

Improving Your Public Profile

Lions International Website

Lions meet the needs of local communities and the world. Our 1.35 million members - who perform community service in 209 countries and geographic areas - are different in many ways, but share a core belief: community is what we make it.

When you join Lions, you join a global service network. So, at the same time you're doing local community service, you can also contribute to Lions volunteer efforts around the world.

Your clubs already have a strong public profile which makes my job all the more challenging this morning.

Topics—

- Communication planning and why it's necessary.
- Tools to link with the local news media in your community.
- Image building in your communities – blowing your own horn.
- Creating lasting partnerships.
- Sharing Your Success Stories
- Questions

Communications Plan

People and organizations communicate with others for a variety of reasons - to inform, persuade, prevent misunderstandings, present a point of view or reduce barriers.

Communications happens when the message you send is received, understood and acted upon by your intended audience.

Communications planning is simply a process to help you reach that goal.

The communications plan has been described in a number of ways, including:

- a foundation on which to base decisions and create ideas
- a means of focusing on where you want to be and what needs to be done to get there
- a tool for discovering opportunities, optimizing challenges and initiating change, and
- a means of monitoring your communications efforts.

Communications planning is not a mysterious art. It is a straightforward, step-by-step process that will help you clearly and logically summarize what you want to say to your intended audience and map out how you will deliver that message.

Why Communicate?

Organizations need to communicate for one or all of the following reasons:

- **To inform** You may need to let interested parties know who you are, what you can do for them, what they can do to help you, or even just how to get in touch.
- **To build understanding or change behavior** You may want to encourage others to think, act or feel a certain way; to stay in school or not do drugs, for example. This can involve appealing to feelings, self-interest, or a person's imagination.
- **To prevent misunderstandings** Even a small misunderstanding can create large problems for your organization. You can ensure good communication by putting yourself in your audience's position, paying attention to their needs and getting to know them.
- **To present a point of view** Often, this is all you need to do to accomplish your goal.

To lower barriers between groups and individuals These barriers may range from information overload to suspicion and prejudice.

Communications Planning - The Six Steps

Step 1 - Research And Analysis or Take Stock Of Your Current Situation

Start your communications planning with some research. Research can be as extensive as commissioning a public opinion poll or as simple as talking on an informal basis with your clients or staff. It also means asking the following questions about your current situation and what affects it:

- What are your organization's goals, strengths and weaknesses? Having a clear picture of what your organization wants to achieve will help you determine a good course of action for your communications.
- What resources do you already have? Information, people, money, time and public support are all valuable assets. Determining which assets you have and which ones you might need will help you decide on the scope of your communications program.
- Is there any current research that will help you? Do you need to do any research?
- Has this type of communications activity taken place before? If so, what was the result?
- What are your major communications opportunities? Perhaps the local newspaper is always interested in your organization's activities. Or maybe there's an annual meeting coming up where you can present your messages.
- What are your major communications impediments? Perhaps you don't have a lot of money to spend on communications so you will need to look for low-cost opportunities.

The analysis stage involves sifting through the research to look for information that will help you frame your communications plan. Analysis can help you:

- define your communications challenge
- identify friends (and opposition) and suggest their motivation
- help identify audiences, place them in order of importance and determine how they perceive your organization, and
- suggest what messages should be directed to your audience.

Step Two - Goals and Objectives

Defining your goals and objectives or what you are trying to achieve will help you focus on the who, why, when and how of your communications planning.

Goals are the overall changes you wish to cause.

Objectives are the short-term, measurable steps you take to reach your goal.

For Example:

- If your goal is to increase community support for your local community development initiative, your objectives might be to:
- increase your membership by 10%
- add two new organization directors
- increase funding from the business community
- encourage positive media coverage of your organization's activities
- inform the community of the benefits of having a Lions Club in the community, and
- achieve support for your activities from local civic leaders.

When deciding on your objectives, ask yourself:

- Are we seeking to provide new information?
- Are we calling the audience to action?
- Are we seeking to change behaviour?

Your objectives should form a clear statement of what it is you are trying to do. They should be specific, realistic and listed in order of importance. They should also be measurable. When you evaluate your communications plan, you will measure your results against your objectives.

Step Three - Target Audience

The next step in the planning process is to determine your target audiences by:

- listing the groups with whom you need to communicate, and
- analyzing each group.

When choosing the people or groups your organization needs to influence, it may be helpful to think about the many different ways you can describe them. Possibly, you are looking at a program geared toward seniors or youth between 12-18.

The more clearly you can define your audience, the easier it will be to make choices about your messages and communications vehicles.

When analyzing each group, consider:

- What do they already know about your organization?
- How are they likely to react to your message and why?
- What are some factors influencing the audience that receives your message - for example: literacy levels or multicultural differences?

Are there any difficulties you might have in communicating with each group?

Step Four - Key Messages

Taking into consideration your objectives and target audiences, it is now time to identify the essential idea or set of ideas you want to communicate. Ask yourself - What does the audience already know about this issue? What does the audience need to know? What do we want to tell the audience?

Now, develop the message or messages you want your target audience to hear and to believe. Write down each message in a simple, specific statement.

Keep in mind, to motivate people, you must show them that you will help meet their needs. A clear description of the benefits to your audiences will help ensure that your message is received, understood and acted upon.

Step 5 - Communication Strategy

Tactics

There are many communications vehicles available from which to choose. A number of them are listed on the last page of this Factsheet.

