

Make More Money With an Effective Communication Plan

Before you start a journey, you have to know where you're going and how to get there. In the communications field, the roadmap to reach your destination is the marketing/communication plan. By developing a comprehensive marketing/communication plan and religiously following it, companies will see improved communications and increased profits.

Establish a Purpose

The first step in developing a marketing/communication plan is to establish a purpose, which should be the essence of simplicity—people who read it should immediately understand what you're trying to accomplish. Here's an example: "The purpose of this plan is to establish regular communication with existing clients and to market the firm to potential clients."

List Specific Goals

Once your statement of purpose has been established, you need to set specific goals on how to get there. In order to ensure that your plan is followed, limit your goals to no more than five. These goals should be specific and able to be measured. For instance, a specific goal from the above example could be the following: "Develop a communication series to be mailed to all clients and prospects." You will develop strategies to accomplish these goals later in the plan.

Determine Your Target Markets

Establishing well-defined markets that are reachable in a targeted manner is essential to the success of any marketing/communication plan. Be as specific as you can regarding your target markets. In the above example, "existing clients" is a clearly defined market that should be reachable through the use of the company's database.

Address External Factors

If any external factors are likely to affect your outcome, list them here. If one of your goals is to develop a quarterly newsletter and your competitor is already mailing a newsletter to your target market, you need to know that. If you believe you have the very best product available, write it down so everyone who reads your plan will know it, too. This is where you will list your major competitors and their strengths and weaknesses.

Develop a Unique Selling Proposition/Campaign Slogan

Before any marketing can be done, you must develop a Unique Selling Proposition (USP). What differentiates you from others in your field? What makes you unique? Why should people choose your company? For instance, do you offer the lowest price in your market? Is your customer service top-notch? Do you guarantee your work? Don't assume you know what makes you unique—ask your employees and customers what they think. Ask why clients do business with you, and ask former customers why they don't work with you any longer. (Their answers may tell you what you should be promoting about your firm.) Be sure to check out your competition to see how they position their businesses. If your company already has a slogan that reflects your USP, list it here and incorporate it into this plan.

Establish Specific Strategies to Meet Your Goals

Under "strategies" on your marketing/communication plan, list each specific goal from above and then write down strategies to meet each goal. These strategies form the "meat" of the marketing/communication plan, so you should spend a good amount of time brainstorming. If you haven't already done so, get your employees involved in developing these strategies.

If one of your goals is to “Develop a communication series to be mailed to all clients and prospects,” your strategies could include “Design a quarterly newsletter,” “Design a monthly flyer,” “Design postcards to be mailed on breaking news items,” and “Develop a publication calendar.” If one of your goals is to “Package our message,” four specific goals could be to “Design and print letterhead, business cards, and envelopes,” “Write a capabilities statement,” “Develop other promotional materials as needed, such as staff biographies,” and “Design a web site.”

When you are developing strategies, it’s important to think in terms of benefit to your customers and to your bottom line. If developing a corporate brochure will make your staff feel good but won’t help your customers understand the benefits of your product or service and won’t increase your sales, you probably shouldn’t develop one. Also list the cost for each of your strategies.

Conduct Research

Plan to conduct research. Find out what has worked for others in the same field and what can be learned from their experience. That way, you’ll save time and avoid costly mistakes. You may also need to conduct generic research using your local library or the internet. More specific, customized research may also be needed. The more information you have up front, the more successful your plan is likely to be.

Establish a Calendar

In order to ensure the success of your marketing/communication plan, establish clear deadlines and make sure all employees and consultants know the consequences of not meeting those deadlines. If you’re serious about making the plan a success, you have to be serious about ensuring everyone meets the deadlines.

List the Total Budget

Add up all the costs you estimated in your strategies. This represents the total cost of your marketing/communication plan.

Implement Your Plan

Once the plan is complete, you should determine the best way to implement it. Your plan will be comprehensive, but that doesn’t mean the entire plan will need to be implemented at once. You may want to hire outside consultants to implement certain aspects of the plan, or you may wish to handle the entire implementation in-house. Your plan will be organized in such a way that you can pick the goals and strategies you want to concentrate on, when you want to concentrate on them.

Evaluate Your Plan

Evaluation is one of the most important parts of any marketing/communication plan. Establish regular checkpoints throughout the year. A comprehensive quarterly review and planning session will help keep you on track and is much easier to focus on and digest than reviewing an entire year. Remember that your marketing/communication plan is a long-term strategy designed to get you where you want to be. You may not see immediate results at your initial 90-day review, but don’t give up. On the other hand, if you have been using a specific strategy for a year and you fail to see measurable results, you may wish to eliminate or change that strategy. It’s important to regularly evaluate your plan so that you are getting the most value for your time and money.

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