six hours.
- A list of social media platforms with which the company will engage, who will maintain the accounts, and how often items will be posted.

There are plenty of options when it comes to media guidelines. It all depends on what your goals are and what your public relations plan looks like.

Sample Media Guidelines

Be Honest

Don't try to be someone else. (This has caused lots of trouble for politicians and prominent business people). Tell people who you are and be honest about your position within the company. Don't try to pass yourself off as someone else, or in a way that pretends to give you more responsibility than you have.

Be Respectful

When using social media in particular, it's sometimes tempting to "let it all hang out" and say what you think. With respect to your organization, and especially when you are acting in the official role of communications officer, you've got to temper your comments. Contribute things that are respectful and that have meaning to anyone will read them. Being respectful also means respecting a media outlet's guidelines for submission, content rules, and deadlines.

Maintain Confidentiality

As an employee you may have access to information that is sensitive to the company operation and to shareholders. Make sure that you conduct your affairs in a way that protects that information, and that you respect confidentiality and people's expectations for privacy.

Guard Your Personal Identity

Be diligent that the information you are releasing is what you intended. You must ensure that your information, including address and personal details, are not accessible to unscrupulous people such as thieves and hackers. Respect the information regarding your company in the same manner.

Respect the Company Brand

Businesses work extremely hard to create a reputation. Your behavior with the media – and your interactions with social media – should respect that, especially if you are being interviewed or posting social media updates on the company's behalf.

Be Consistent

If your role includes updating social media sites, make sure that you do so regularly, and that you have worthwhile information to share. Also be sure to monitor what is being said about you, the company, and the brand in order to celebrate success and manage problems that arise.

Selecting a Spokesperson

Consider these essential elements in determining your company's spokesperson:

Select Great Communicators

Credibility is increased when you speak well, when you can listen to questions and answer thoughtfully, and when people believe what you say. These skills can all be learned, so if a person in authority or with

technical knowledge is to be the spokesperson, be sure to invest in their (or your!) communication skills as well.

Find Ambassadors

Effective spokespeople need to be positive supports for the company. They need passion as well as expertise and they need to be able to communicate that to their audience. Their body language, facial expressions, and overall attitude need to support the message, and it also helps if they can build relationships with members of the media rather than simply make statements. Relationships will lead to more thorough understanding by members of the media.

Interpersonal Counts

Some people are not great spokespeople, no matter how fantastic they are technically. A spokesperson must be able to stay calm amid the frenzy of a media event, think on the spot, remain likeable, and share the company message clearly. If your subject matter expert cannot do these things, then select as spokesperson a team member who can, and have the technical expert bring him or her up to speed in the privacy and comfort of a quiet office.

Strong Insight is Important

A spokesperson needs to hear what is behind a reporter's question and to try to understand the intent behind it. The answer should address the reporter's question while maintaining the company message.

Developing an Approval Process

As part of your creation of guidelines, you also have to create (and perhaps be a part of) an approval process. A series of approvals is often necessary before a marketing campaign or annual report, for example, are released to the media and the public. This helps stop errors or the release of information prematurely, and to prepare for any questions that come as a result of that information. However, an approval process that takes too long, or subjects a one-page release to the same rigors as a 100-page report, will result in missed opportunities to get the word out.

Here are some guidelines for an effective approval process.

- ✓ There is no such thing as perfection, so do not strive for that. Too many companies miss important public relations opportunities because they are too timid to engage the public eye.
- ✓ Do not be too invested in materials that you develop. Other people will have different opinions, but that does not make your work wrong. In fact, the exchange of opinions will make a stronger message.
- ✓ Let go of any personal attachment you have to your communications work. Focus on the process of creating information that works for the people you work with, and that is useful, accurate, and purposed for the media and public.

- ✓ Maintain a small collaboration team. Too many approvers can spoil the message. Keep the process to one or two key people, with an added expert (such as a lawyer or consultant) when needed.
- ✓ Be timely and respectful of deadlines. Often, the early media release gets the space. The news cycle is short and attention spans are shorter. Waiting until tomorrow or next week can kill the story before it is issued.

Inbound vs. Outbound: How Can We Help You?

Defining Inbound and Outbound Marketing

Outbound marketing means connecting with customers by your company's choice of method(s): advertisements on television and radio and in print, pop-up or click ads on websites, mailbox flyers, telemarketing calls, and any other means in which the customer is approached by your company message. This is the traditional means of sharing a company message, and is still frequently used with some success.

