

Strategic

communications planning

Let's talk about how a strategic marketing communications plan directly supports organizational priorities and business goals. A communications strategy is at the heart of all communications activities. It aligns your goals and objectives to your various tactics and deliberately defines the scope of work, key messages and evaluation metrics to fuel your organization's performance.

Effective communications doesn't happen by accident or through a shotgun "bigger is better" approach. Proactive planning generates a higher impact while reducing risk for the organization at a lower cost.

Here are the steps to building a strategic communications plan:

1. External Environment Scan

- Use the PEST model (Political, Economic, Social, Technology factors) to determine whether or not there are any external elements that may affect your communications.
- Conduct a competitive analysis. Research your top five competitors' strategies, strengths and weaknesses.

2. Internal Environment Scan

- Use the SWOT model (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) to determine your organization's competitive position.
- List internal team skills and resources available.
- Gain feedback from a variety of internal stakeholders including your leadership team, Board of Directors, front line workers, etc.
- Establish a budget.

3. Define Goals and Objectives

- Develop SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Action-Oriented, Realistic and Time-Sensitive) for the next one, two and five years.
- Don't forget goals and objectives aren't the same thing:
 - Goals - Broad, strategic and long-term oriented
 - Objectives - Specific, measurable and set to achieve goals

4. Define Target Audiences

- Create a persona or an avatar of primary and secondary stakeholders. Audiences may include customers / clients, influencers, employees, partners, government officials, volunteers, etc. Consider elements such as:
 - Demographics - including geographic location, purchasing habits, media habits, etc.
 - Hobbies
 - Income
 - Level of education

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5. Build a plan

- Outline the strategies that will meet your goals and objectives.
- Create a content calendar to support social, editorial and media opportunities.
- List the activities that will help support your strategies:
 - Are you starting a blog?
 - Are you utilizing social media differently?
 - Are you holding a fundraising gala?
 - Are you placing newspaper or magazine ads?

6. Calendar

- Create a Gantt chart or workback schedule to determine a realistic timeline for your tactics, objectives and goals to be achieved.
- Break down tasks quarterly, monthly and weekly.

7. Budget

- Set your budget and list any additional expenses you may need to accomplish your goals.
- Include everything from staffing costs for special events, print advertising fees, social media advertising fees, etc.

8. Measurement

- Determine quantitative and qualitative performance indicators and evaluation metrics for proposed strategies and tactics.
- Set timelines (which coincide with your calendar) as to when measurement will take place. Will you do monthly, quarterly, or yearly measurements to stay on track?
- What is your reporting schedule?