

# A guide to communications FOR community and voluntary organisations

# COMMUNICATIONS AND MARKETING STRATEGY

In order to reach new users and to make others aware of all the good work that you are doing, it is worth spending some time thinking about your approach to marketing and communications and how you want to be seen by others.

Publicity and marketing **doesn't** have to be expensive and glossy – it is simply the ways in which you get your message heard and your name known which is important. Here are some things you might want to consider:

**Why?** A simple communications or marketing strategy can help to raise awareness of what you do, build your reputation and trust (with service users, partners or funders), reach out to new communities and people, and increase familiarity of your services.

The following acts as a guide of what to include in your marketing and communications strategy:

**Your target audience** – Who are you trying to reach and why? Is there something that brings this audience together? You might have a primary audience (those that you focus on most directly) and then other beneficiaries, groups or partners that you might work with (those that are closely linked with your service or that you might affect indirectly). For instance, your service might focus on people with mental health issues as your primary audience but also work with GPs or hospitals as part of your service.

**The 'product or offer'** – What are you marketing? In order to 'sell' your service, you need to be clear about what it is you are offering as an organisation and then to be able to communicate what this is to others in a simple, clear way. What's more, you need to make sure that everyone within your group or organisation is giving the same message otherwise it can create confusion and mixed messages. What are the benefits and values of your service and what can it do for your target audience?

**Your strapline and elevator pitch** – If you found yourself in an elevator with an important funder and had one minute to promote your organisation and explain what you do, what would you say? Does your organisation have a strapline, ie a simple one-line sentence to explain what you do, which you can repeat universally again and again in order to get the message across to who-ever crosses your path?

A clear message – Think about all the different ways that the public might find their way to your organisation. Is there a consistent message through your marketing materials and do you have someone to overlook the process so that each of these channels work with each other, rather than on their own? The clearer you are about who you are and what you do, the easier it will be to communicate that message. If you don't know why anyone would want to volunteer for you, it will be difficult for anyone to see the value and see why they would want to get involved as well.

Vision and mission – Is your vision and mission easy to follow and does it clearly describe everything that you are trying to achieve in a simple way? Even if it makes sense to you, does it make sense to the average Joe Bloggs on the street?

Your logo – Your logo should be a visual representation of your organisation – something that people will see and instantly recognise. Think about the style and what you want from it. If your organisation's name is made up of an acronym, you may want to focus on the name itself and include a description of the acronym in full. If your organisation focuses on a particular theme, such as children or bees, you may want to include a simple image of that theme. Your logo will help to build your brand recognition, reputation and the trust that others have in you as an organisation, so try to avoid any drastic or constant 're-branding exercises'. It is more important to create something that you have thought about and are happy with as an organisation to begin with, and to use other ways to adapt and change with the times. Kellogg's and Cadbury's for instance, have kept the same logo for decades, because it is what people recognise.

Marketing materials – Marketing materials are a good way to spread the word about what you do and to reach new audiences. They should be developed as a set of materials that work together, rather than having different designs for each poster, leaflet and newsletter. The reason for this is so that people can recognise your brand and your name and to avoid confusion.

Think carefully about what you are producing and why – do you need to print out a different leaflet for each service, or can you design one generic leaflet to give a flavour of all your work? Ensure that your leaflets or posters have your address, phone and fax numbers, email and website addresses and if possible a map of how to find your premises. Make it as easy as possible for users to contact you. Think about places in your community to display posters, distribute newsletters etc. Publicity material should be targeted for your specific audience. In your strategy, you may want to use this section as a guide or to explain what your particular approach is to producing marketing materials and list what you will produce.

Your brand – How have you used your logo and marketing materials to build your brand? Have you created a consistent message and is your logo used in the same way on all your publicity? Remember that everything you do will aid and build your reputation if it is done well and if others are clear about what you do and how you do it.

Your services – You can build your reputation through your service. A reliable, professional and efficient service can go a long way and build trust in others. If you have planned and promised a parent and toddler group every Wednesday at 11am, make sure you deliver. It is better to under-promise and over-deliver, than to promise many things and then let people down, for whatever reason. Your service includes everything from answering the telephone to delivering an outcome, so be specific about answering the telephone between certain hours, answering letters within a given number of days, checking and replying to emails on a regular basis, etc. All this will go a long way to giving your organisation a reliable image.

