

How to write a communications strategy

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What do we mean by ‘strategy’?

First, a definition

The word ‘strategy’ comes from the Greek *stratēgia* meaning science and art of military command. It is a high level plan to achieve one or more goals under conditions of uncertainty.

- A good strategy provides a clear roadmap, consisting of a set of guiding principles or rules, that defines the actions people in the business should take (and not take) and the things they should prioritize (and not prioritize) to achieve the businesses desired goals.
- A strategy is not a mission, which is what the organisation’s leaders want it to accomplish; missions are elaborated into specific goals and performance metrics.
- A strategy is not a vision, which is an inspiring portrait of what it will look and feel like to pursue and achieve the organisation’s mission and goals.



Demystifying Strategy: The What, Who, How, and Why, Michael D. Watkins. <https://hbr.org/2007/09/demystifying-strategy-the-what/>

What's makes a great communications strategy?

Your pre-flight checklist

Before you start, you should be able to answer yes to the following...*

- I know why I'm writing this strategy (and so does my boss)
- I know my audience(s) and have up-to-date research to corroborate this insight
- I know my organisation's business priorities and goals
- I understand my organisation's current and desired culture and values
- I know my stakeholders – both their needs and expectations
- I know what has worked well in the past, what hasn't and why
- I have the support and confidence to be bold and ambitious
- I have a good sense of what's best practice in my industry and further afield
- I know my budget
- I'm clear about the resources, tools and channels at my disposal
- I know key dates in my organisation's calendar

* If you can't answer yes to these questions, STOP! You have some preparation still to do.



Before you put pen to paper...

A word about tone, style and brevity

It might sound obvious but... your communication strategy should showcase best practice.

- **Make it differentiating** – it should clearly reflect your organisation's unique characteristics
- **Bring it to life** – does it have to be another PowerPoint?
- **Give readers a handy summary** – the shorter the better
- **Share it widely** – your strategy should be available for all to see on walls and screens, not locked away on a shared drive

Visualise your strategy



The **Top 10** elements of your strategy

1. Purpose

An explanation of why the communications strategy exists.

What purpose does it fulfil? What value does it add to your organisation?

Be as tangible and concrete as possible.

pur • pose

Noun

The reason for which something is done or created or for which something exists

2. The ambition of communications

Set out the ultimate goal of your communications activity – ideally make it SMART. To help, think about the context of your organisation; what does success look like for communications? Be brave – an ambition should be bold and stretching. Be as tangible and concrete as possible.



3. Strategic objectives

Root the strategy in the context of your business and competitive marketplace. Set this out succinctly. Identify the business priorities the communications strategy is designed to support. This shows how communications will become a vital tool to help achieve organisational success.



4. Audience analysis

Get under the skin of your target audience(s). Demographic information is good, but insight into their attitudes, opinions, preferences and expectations is even better. Are some audiences priority? If you have sub groups, how do they interact and overlap? Think about the role of these groups. Are some partners in the communication process?



5. Communication themes

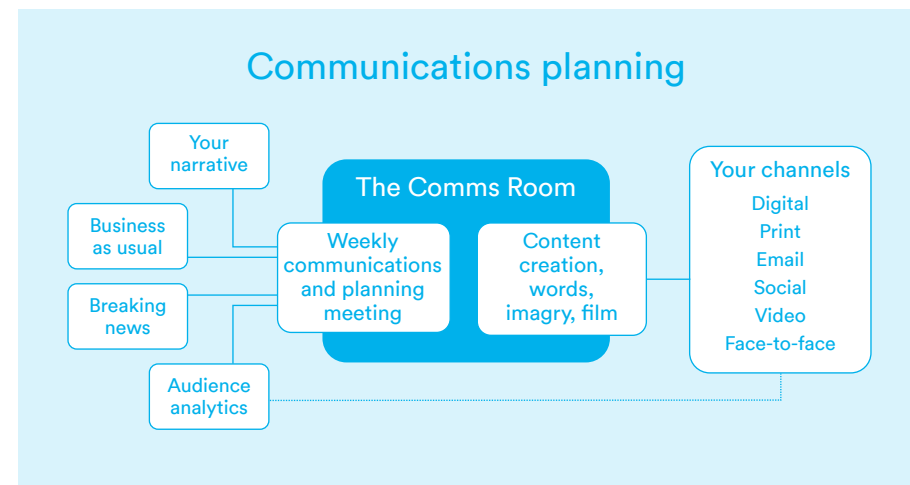
Messages come and go but themes stay constant. The themes you identify will become the yardstick by which you and others will judge whether a future communications initiative has strategic value. Define your themes with care. Be as specific as possible.