Having done your communications analysis, you will be able to narrow your choices to the communications vehicles that:

- fit with the resources you already have
- are the most effective communications vehicles to reach your target audiences and influence them with your message(s), and
- help you achieve your goals and deliver the outcomes you want.

Timing is another very important consideration when choosing your communications vehicles. You don't want your messages competing unnecessarily

with other events. Finally, there is the budget. Don't let a limited budget discourage you. There are many inexpensive communication vehicles.

Your communications plan may need a theme to tie it together. The theme line should be a short, punchy version of your main message and should be the link between all your activities and materials. Foodland Ontario's There's No Taste Like Home slogan is a good example of capturing a message (that Ontarians should buy Ontario-grown food) in one catchy phrase.

Implementation

Make a list of all the activities that will take place:

- before the launch of your communications campaign; for example, preparing a mailing list, writing a news release
- at the time of the launch; for example, distribution of the news release, and
- as a follow-up; for example, responding to media inquiries resulting from the news release.

If you develop a long-term plan, be sure to build in some check points to monitor progress and aid adjustments.

Step Six - Evaluation

How will you know if you are successful? Will the audiences receive the messages you intend them to receive, or will they get an entirely different message?

By evaluating your communications plan, you can learn how your plan worked with various audiences, which activities had the most impact, and which parts of the plan failed.

There are a variety of formal measurement techniques for measuring the results against your objectives, such as: readership surveys, attitude audits, focus group sessions. You can do your own evaluation on a less formal basis by assessing media coverage and talking to your clients.

The evaluation of your first plan should form the foundation of your next communications plan.

(Source: Government of Ontario- Communication Planning for Organizations)

Tools to Link with the Local Media

If you want to get publicity for your club in your local area, you need to build relationships with the media. Get to know the reporters on your local paper, the editor at the local TV news desk and the staff at your local radio station.

There are some key things to remember when dealing with journalists.

First of all, timing is everything. Find out when the deadlines are. Make sure you provide information or pictures well in advance. Don't ring a journalist for a chat when their publication is about to go to press.

Secondly, find out what their requirements are. Most journalists are incredibly busy. Ask them when would be a good time to call back or drop in to see them.

Keep in touch with phone calls or emails but don't pester them and don't bombard them with press releases. If you keep sending irrelevant releases, then your big announcements won't make any impact.

Giving journalists what they want

The best way to make your PR effective is to find out what journalists want and to provide it. What makes a good news story depends very much on the publication. You may need to give your story an angle or a hook. Are you bringing in a celebrity or politician to possibly announce a new project?

Be as helpful as you can. Provide everything they need, including quotes, pictures, facts and figures. Possibly bring in funding partners as part of your announcement.

It is also worth cultivating the freelance journalists that write for the publications that you are targeting. They are often looking for quotes, information and ideas. If you help them, they will come back to you for your input. You may even be able to pitch an idea to them for a feature that they can take to the magazine.

Doing interviews with journalists

Many business people dread doing interviews with the press. Do them well, however, and you will get valuable coverage for your company.

Always be friendly and helpful when a journalist requests an interview. Don't, however, feel pressurized into responding then and there. It's always best to give yourself time to prepare for an interview. You can ask the journalist what questions they have and then call them back when you are ready, deadline permitting.

Make some notes on the key points you want to make and phrases you want to use. You can even ask to respond in writing by email if you are concerned about saying the wrong thing.

Bear in mind that journalists don't have to show you copy before it is printed and they cannot guarantee that your story will be published. If you are helpful and respectful, however, they'll contact you for quotes time after time.

Writing a press release

Your press release has to stand out and give the journalist all the facts. Start with a good heading. Keep it simple and make an impact. If it's good enough the journalist may use it in their publication.

If the journalist is hooked by the headline, they will go on to read the all-important first paragraph. Here, you have to tell the story using simple language and short sentences. If there's an important fact or figure, start with that.

Make sure that your press release answers the five key questions that every good news story must cover: Who? What? Where? When? Why?

Don't waffle. A good press release is fewer than 500 words and no more than two pages long. Typefaces should be fairly large and clear - use generous line spacing. Don't try and cram too much on a page.

Structure is important - the information must flow in a logical way. Use bullet points, short paragraphs and quotes.

Make it clear that this is a press release - mark it 'Press Release' at the top and 'End of Release' before your contact details. Essential company information should be tightly summarized in a final standard paragraph.

Quotes for press releases

Quotes are the lifeblood of an article - make sure they're not bland or cheesy. If you have sold a product to a customer, include favourable testimonials from them too.

Your press release must tell the journalist who to call for additional information. If the reporter can't get hold of the right person when they're writing the story, they will drop it.

Pictures for press releases

The importance of good pictures can't be over-emphasized. Editors are always searching for stunning images to make their page layouts look good and they would rather not pay for stock shots. Look at the publications you're targeting to see what kind of pictures they use. Make the subject matter interesting and try to give the image a twist.

The quality of your images is crucial. Use a freelance photographer or one of your club members who is into photography as a hobby. Make sure each image is the best quality it can be. Publications often receive jpegs that are too small and low quality to be used. Find out what format and size of picture the publication prefers.

Finally, write a simple caption. Include your company name and telephone number on a sticker and attach it to the reverse of any prints you send by post.

Follow up your press release

A follow-up phone call is a good idea, but don't keep hounding the journalist to ask if they have read the release yet. If your press releases are not getting used, it may be because they are not relevant or newsworthy - ask a journalist what they're looking for.