Putting it into practice – The final thing you might want to think about is some general principles and aims on how to use your communications and marketing in the right way. In other words, how can you use your publicity materials, logo and communications to present the image that you want? Here is where you could have some specific guidelines on what to do and what not to do. For instance, do you need to put your logo and any funder on all letters, presentations and publicity? Do you have a set of templates that can be used? Are you using simple language and minimising the use of jargon and acronyms wherever possible in order to increase understanding? Is the name of your organisation being used consistently (particularly if you have a long name or an acronym)?

# MARKETING TIPS FOR NEWSLETTERS AND PUBLICITY

Marketing can be a daunting prospect. How do you make your articles and publicity materials stand out amongst the crowd? How do you make your information useful and relevant in an era of information overload? Follow our top tips to make your information work for you!

## Step 1: Basics and structure

Ask yourself what you are trying to achieve, who you are trying to communicate with and what you want as the end result or key message? Then structure your articles or publicity materials accordingly. For instance, 'this is a fundraising article to raise awareness of XXX for local voluntary groups, it's easier than you think'.

Write a brief introduction to explain the context to someone completely new to your work, before going into the main story or content (30-40 words).

Keep sentences and paragraphs short (16-30 words per sentence) and gear your message towards an action. If you want your reader to do something for instance, you could begin it with 'is volunteering right for you?' and end your article with 'come along to our event to find out'.

Add a web link or contact point for further information and reassert the purpose of your article.

Double check any facts, in particular dates, times, locations and contact details.

## Step 2: Headlines

Try and keep them snappy and short. Be imaginative. You could use puns, quotes, alliteration, or intrigue. The following are some examples:

Pun – **'IN FULL BLOOM'** (story for flower show)

Direct summary – **'BRITAIN'S BEST INTERACTIVE WEB SITES'**

Quote – 'It **WAS THE BEST TRAINING I'VE EVER HAD'**

Intrigue – 'She would never have known...'

Question – **'DO YOU NEED VOLUNTEERS?'**

Alliteration – **'IMMEDIATE IMPACT ON OUR CHILDREN'**

## 7 eye-catching words... ..guaranteed to grab people's attention:

1. You (a direct notion to say, we are speaking to you)
2. John (a first name, this story affects normal people and applies to you)
3. Now (to be read immediately, before it is too late)
4. FREE (in capital letters, this is used as a real eye grabber to draw people in)
5. Proof (use evidence to justify what you are saying)
6. Important (this is the most important thing that you do today)
7. Easy (tell people how easy it is to get involved)

### Step 3: Main body

- Write for the skim reader – use straplines, subheadings, captions, and quotes to make it as easy as possible for the reader to digest.
- Make it relevant to the reader by using local, modern examples which they are interested in, e.g. 'Funding in Salford has doubled'.
- Know your audience – their needs, desires and motivations, and match your needs with their own e.g. 'We've got access to the funding that you need'.
- Include relevant facts and stats for instant impact – e.g. '82% of our members have signed up'.
- Make it 'real' or as 'human' as possible, tell it like a story, add quotes, get the reader to see themselves in your article. Remember to build your message into the story – e.g. 'Karen was worried about the tendering and commissioning process...'
- Make a direct appeal – use questions, appeal and engage people by speaking to them directly.

## **8 ways to bring your article into the here and now... don't use them all at once!**

1. Change – Things are moving to the next step
2. Action – Something needs to happen, we need to act now
3. Shock – Grab attention by telling them something shocking!
4. Prominence – Use a high profile celebrity or a subject which is topical in the public mind
5. Immediacy – This is happening now, what will you do about it?
6. Conflict – Challenge the reader, tell them something that they didn't expect that goes against their assumptions. Or give them an uncomfortable truth to get their attention.
7. Emotion – Arouse people's feelings
8. Oddity – Mention something out of the ordinary

### Step 4: Language

- Be clear and concise – write in plain English, avoid jargon (if it is unavoidable include a definition of technical words).
- If you use acronyms and abbreviations they should be written in full the first time you introduce them with the acronym in brackets, unless it is a name of an organisation (e.g. WVA) in which the reverse may be done depending on what the organisation is recognised as.
- Avoid using capital letters, unless it is a proper noun. Names of people (David), weekdays or months (Wednesday, January), places (Big Ben, France), titles (Mr, Mrs), names of organisations (Diocese of Manchester), are all proper nouns. Ideas, concepts or groups of things are not proper nouns, so should not be capitalised (such as local authority, voluntary sector, outcomes, consortium).
- Use active, not passive language, e.g. 'We delivered a unique opportunity to project manage' as opposed to 'an opportunity to project manage was delivered'.