6. Resources, roles and processes

Who will do what and when? Don't dodge any skills or resource gaps. Set out a clear process for the creation, approval, dissemination and evaluation of content.

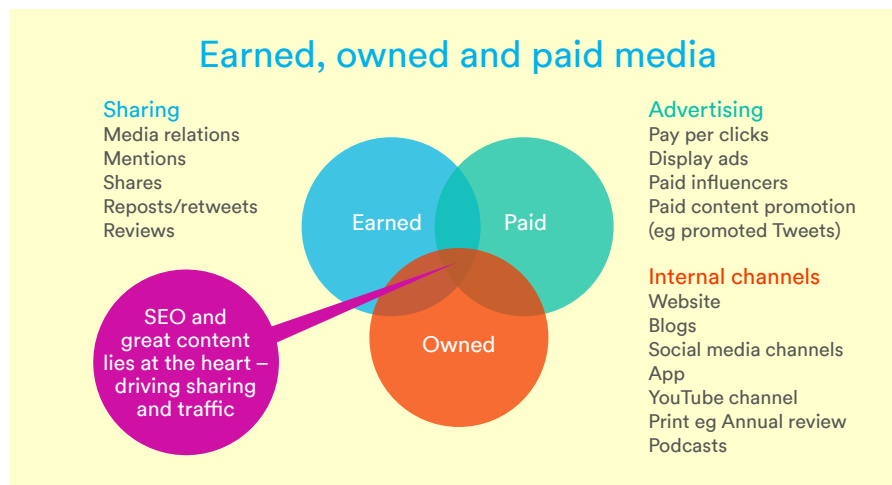
A diagram might help. Here's one showing a typical content creation process.



The Top 10 elements of your strategy

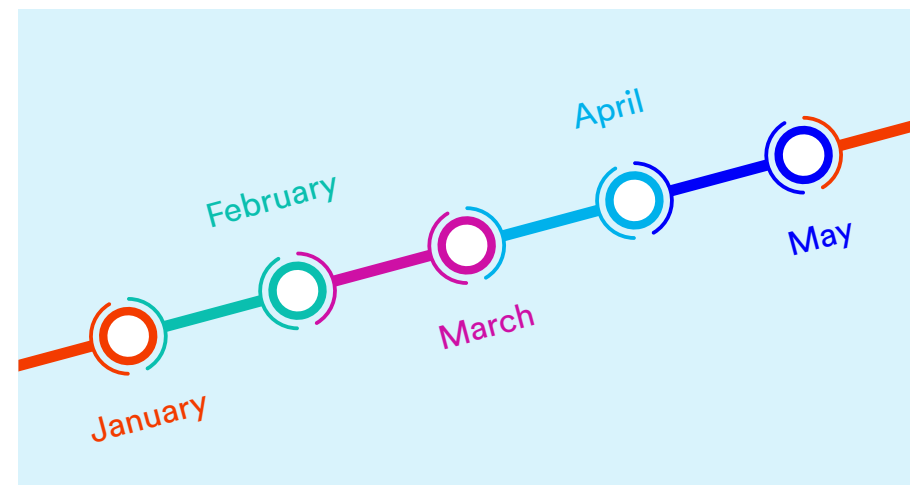
7. Activities and channels, plus quick wins

Set out what's going to happen – not every communications activity, but those intended to make the biggest impact. Highlight quick wins to build a sense of momentum. Think broadly across all media – earned, owned and paid.



8. Timeline

This is an activity schedule for six to 12 months. Include key moments in your organisation's annual plan. Remember to include dates for review and evaluation.



9. Measurement review

We think of communications as having outputs – the stuff people read, watch and hear – and outcomes – how they think, feel and behave as a result.

Measuring the first is relatively easy because it can be seen and quantified. Measuring the second requires investigation. Most likely, some kind of qualitative research. Identify the mechanisms for capturing this data.



10. Strategic review


Set out how you plan to review the success of your communications strategy. You may want to conduct a communications Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis 12 months after implementation. Your measurement activities (from step 9) will inform this process.






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