

## 12 Ways to Ruin Your Communication Strategy

.....

Communication professionals strive to deliver measurable business results. However, results that demonstrate the value of communication aren't that easy to come by. It's hard work to gather the information you need to inform your communication strategy. Seriously, without the brow-sweating, mind-boggling, deep dive into analysis you won't have a clue where you're headed. To deliver the kind of results that make a difference and put you and strategic communication on the map as a serious business contender, here are a few pitfalls to avoid.

### 1. Don't align your work with the needs of the business.

For a sure-fire way to stumble, skip lightly over the business needs. Understanding the business and leveraging your communication acumen to develop a strategic approach isn't just the starting point. It's essential.

### 2. Don't use research as an input to inform your work.

Forget the research and go with your gut feeling. Without research to inform strategic direction, it's like shooting an arrow in the dark and hoping to hit the bull's eye. It's not going to happen. Even if you don't have a budget for original research, there are other options available. Chances are data already exists in-house. Failing that, conduct secondary online research and benchmark against best practices in the profession.

### 3. Don't collaborate with stakeholders or subject matter experts.

Go ahead. Ignore stakeholders. Forget consulting with subject matter experts. Do this and your best laid plans will likely fail. People support what they help to create. A lone wolf compromises results by not taking the time to hear what stakeholders and subject matter experts have to say. Incorporate their feedback and intelligence into your strategy. Guaranteed, it will be stronger. Besides, the last thing you want to risk is backlash.

### 4. Don't see the business through the eyes of your audience.

What does the audience have to do with the strategy or its delivery? After all, you're focused on the business, not the audience so why bother? Failure to see the business through the eyes of your audience is failure. See what they see. Understand why they think the way they do. Use that knowledge to inform your strategy and align the business need with the audience analysis.

### 5. Don't segment your audiences.

If you're a proponent of one-size-fits-all, rethink your position. There is no such thing as the general public or the employee audience. It's more complex. People are as different from one another in their understanding and perceptions as apples are to oranges. Messages that are clear and relevant to one audience segment can miss the mark completely with another. Beyond listing audience segments, make sure you understand who they are, what they think and care about, and how to motivate them.

### 6. Don't define key messages.

Key messages? What are they, anyway? Creating key messages is not a willy-nilly exercise. You need consistency for all audiences across all channels. You need key messages. They are the backbone of alignment between business and audience needs, and they bridge the implementation of your tactical plan. Key messages make your work strategic. Don't wing it. Make them clear, concise and meaningful to the audience.

### 7. Don't set meaningful, measurable objectives.

Forego this step and lose the ability to demonstrate the power of strategic communication to deliver results. Objectives must be aligned with business needs, and they must be measurable as outputs or outcomes. As a heads up, tactics such as writing or distributing a publication are not objectives. They're what you do to implement your plan. Objectives define what success will look like.

They are:

- > Measurable in quantity, time, cost, percentages, quality or some other criteria.
- > Realistic, meaningful and believable.
- > Aligned with the needs of the business.
- > Stated from a communication perspective.
- > Can be a combination of output-based statements (volume, increases), and outcome-based measures (attitudes, opinions, behaviours, and business results).

## 8. Don't use communication channels that are aligned with audience preferences.

What's the point of communicating if the audience never receives the message? You got it. Nothing. Nada. Zero. There is no point. Making sure that you reach the audience is critical, because if you don't reach the audience, everything else is academic. There goes your opportunity to influence understanding, opinion and behaviour. Research their preferred channels (not yours or the senior executives) and connect audience preferences with tactics, vehicles, media and channels.

## 9. Don't bother with creativity.

"I love reading corporate-speak. I love those complex, high-level words that fill space and don't mean much," said no one, ever. It's important to be creative and deliver clear, relevant messages. It's important to connect with the audience on an emotional level. If you don't your work will become one of the 500 plus daily messages that goes in one ear and out the other. Whether you're communicating with an internal or an external audience, the point is to make your message memorable. So, creativity is not only

clever, it is part of the strategic approach. Every time you're tempted to skip this step, remember people rarely remember what you say, but they always remember how you made them feel.

## 10. Don't have a solid, well-timed, deliverable implementation plan.

Go ahead and fly by the seat of your pants. In the words of Benjamin Franklin, "If you don't have a plan, you're planning to fail." A well thought out tactical implementation plan is just as important as setting measurable objectives. This is all about project management, a core competency for communication professionals. Manage your budget, timing and human resources.

## 11. Don't plan for change or challenges.

Maybe there'll be no side trips. Then again, it doesn't hurt to identify and manage potential risks. A tight deadline, change in direction, scope creep in the project, budget cut backs, stubborn decision makers and staff turnover can each take a toll on your practically perfect plan. If you've done your homework, change is much easier to meet head on with a back-up plan.

## 12. Don't measure results.

After all that research, planning, development and implementation, are you really going to ignore the most important part? We didn't think so, because this where the rubber meets the road! So, go ahead. Measure your progress against the objectives. Demonstrate that strategic communication is a vital business process. When you show the value of your work, senior executives sit up and take notice, and that's a recipe for success.

For more tips, download our infographic [here](#).



### Claire Watson MC, ABC, APR

Vice-president, Strategic Communication Management

.....

Claire Watson consults to global, provincial and national companies on their communication needs. Her expertise encompasses research and measurement, internal and change communication, branding, marketing, public and community relations, advocacy and corporate social responsibility. She has taught extension classes for the University of Regina and developed unique training courses for the Centre for Strategic Communication Excellence. She holds 33 international and 150+ national and provincial Awards of Excellence. In addition, she has received a Lifetime Achievement Award from IABC Regina, Master Communicator designation from IABC Canada and the IABC Chairman's Award for leadership in the profession.