

how to...

third avenue ltd.
the worx
16-24 underwood st.
london
n1 7jq

tel: 0207 336 7222
www.third-
avenue.co.uk
library@third-
avenue.co

Build a Communications Strategy

Your organisation is planning a major change.

"What we need is a communications strategy," bellows the Chief Executive.

Suddenly, all eyes are on you.

Many people are intimidated by the idea of putting together a communications strategy, but the truth is, most follow the same formula. If you are asked to produce one, resist the urge to turn it into a magnum opus. The general rule is: the bigger the strategy, the better the doorstop. Those implementing it cannot understand anything too big or too complex. The most successful communications campaigns are often never written down at all.

But strategies are necessary sometimes to get everyone moving in the right direction. They help to work out who's doing what and to persuade organisations to spend money on good communication. So if you are going to produce one, keep it simple and follow these ten steps:

1. Audit

Get an overview of current perceptions of your organisation and its communications. This can be anything from a major research project to a quick survey of some key people. However you do it, your strategy should start from what people think now. Remember —perception is reality.

2. Objectives

Does your organisation have a clear idea of its objectives in communicating? You may be able to glean these from vision statements and business plans. However, often the easiest way is to get all the senior players together for a short session to agree what they're trying to achieve.

3. Audiences

You need to decide who the main audiences are and which are the most important. Remember that important doesn't always mean senior. For example, in an internal communications campaign, the most important people might be those with the local power to influence the grapevine.

how to...

Build a Communications Strategy

third avenue ltd.
the worx
16-24 underwood st.
london
n1 7jq

tel: 0207 336 7222
www.third-
avenue.co.uk
library@third-
avenue.co

4. Messages

What are the key messages you need to get across?

You may have to curb the urge of senior staff to develop too many complex messages. Keep them short, simple and accessible to the audiences you want to influence. Once the messages are developed, test them out and then edit, edit, edit until they are right.

5. Channels

What channels are you going to use to communicate? Avoid using the channels that suit the organisation, not the audience. Remember that two-way communication is also important—how are you going to get feedback?

6. Timescale

What are the key milestones and deadlines you need to hit? In a large campaign you may need to plot these in some detail, but keep the big milestones simple so everyone can focus on the priorities.

7. Resources

How much money and how many people have you got? Your activities must be tailored to your resources, or you have to find more by getting support for your plan from the decision makers in your organisation. There is never enough time or money, so concentrate on the high impact / low cost activities if you have to cut back. For example, one creative photo opportunity might get you as much coverage as an expensive PR campaign.

8. Activities

Once you've agreed on what you want to say, whom you want to say it to and how much time and money you have, you can concentrate on the "how". You need to develop a full list of all the relevant communications activities into a working project plan with deadlines and responsibilities. This might include activities like media relations, public relations, marketing, public affairs, events, publications and electronic communication.

9. Evaluation

How will you know whether you have succeeded? It is possible to spend as much time evaluating communications strategies as it takes to actually implement them, so keep it simple. What are the key success factors and performance indicators? And at what point are you going to review your strategy and take it on to the next stage?

how to...

Build a Communications Strategy

10. And finally

Any communication strategy is only as good as the product or idea that it's selling. If the message isn't credible, you might as well use your strategy as a doorstop because you can't fool all of the people all of the time. If you're in this situation, it's back to step one I'm afraid.

Carol Grant is a Communications Consultant and can be contacted at cgrant@netcomuk.co.uk

third avenue ltd.
the worx
16-24 underwood st.
london
n1 7jq

tel: 0207 336 7222
www.third-avenue.co.uk
library@third-avenue.co