

Developing Your Communication Strategy



Understand Your Audience

As specifically as possible, define your target audience(s) and the approaches needed to effectively communicate with them; step into their shoes. Define the opinions, attitudes, and emotions that make them tune in or turn off. What communication media works best for your audience? Content, time and place don't matter if you can't connect. Find where your target audience is and go there.

Key Points

- Who specifically do you need to convince/ compel/motivate in order for your project to be successful?
- What are their communication tendencies?
- What communication media works best for the audience?

K.I.S.S

Be Simple: Use Small Words

It is difficult to adequately relay information to your customer if it is presented in a way they cannot identify with. An overwhelming presentation of esoteric vernacular and impressive facts may miss the mark when you aim to capture your customers' attention. This concept can be applied to your SWCD through website design, marketing campaigns as well as the way you publish information about your services. Minimalist marketing messages capture and retain your audience's attention, as they provide a concise and clear message they will remember. It is also important to know the level of knowledge they have about your topic.

Key Points

- What is the core idea that communicates what you want to achieve/be?
- All of the decisions regarding the project should be in alignment with this 'statement of purpose.'
- Statement that is simple, profound, and that relies on 'easy' vocabulary.



Be Concrete: Use Short Sentences

Present your customers with information that won't confuse or overwhelm them. Written content should be limited somewhere between two to five sentences, and it should only relay the most necessary information. Organize your content through icons or images, rather than lists or text-heavy content. Images tell an instant story that your audience recognizes in a glance and processes quickly. It provides their brain with a desired focal point and makes a strong statement. Use taglines and succinct captions to accompany your icons, in case your viewers need some extra guidance.

Key Points

- In 1-2 sentences, explain your plan (ideas) in ways that enable the audience to clearly imagine what you want to achieve.
- You want your plan (idea) to communicate the same thing to everyone.
- Be sensory specific (see, hear, feel, touch, action, etc.)



Demonstrate Credibility: Credibility is as Important as Philosophy

The root of the word "credibility" is "credo," which means "I believe" in Latin. Put simply, credibility is the feeling of trust and respect that you inspire in others. If credibility were a pyramid, then your character and integrity would make up the foundation. You establish credibility when you inspire trust in others, and it's important to your success, no matter what role you're in. To build your credibility, demonstrate honesty and integrity in everything that you do. Work on building expertise, be transparent, be professional, and communicate clearly.

Key Points

- How can you get people to believe in/support your ideas?
- Facts and figures help, but they are not enough. They leave your audience as "observers." Empower your audience to test the value for themselves. This makes them associate into the experience and become "participants/stakeholders."



Consistency Matters

Ensure that all messaging and communications strategies are unified across all channels and are centered around the customer." Simply put, marketing is most effective if every SWCD marketing channel has communication that is aligned to the same core brand positioning. Clearly you don't want to have marketing that makes your brand look like it has some sort of split-personality disorder like Gollum from The Hobbit.

Key Points

- Consistency in creating valuable content takes a lot of planning and time management.
- What simple clear message do you want your audience to know about you?
- Is this message communicated through ALL of your outreach efforts?
- Create templates that portray the same message for all staff to use.



Stir Emotions: Speak Inspirationally

When the first words out of your mouth or in a written document are all about you and what you can do, your prospect is actually turned off. They don't feel listened to. They feel they are being sold to. And that creates immediate resistance. "Here's this person telling all the great things their company can do, and I have no idea if they even understand my situation." Talk about the prospect, about their situation, their challenges, their problems, their pain, their frustrations and even their aspirations and goals. After you've communicated that clearly, only then do you talk about what it is you offer that addresses their situation, makes their challenges easier, solves their problems, eases their pain, lessens their frustration and shows the way to achieving their goals.

Key Points

- Emotions are directly linked to values. People make decisions based on their values.
- What emotions are linked to the values you want to fulfill?
- What emotions are likely to motivate your audience to move toward or away from what you want to achieve?
- How can you make them feel compelled to support your plan (ideas)?



Visualize: Use Metaphors & Stories

Image transcends language, both written and spoken. No matter which language is communicated – people will always share a natural understanding of the visual image. Studies suggest that “*As human beings, our brains are wired for images.*” This portion of the brain handles emotion and imagination. Therefore, it makes sense that we weave metaphors which pull up mental pictures. Have you ever watched or listened to a newscast where the announcer says, “The water main break pushed 15,000 gallons of water into the streets of our city. 15,000 gallons. That’s enough to fill Yankee Stadium three times.” We may not grasp what 15,000 gallons of water looks like, but most people have an image of a professional baseball stadium to help them better understand the size and scope of 15,000 gallons of water, three times over.

Key Points

- How can you get people to act based on your plan (ideas)?
- Stories and metaphors create ‘experience’ and get people to ‘associate’ into your vision/ideas.
- Whenever someone repeats a metaphore/story in their head or to someone else, it re-enforces their ‘participation.



Be Relevant: Provide Context & Explain Relevance

This is the interruption vs. value issue. People are looking for information that helps them accomplish a task, solve a problem, educate them about an issue, or entertain them. People want to hear things that are familiar to them. You need to switch from *product or service-centric* marketing to *customer-centric* marketing.

Key Points

- What problems is your audience facing?
- Which of these are ‘critically important?’
- How can/will your project help solve them?
- What will happen when your project succeeds?