

Effective Communications

A key element for success and sustainability

In difficult times when there is less money available, organisations of all sizes need to make sure they are doing all they can to differentiate themselves from the crowd and put themselves on the map. Effective communications with your target audiences is vital. Are you sending the right messages about your organisation to the right people in the right way at the right time?

There are lots of free resources, training courses and low cost solutions to help you promote and market the work you do. As well as engaging with current and future service users or clients, you should be talking to funding bodies, purchasers, opinion leaders and the media about your work.

Here are **5 top tips** to help you think about your communication activities;

1/ Do you have a marketing communications plan? If not, draft one **now!**

Plan, Action, Evaluate, Review your communication activities.

Consistent, structured communications which have a 'thought out' rationale and measurable objectives will be more effective than an ad hoc approach. See overleaf for an outline plan.

2/ Are you telling people outside your organisation positive stories about the work you do? If not, start **today!**

Keep an ongoing file of positive comments, thank you letters received and details of your successes and achievements for use in promotional materials & PR.

3/ Are your staff ambassadors for your organisation? If not, get them **talking!**

Word of mouth and enthusiasm are powerful tools! Encourage all staff to network and make the most of each opportunity to speak about your organisation. Make sure that all staff are familiar and comfortable with 'key messages' about what you do so that external communications are consistent and coherent.

4/ Are you using all available communication channels? If not, **share ideas with colleagues!**

Be creative – letting your target audiences know what you do doesn't have to cost a lot of money. Think about all communication options that may be available. *e.g. email bulletins or newsletters, website pages, press releases, editorial, the letters pages, social networking sites, gathering mobile numbers for text message advertising, putting marketing messages on your email signatures, flyers, leaflets, posters, organising visits or tours for decision makers or potential clients, 'live' marketing - stalls at community events or in shopping centres, organising or offering prizes for competitions, networking and lots more.*

5/ Are you making use of partnerships, free training and resources? If not, get **researching!**

Find out about the many resources available for the third sector to help support and develop your organisation. If you don't have your own website, could you request a page on a partner's site? If you are organising an event, there are many free events listings for the Birmingham area. Do your staff need training? There are often free training events organised by capacity building organisations plus Train To Gain and Learndirect courses. Check online for useful resources too. Here are some sites to get you started;

www.bvsc.org Birmingham Voluntary Services Council is the key voluntary sector support organisation for Birmingham.

www.i-se.co.uk ISE is a learning social enterprise that provides support and capacity building activities for the third sector.

www.changeupbirmingham.org Broad spectrum of organisations providing support to other VCOs.

www.bssec.org.uk Birmingham & Solihull Social Economy Consortium - useful resources, factsheets and tools.

www.entapeople.com Enta's website with full details of services and courses available.

Marketing Communications Plan – Outline Plan

1/ Organisational Background

Give a brief summary of background of organisation / an overview of where the organisation is at. Note any specific factors to be taken in consideration.

2/ Situation Analysis

*Think in more detail about the **strengths** and **weaknesses** of your organisation, the **opportunities** it has and the **threats** it faces. This is called a SWOT analysis and helps give a realistic evaluation of the organisation.*

3/ Objectives

Bullet point the specific outcomes and targets you wish to achieve.

4/ Target Audience

Your target audience may be diverse and need detailed segmentation. Specify the target audiences you wish to reach. (NB Targeting does not mean excluding everyone else but rather knowing one group better).

5/ Key Messages

Detail the key messages you want to communicate to your target audiences.

6/ Marketing Strategy

'Big Picture' view, the 'what and why'. Give an overview of the approaches you will take i.e. how you will reach your audience, and why you have chosen each particular approach, ie your rationale.

7/ Marketing Tactics

Your action plan and how you will evaluate the success and impact of your marketing communication activities.

Action	Who is responsible	By when	Budget	Evaluation
<i>Detail concrete actions that will happen - what / how / by which channel etc</i>	<i>Nominate who is to action and be responsible.</i>	<i>Timescales and dates of actions</i>	<i>Detail any cost implications</i>	<i>Include metrics and measurements to analyse the impact of the tactics.</i>