# TIPS FOR PRESS RELEASES

## Introduction

Press releases are a great way to get your story out to the local or national press. If you are doing something that's a bit different, or has a good story behind it, then you'll get yourself a lot of free publicity. Don't be scared of working with journalists, but always remember their job is to find a story and anything you say may be used! Try to work with the press and think about what they need.

## How do I go about it?

**Point of contact** – Choose the best person for journalists to contact and make sure that this person is able to take calls and answer any questions about your story. Everyone in your group or organisation should be clear about who is responsible for dealing with the press in order to avoid any mixed messages.

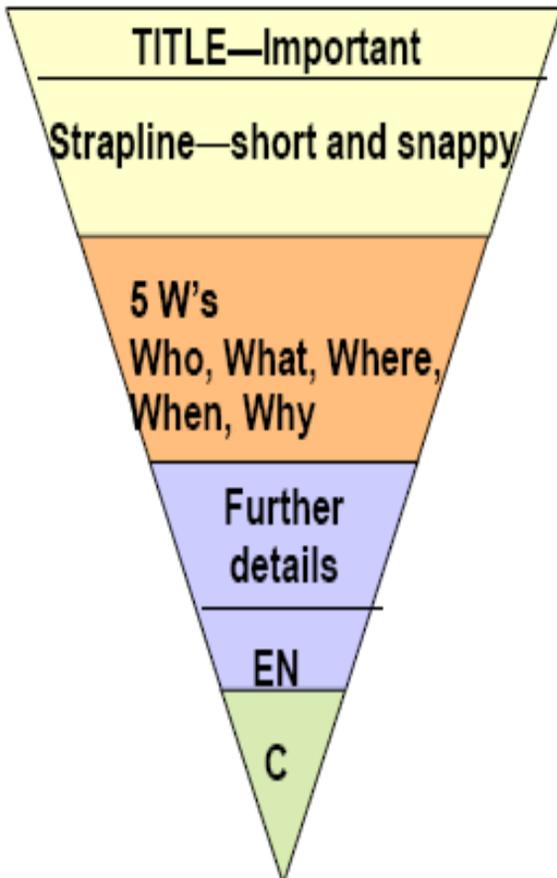
**Know your subject** – Your reputation is very important and this is an opportunity for people to see the good work that you are doing. Make sure you know what you are talking about and that you have double-checked any facts and details of forthcoming events before passing them on. If you have focused on a human story or included any quotes or personal details, make sure you know the context of that story or quote. Why did they need your help? Why did they say what they did? Where did they come from? Are they well known in your local area? You need to make sure that you have the inside story and are equipped to answer any questions or challenges about your press release.

**Who are you targeting?** – Who is your press release trying to reach? Which local journalists and newspapers are you focusing on and why? Make sure you have done your research so that you are reaching the right people and that you are prepared for any outcomes. Make sure you target specific journalists and preferably send it to a named person.

**Timing and format** – Is your press release timely and relevant? Is it the latest news? What is it about your story that needs to be circulated now? Bear in mind that journalists have their own deadlines and it may take time for press releases to be put together and circulated. Try to plan and build up relationships where possible, so that you know when your information needs to appear and you can work within existing structures. Remember that an email is often much faster to pass on than a letter. Use the email subject box and try and make it catchy and readable. If the press release is for a newsletter or paper, try and find out the deadlines of the publication you are targeting to avoid missing the circulation date.

## Eight top tips to what makes a good story:

1. Start with a bang and aim to make an impact
2. Use simple, snappy language that is easy for everyone to understand
3. Keep It Short and Simple (or 'KISS'!) – a press release only needs to be the length of one sheet of A4
4. Personalise your story – think about the human interest and use characters to express the reality of your story. You could also try personalising any facts and include named quotes in your press release
5. Pictures – A good picture is worth a thousand words. Always try and think about a photo to illustrate your story. Be creative and make it catchy
6. A hook – You will need something that will draw people's attention. What makes your story special or newsworthy? Do you have a local angle on a national story; for instance, are you reaching a significant milestone (such as the 100th volunteer or an anniversary)?
7. Try and work with three main points that you want people to remember – no more
8. Action – What do you want out of the story? Do you want people to sign up to something, attend an event, or visit your website? Always remember to put your contact details and website at the end for more information



The upside down triangle is a useful tool for press releases. The width of the triangle represents the importance. If the first two boxes catch a journalist's attention, then you should be fine. The title is important, if you can write a short provocative title that tells some of the story, that's great.

