



Part III Communications Planning: The What-Messaging

Effective communication is essential in winning new customers or donors, recruiting, and retaining great employees, influencing key audiences, and keeping pace with change. It's too important to approach haphazardly. Don't look at your communications plan as another box to check. Instead, think of it as a useful tool to move you and your organization forward.

Messages are the core of any communications strategy because they connect your enterprise's offerings and work with your target audience's needs and aspirations. Messages facilitate relationships and support efforts to build trust. Your mission is not your message. Mission describes what you do but messages help people understand why what you do matters to them.

Developing messages first involves taking a look at where you are now. Review your website, marketing, direct mail, and other communications to examine the messages you are currently sending. Review your social media, and blogs to see what efforts created the most engagement. As you are undertaking this review, ask:

- Are the messages you have been sending still relevant?
- Do they reflect today's strategies and goals and your current brand and personality?
- Do your messages
 - reaffirm your mission vision and values
 - Express the promise you are making to your audiences
 - Show relevancy, importance, and urgency
 - put a human face on your products, services, and programs
 - Connect with your audience's values, beliefs, or interests
 - Reflect an understanding of audience motivations
 - are culturally relevant and sensitive and
 - are memorable
 - Encourage your audience to ask you to tell them more or to act

To create effective messages, think BRAVE

Brief and Bold

People have short attention spans, so you want concise messages that get to the point quickly. Otherwise, they tune out and move on. Once you have their attention, you need to hold it by being bold, not boring, and speaking to the impact of what you do.

Boring	More Interesting
I am a lawyer.	I keep people out of jail
I am a banker.	I help people maximize their money.
I am in public relations.	I help people find their voice.
I am a real estate agent.	I work with people to find their dream home.
I am an administrative assistant.	I make sure our company runs smoothly.
I am a social worker.	I keep families together.



Relevant

Good messages speak to the issues and challenges on your target’s mind, now. They speak to pain points as well as aspirations. Products and services are a means to address a need or satisfy a want of your audience.

Examples:

- Retirement planners don’t lead with 401K’s and IRAs, they talk about helping clients create financial freedom to live their best life in retirement.
- Effective nonprofit consultants don’t stop at fundraising strategy, they talk about increasing your revenue to fund your mission.
- Cosmetic companies' messages focus on making you feel good and confident about yourself.
- Organizations fighting homelessness message not just about providing shelter but helping people address the issues that made them homeless in the first place.

What problem are you solving? How are you making life better for your audiences?

Accessible

A big mistake that many organizations and companies make is delivering overly complicated and complex messages. If it’s too hard to understand your organization, people will go elsewhere. Avoid jargon like “We find synergies to leverage your assets to give you more bandwidth to move the needle so you can scale.” Better messaging might be we partner with you to find and use resources so that you have the capacity to make a bigger impact and grow.

Valuable

Good messages convey a benefit—relieving pain or frustration or fulfilling a dream, a yearning, or a need. The benefit can be eliminating a negative or enhancing a positive. Value comes in many forms. It can be monetary –growing revenue and profits or it can be more intangible like building trust and making you feel safe.

Use value words:

Positives	Negatives
Increase	Eliminate
Improve	Reduce
Boost	Minimize
Accelerate	Protect
Save	Safeguard
Generate	Remove

Emotional

People do business with support causes and invest in companies and organizations that make them feel good. We know from behavioral economics that people make buying decisions based on emotion and then use their brains to justify their decision. The best messages strike an emotional chord, offering a promise of something better. A hospital, for example, isn’t a diagnostic, treatment, and surgical place; it is a place that helps you get well and stay healthy. Disney World isn’t an amusement park but rather a place where you can “stay in the magic and play.”

To infuse more emotion into your messaging,

- Use the word “you” when talking to your audience. Example: We help you live a healthier life is a lot more engaging than, we help our patients...



- Use stories wisely. Share an anecdote about how you have helped your audience. Make sure your stories get to the point quickly and avoid unnecessary details.
- Use concrete and colorful language that paints pictures with words and allows people to imagine how things are better, stronger, and less challenging because of your product, service, or program.
- Use value words