Times, however, are changing. It is a buyer's market in more ways than one. Customers have more choices than ever for information sources and increasingly, they are choosing methods that give them the control. **Inbound marketing** means connecting with customers by their choice: they visit your website, call your toll-free number, take part in your survey, or walk into your store because they heard or read about your products.

To return to our highway analogy, inbound marketing is a ramp that you build to direct customers to your company. However, that ramp does not force them off the highway or interrupt their flow like a television ad or telemarketing call. Your promotion is on the ramp (your website, Facebook page, or store location and hours) and you invite, encourage, and inform them why they should visit. When they make the choice to visit, you are ready. That is inbound marketing.

Some common sources of inbound marketing include:

- ✓ Word of mouth
- ✓ Media releases
- ✓ Blog sites
- ✓ E-mail newsletters (where customers voluntarily join a mailing list)
- ✓ Social media
- ✓ Seminars, workshops, and conferences
- ✓ Trade shows

The Reasons for Inbound Marketing

There are two compelling reasons to include and emphasize inbound marketing in your overall marketing strategy. The first reason is **market reach**. More consumers are skipping the ads and searching for real-life content. If you can provide that content, they will find you.

The second reason is **cost**. Paid ads guarantee the look and position you want, but they do not always provide the information customers want. Customers like stories, not pitches. They seek credible information, not paid advertorials. Purchased ads may not be as engaging as a thoughtful opinion piece or intriguing media release, both of which can be shared free of charge.

Inbound marketing works by attracting people to your message, site, or product; converting them to customers; and exceeding their expectations. If you succeed at this, they will refer you to their family and friends, post about you on their social media sites, blog about you, or otherwise share your information.

Word of mouth continues to be the most credible and heeded source of information. If your inbound marketing is effective, you will continue to build your message and market research not through specific marketing campaigns, but by operating your core business.

Test your Knowledge

Does your company do outbound marketing, inbound marketing, or both?



Is there an advantage to maintaining both styles of marketing in your marketing plan?

What are some examples of how inbound marketing could meet your marketing needs?

The Five C's of a Successful Message

Be Clear

Introduction

There are many rules to govern the writing and revising of effective messages. Often, these rules are expressed as a number of C's. These rules can vary, but this session will cover a summary of some basic elements that can steer you clear of common pitfalls in writing: clutter, confusion, and chaos.

Sample E-Mail

Consider this e-mail:

Ruth,

John's great. When you have a minute, let's talk.

Bill

Ask yourself:

- ✓ What is the purpose of this e-mail?
- ✓ Is the matter urgent?
- ✓ What if there are two or more people named John in this department? Which one is the subject of the letter?
- ✓ What is John doing that is so good?

Being Clear

Correspondence of any kind should answer questions, not create them. Be clear in your mind about the reason for your message and the needs of the audience before you put pen to paper or utter a word. In the message above, the writer may have been clear in their own mind about the message, but they did not consider what the audience needed to take part in the conversation.

If you are not sure where to start, try to identify your goal with a phrase like this:

- ✓ Staff party – invite them
- ✓ Breach of contract – need to meet to discuss
- ✓ Great monthly performance – submitting nomination for award
- ✓ Customer complaint – manager needs to deal with this

Sample E-Mail

Now consider this e-mail:

Ruth,

In recent weeks John Casey, who's working in your department, has helped the marketing team with several urgent communication matters. He has done this on his own time and kept up with his regular workload.

We have a big communications campaign coming up over the next few weeks, and it would help us greatly to have him temporarily join our team. Could you call me when you have a moment to discuss this?

Thanks,

Bill

Ask yourself the same questions from above:

- ✓ What is the purpose of this e-mail?
- ✓ Is the matter urgent?
- ✓ What if there are two or more people named John in this department? Which one is the subject of the letter?
- ✓ What is John doing that is so good?

This time, you have the answers. If you were Ruth, you could respond to Bill's request quickly and efficiently.

Being Coherent

Clear also includes Coherent. When your communication is coherent, it's logical. All points are connected and relevant to the main topic and the tone and flow of the text is consistent.

Consider this e-mail:

Traci,

This message is about the marketing plan that you submitted last week. I passed it on to Sam for proofreading and fact-checking. He asked me to make sure that you know about the brainstorming session at the lodge next Sunday. We'll be designing guidelines for the new social media site that AppNow is launching.

Thanks,

Joan

Ask yourself:

- ✓ The note said it was about the marketing plan, so where are the details about it?
- ✓ What do the brainstorming session and the new social media site have to do with the marketing plan?