EN is the **editor's** note (such as a link to a website for further information, photos, area available and a pack).

C is contact details (don't ever forget these – and give two contacts preferably in case the journalist can't get hold of your main contact).

## SOCIAL MEDIA

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### Why social media?

Social media is mostly free to use and you don't need to have many technical skills to use it. Charities and voluntary groups are increasingly using social media to build online communities or networks, keep in touch with members and let people know about what they're up to and what services are available.

### Things to consider

Social media becomes more useful if you have news and content to share with people and if you are able to interact and communicate with them on a regular basis (answering any questions that people may ask).

Information shared via social media is accessible by anyone with an internet connection. Remember that anyone updating your social media content is publicly representing your organisation.

Think about what content is appropriate to share and the tone of voice you want

your staff and volunteers to adopt in social media communications. Especially, considering that many people consider social media to be a more informal and immediate form of communication.

Unlike a newsletter which is static, or a website which may only need to be updated once or twice a month, social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter can very rapidly look out of date and neglected if they are not updated on a regular basis. A rough rule of thumb is to add new content to your Facebook page at least once a week; Twitter should be updated several times a week – this can be a mixture of sharing resources other people have made, links to your own news, blogs or events, or retweeting other people's comments and joining in conversations.

Applications such as Hootsuite and Tweetdeck can help you keep track of your updates on Facebook and Twitter and allow you to schedule your postings in advance. Meaning you select your time to update your social media presence rather than it being a constant ongoing activity.

Social media followers normally expect a quick response to their questions and comments (usually within 24 hours). Hootsuite and Tweetdeck can alert you when someone posts on your Facebook wall or sends you a Twitter message.

Social media can take up a lot of time (especially when you are new to the technologies); focus your energies on using one or two tools initially that best fit your organisation and who you want to interact with.

Be prepared to measure the difference your social media activity makes to your organisation. Are you getting more members? Are more people turning up to your events? Are people signing up to your newsletter? Are people clicking on your links?

If you include links to your own site, use Google Analytics to measure the response to your tweets and Facebook posts. What type of posts get the best response, what time of day are you making those posts? How great a proportion of your web traffic is coming from social media sources?

Answers to these questions can lead you to focus your social media activities more effectively.

Original content can help highlight the work that you do – and allowing other people to share and talk about your work means their followers and friends also find out about your organisation.

## Create your own content

With most new mobile phones having the ability to capture audio and video have you considered creating your own content for your website?

- Capture interviews with volunteers to show the scope of your work
- Record discussions about issues affecting people you work with
- Build mini case studies of your work to show funders and also share with your followers on platforms like Facebook and Twitter

Stay within legal frameworks and be aware of copyright, libel and data protection laws.

## Your guide to social media...

**Social networks** – Social networks are a way of using your computer to talk to other people and develop networks on specific topics and interests. Social networks enable you to develop online groups that other people can be members of. Examples of social networks include Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn.

**Blogs** – A blog is a log or an online journal that allows you to write about things that concern your group or perhaps document your progress to impress funders. A blog can act like a normal website, because you can add stories, upload photos, allow people to leave comments, embed videos from YouTube, add Twitter posts and Flickr photos and post links to other websites. People can subscribe to your blog for updates and you can subscribe to other blogs. Blogs can be hosted on your own website, and give your users a chance to interact with your staff via the comments facility. Although many community groups or smaller charities use a standalone blogging site to have an online presence, due to their ease of use and low cost.

**Photo sharing** – Photo hosting websites such as Flickr and Instagram allow you to upload an image so that people can view it (though you have no control over the advertising which might appear on the same page as your photos). Photo sharing websites tend to provide a dedicated space for you to display your photos in different ways, such as a slideshow. However, make sure you read the terms of use on photo-sharing websites, because some websites might consider your photo to be their property if you upload it. Websites such as Flickr allow you to say whether other people can use your images or not. Remember to ensure that you have permission to use the photographs that you share.

**Video sharing** – You can upload videos, perhaps of an event or activity involving your group, to websites such as YouTube, where other people can view and comment on your videos. You can 'embed' your uploaded videos into your website, blog or on Facebook, by copying and pasting the codes for your videos from websites such as YouTube, enabling you to keep your media in one place for people to view. Bear in mind that some video sharing websites show related videos on the same page as yours. YouTube also provides tools for you to add subtitles to your videos. Remember to ensure that you have permission to share the video from those in it.

Podcasts – A podcast is an audio recording of news, events, discussions, interviews or music that you can create for others to download to their computer, iPod or mp3 player. Or they could simply listen to it through your website. It also works as an image, known as ‘vodcasts’ (video files). You can also subscribe to updates from other podcasts which are out there, without having to create your own. You can download free tools such as Audacity to compile and edit a Podcast (like a mini radio show). There are a number of ‘podcast directories’, such as iTunes, Spotify, or Blubrry where you can find podcasts to listen to, subscribe to feeds, or access software to create your own.

RSS Feeds (really simple syndication) – News can be automatically fed onto your website by you or from partners or other organisations that your users might be interested in. You can subscribe to RSS feeds through an organisation’s website, particularly for their news and events. Google sites also allow people to subscribe to your news, which is fed onto a browser page like iGoogle or Google Reader.

## Most popular social media websites

Twitter – A social networking and ‘microblogging’ service that allows you to send short text messages 140 characters in length, called ‘tweets’, to your friends, or ‘followers’. Twitter is ideal for tweeting about an event, telling people your news or linking to your website and to photos. It also allows you to ‘follow’ others, which is good for finding out and sharing news, updates and opportunities from similar organisations, funders and stakeholders. Hashtags are used to categorise conversations. Other people on Twitter may ‘re-tweet’ your tweet so other people can also view it.

Facebook – Facebook allows you to create a page for your organisation which contains ‘wall’ space for posting messages, lets you upload photos and gives you the opportunity to advertise events and invite attendees. You can add contact information and details of where your group meets and add information to encourage members to join or volunteer. You can then invite people to ‘like’ your page; they will then receive notifications of posts and updates you make. Once your page has over 30 ‘likes’ Facebook gives you access to ‘insight’ tools that let you see how users interact with your page. As an individual you can also join other groups and connect with people who may have important updates about networking events, funding and services.

LinkedIn – LinkedIn is a business-oriented social networking service. The design of the website is similar to Facebook. You can create a personal page about yourself that works similarly to an online CV and a page for your organisation or business.

# Online Event Organisation

**Eventbrite** – Eventbrite is an online tool to help anyone to plan or organise events. You can use it to create a customised event page with its own URL link and your logo, send invites and messages to existing mailing lists or attendees, collect money and monitor attendees and sales. You can use it to create your own attendance list and choose how much you charge for different bands. This tool is particularly useful if you are a charity or community group offering a free event, because there is no cost and you can significantly reduce the amount of time you spend on administering the event.

**Doodle** – Doodle is a simple-to-use tool to help schedule meetings and other appointments. You register for free and then create a meeting by filling in some basic details and potential dates of when you would like to hold it. Doodle then generates a web link that you can send out. Attendees can fill in their availability without having to worry about getting bombarded by follow-up emails from other people. You then receive an automatic email as people complete your doodle and you can choose a date based on the results and number of people available.

## GLOSSARY

**Brand** – A name, term, design, symbol or any other feature that identifies your goods or services as distinct from others

**Communications strategy** – A document that outlines your organisations long-term approach to communications and how you will market your services or products

**Elevator pitch** – Your one-minute ‘sell’ to promote your organisation and describe what you do in a clear and catchy way

**Marketing materials** – Leaflets, postcards, posters or banners – things that publicise what you are doing

**Strapline** – A one-line sentence to explain what you do in a clear and concise way

**Target audience** – the people or groups that you are primarily aiming to help

**Vision and mission** – What your aspirations are as a charity and why you exist

**Social media** – the term used to describe social interaction through the internet including audio, video, images and text media such as podcasts, social networking and content-sharing.

**Twitter** – A social networking and ‘microblogging’ service that allows you answer the question, ‘What are you doing?’ by sending short text messages 140 characters in length, called ‘tweets’, to your friends, or “followers.”

**Blog** – A blog (a blend of the term web log) is an online journal or blog.

**Podcasts** – a digital audio file made available for download on the internet.

**RSS Feed (Really Simple Syndication)** – An automatic news feed



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