To ensure coherency, e-mails or short notes are usually best with one topic only. If you need to include more than one topic, make sure that both are clearly defined.

Let's look at a revised version of our sample e-mail:

Traci,

This message is about the marketing plan that you submitted last week. I passed it on to Sam for proofreading and fact-checking. He will upload a revised version to the server by the end of the day and will e-mail you when it is ready.

The new social media guidelines for the AppNow site will need to be incorporated into this plan. These guidelines will be determined at the brainstorming session at Oakman Lodge next Sunday from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m.

Thanks,

Joan

Be Concise

Being Concise

Stick to the point and keep it short. More words do not emphasize your meaning; they bury it. Read through your message and remove repeated or unnecessary sentences. You should also delete adjectives or phrases that do not add to the meaning, such as:

- ✓ For instance
- ✓ Really
- ✓ Actually
- ✓ I mean
- ✓ You see

Sample E-mail

Hi Jesse,

I wanted to touch base with you about the social media campaign we chatted about the other day. I really think that our target market is definitely going to want to see the company's good works in the community. That could really make a huge, massive impact, and they would remember it better than a sales pitch.

For instance, if we talk about the company's environmental initiatives, as well as the charity work, then the impact will just grow.

What do you think?

Markus

Revised E-mail

Hi Jesse,

About the e-mail marketing campaign that we analyzed last Thursday: we should focus our message on the company's community and charitable work. Our target market will want to know about these programs, especially our goals to become environmentally sustainable and help local schools provide better quality education to our inner city neighborhoods.

This would make a greater impact than a traditional sales pitch in both the short and long term. What do you think?

Markus

Be Complete

What to Include

Your message should include everything that the audience needs to know. Once the audience has read your message, they should know what they need to do. This may seem like another C (common sense), but there have been numerous advertisements and news stories that overlook obvious details (like town names or dates) in favor of the more exciting message. We all want to get to the good stuff but the message is ineffective if the audience doesn't have the details to place it in context or motivate them to act.

Sample E-Mail

Consider this message:

Hi gang!

I just wanted to remind you all about the meeting we're having tomorrow! Don't miss it!

Bob

The reader is left with the following questions:

- ✓ What is the meeting about?

- ✓ Where and when is the meeting?

Revised E-Mail

Now consider this e-mail:

Dear marketing team,

This is a reminder about the meeting on Wednesday, February 2nd at 11 a.m. in Boardroom A. The new marketing plan and social media guidelines will be reviewed and discussed. Attendance is mandatory. Lunch will be provided.

Bob

Be Correct

Being Correct

Correct communication provides your audience with accurate and relevant information, spelled and punctuated correctly in grammar that is polite and clear. Confirm job titles and the spelling of all names. The Chief Executive Officer may be offended if you call him the Supervisor. The spelling of company or personal names can vary, too: is it Michael, Micheal, or Mykal?

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Sample E-Mail

Consider this e-mail:

Hi Matthew,

Thanks so much for meeting me at lunch today! I enjoyed our conversation, and I'd like to recommend that our companies work together, if that's okay with you. We can manage the four-week deadline, no problem.

Thanks again, Mike, and I'll speak to you soon!

Cheers,

Sandy Smith

Are there any errors? No? Read it again. There are four mistakes:

- ✓ “conservation” instead of “conversation”
- ✓ “of that’s okay” instead of “if that’s okay”
- ✓ Second reference is to Mike, when first reference is to Matthew
- ✓ “weak” instead of “week”

These errors can happen when you are typing quickly or writing while distracted. Spell checkers or auto-correct functions will not catch these errors. Unless you catch them, the person seeing them will be your audience who will be left with the impression that you are at best careless, or worse, illiterate. That is not an impression you want to make on a customer or colleague. Take a few moments to review your message carefully. You may even want to walk away and come back before sending it off. The extra time will pay for itself in correctness and another important C: credibility.

Be Compelling

Consider this advertising copy:

QuikBrew makes coffee.

This statement is accurate, but there is no excitement about the product. There also are no details about what it is or does. This message is too general to attract anything but a passing glance.

Now consider this:

For the discerning coffee lover who wants fast, convenient, low-cost, top-quality coffee at home, QuikBrew is the ideal solution. QuikBrew is the first single-serve coffee brewing product that offers 100% organic, certified gluten-free, fair trade coffee at a low price.

This copy is packed with information and creates an image in the customer’s mind. Can’t you just see yourself sipping on a fantastic cup of coffee in your kitchen?

Consider this advertising statement: “Tin-Trax keeps food fresh.” How could you make this more compelling?



Further Reading:

