



NAVIGATING THE NOISE

5 STEPS TO AUDIT YOUR EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

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IMPROVE YOUR BRAND MESSAGING

companies' communication with customers, investors and the media often grows organically. They often hire their first marketing or PR person who starts a social media channel, writes press releases, and tinkers with website content. That person gradually assembles a team that builds on what they've established.

Alternatively, many large firms have marketing, public relations, website and/or social media teams working independently, using different messaging and visuals. This becomes even more complex in organizations with offices in multiple locations or subsidiary structures.

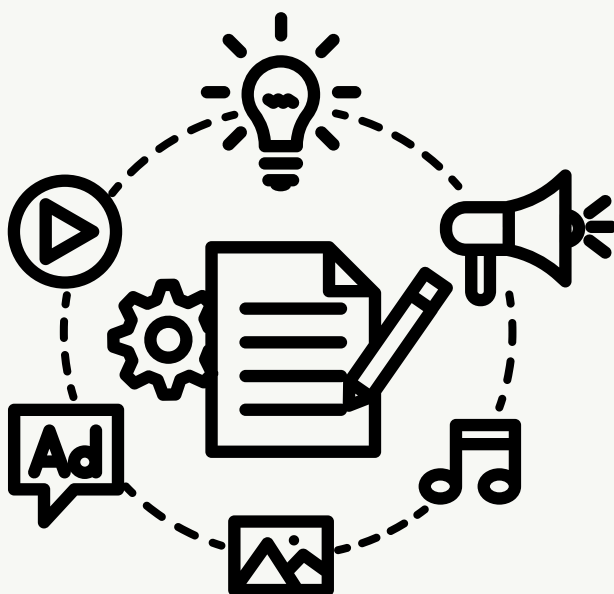
In both scenarios, companies spend significant personnel and financial resources communicating with the outside world, without evaluating what they're doing and deciding what to do differently.

SEIZE THE OPPORTUNITY TO
ALIGN YOUR COMMUNICATIONS
WITH YOUR COMPANY'S PLANS
AND STRATEGIC GOALS.



AN AUDIT IS THE BEST WAY TO DETERMINE WHAT YOU SHOULD IMPROVE & HOW

It often takes a new hire or a consultant to realize it's time to audit your external communications and convince your teams it's worth the effort. This guide will help you through the process.



A COMPREHENSIVE
AUDIT IS THE BEST
WAY TO ANSWER



What are you communicating?

Who is communicating it?

How often? Via which channels?

Does it support your goals?

Are messages targeted to your key audiences?

STEPS



1



**GATHER PAST
COMMUNICATIONS**

2



**EVALUATE MESSAGES
& BRANDING**

3



**SURVEY THE PEOPLE
BEHIND THE COMMS**

4



**CREATE OR REFINE
YOUR STRATEGY**

5



REPEAT IN 6 MONTHS

SPEND YOUR TIME WISELY & BECOME A BIGGER ASSET



After completing this audit, you can be sure you're spending time on worthwhile tasks, and that marketing and PR will become more valuable to your company.

GATHER PAST COMMUNICATIONS



Collect what your company has communicated externally over the past 6-12 months. Add these to a simple spreadsheet. Look at:

CHANNELS YOUR COMPANY USES



Social media

Website, blogs, podcasts

Press releases, media interviews

Public presentations and speeches

For big organizations: check other offices and subsidiaries as well as headquarters.

Without going into much detail, note what is performing well and what is weak in content or engagement. You'll come back to these notes in step 3 when you speak with the people behind the communications, and create or refine your strategy in step 4.

LOOK BEYOND OFFICIAL COMMS



WHAT HAVE CEOS AND EMPLOYEES COMMUNICATED?

- Look for your organization's name in public posts on popular social media sites (LinkedIn, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, etc.). Paid social media listening tools like Meltwater or Sprout can track this as well.
- Do a Google search with your company's and senior managers' names – do they appear on Google, Wikipedia, Reddit, forums, career or other sites that rate your organization (Stepstone, Payscale, etc.)?
- On your spreadsheet, keep track of what you checked, links to what you found, and false or negative comments that you need to follow up on.

Also check for imposter social media accounts and websites – is someone impersonating your company or management on social media or online? If so, report these social media accounts to the platform and ask that their accounts be removed. If you find an impostor website, you'll likely need to involve your legal team.

EVALUATE MESSAGING & BRANDING

Now that you know what channels your company (as well as senior management, employees and perhaps imposters) have been using, it's time to dive into the messaging – what you're saying – and visual branding – how it looks.

Add columns to your spreadsheet and use a simple traffic light system (green = nothing to improve, yellow = some issues to improve, red = needs urgent attention) to mark if it is on target. Jot down notes if you notice something specific that is working well or could be improved.

THINK ABOUT



Are you conveying the right messages to reach your target audiences?

Are you targeting the right audiences?

Do any of your messages resonate particularly well or poorly (as measured by social media engagement or website views)?

Are you using informative & engaging visuals where appropriate?

Is your visual branding and tone consistent across platforms?

Are you *not* communicating something you should be?

Now you should have a clear picture of what your company has been communicating, where, and to whom. With this in hand, you're ready to speak to the people doing the communicating.

SURVEY THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE COMMS



Your goal is to hear what the people doing the comms think is going well, what needs improving, and how they think things should be done differently. Use this chance to share what you've learned in steps 1 and 2 and see if they agree. If so, great. If not, you'll want to understand why.

Meet individually or in small groups to discuss what they like – and don't – about how and what the firm communicates. Surveys are another great way to collect feedback.

You don't need to engage with every marketing/PR/website/social media employee, but use a good cross-section and take function, seniority and location into account.

Encourage them to be as honest as possible. Ask for content as well as process feedback. Is content interesting and relevant? Are approval processes simple and quick? What would make them better?

FIND SYSTEMIC FLAWS THAT ARE HINDERING YOUR EFFORTS



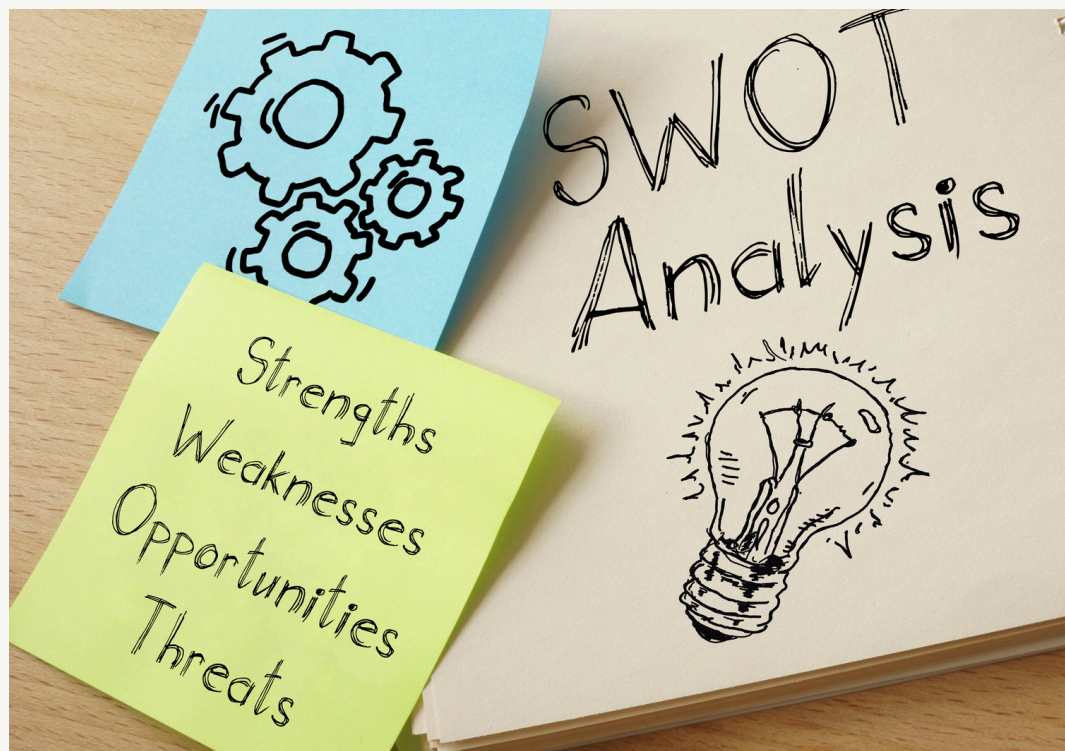
Find out what content scheduling and media listening tools, AI platforms, or other programs the communications teams use, if any. This will give you insight into day-to-day workflows and how to streamline processes. Are they utilizing available technology? Are better platforms available? Are they trained in using AI and aware of legal requirements and risks?

Reflect on the major issues these team members identified as working well and not. You'll use this to inform your strategy in the next step.

CREATE OR REFINE YOUR STRATEGY

Your company may have a communications strategy that needs refining, have one they've forgotten about and doesn't reflect what you're doing, or not have one at all. Three valuable steps in creating a communications strategy are conducting a SWOT analysis, and defining your key messages and SMART goals.

STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES & THREATS



A SWOT analysis is a simple way to visualize how your company's external communications are going well and poorly, as well as what opportunities you could seize and threats you need to respond to. Mind Tools offers a helpful, [free SWOT worksheet](#).

KEY MESSAGES

Companies' key messages are one of the most common areas that need improvement. Many firms – big and small – need help defining and integrating them into their external communications. They can get lost in the matrix of communication channels, especially when different people run different channels.

If you've determined that your messaging is unclear and you need to unify it, here's how to start.



EVERYONE SHOULD UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU DO & WHY IT MATTERS



The goal is to speak with a consistent and unique “voice” that supports your goals and differentiates you from the competition. Everyone in the company should use this “voice” on every channel – from the CEO’s conference presentation to a new trainee describing the company to their friends and family. That doesn’t mean you have to use the same words to describe what you do to board members and your grandmother – but the messages will be the same.

HOW TO IDENTIFY KEY MESSAGES

HELP YOUR COMPANY STAND OUT

1



BRAINSTORM TOPICS

In a small group of senior staff from various departments, identify 3-5 main topics you focus on that you think will help achieve your goals.

2



DEVELOP KEY PHRASES & WORDS

In a larger group (from different departments and levels of seniority), brainstorm key phrases and words you think should be included.

3



FORMULATE KEY MESSAGES

A strong communicator should formulate 1-3 sentences for max. 3 key messages per topic.

4



REVIEW & APPROVE

Have your small group of senior staff review and approve the key messages.

5



SHARE

Present them to the larger group. They should be easy to say and remember. Refine if needed.

6



USE & INTEGRATE

Share within your company and incorporate them into your communications strategy.

DEFINE GOALS & HOW YOU’LL ACHIEVE THEM



After reviewing your recent communications, evaluating messages and branding, speaking with your PR/marketing teams, conducting a SWOT analysis, and defining key messages, you're ready to draft a communications strategy for the next year. Present your findings to the people with the power to change them. What do you recommend changing, and how? What should you continue doing, or even strengthen? Include actionable short and medium-term steps to work towards your strategy and use SMART goals (strategic, measurable, actionable, realistic and time-bound).

Once you get buy-in from decision-makers, involve and inform the people doing the communications. If they aren't behind your new strategy, day-to-day communications won't change. Hold an interactive meeting to thank them for their input and get them on board. Schedule times to regularly (for example, every 2-3 months) reflect on your strategy and make sure you continue to work towards it.

REPEAT IN 6 MONTHS



**EXPERTS DON'T COMMUNICATE FOR THE SAKE OF IT.
WE COMMUNICATE TO SUPPORT STRATEGIC GOALS.**

Congratulations! You've completed an external communications audit and used it to inform a new communications strategy. To ensure your company continues communicating your key messages to target audiences via the appropriate channels, repeat these steps in 6 months. Revise your communications strategy as needed.

Completing these steps will strengthen your organization's external communications, and verify your PR and marketing efforts support your goals, making you even more valuable to your organization.

WHO WE ARE

Barber Communications helps clients communicate their messages to reach the right audience at the right time. Founded in 2019 by Corey Barber, we support our clients by creating marketing and communications strategies, effective media outreach, speeches, social media campaigns and content, and websites – or we train them to do strategic communications in-house. A Berlin-based firm of native English speakers, we offer services globally and specialize in helping non-native speakers communicate in English.



COREY BARBER

Director

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Corey has worked for more than a decade in PR and public affairs, gathering lobbying experience at the Oregon Legislature, the German Bundestag and global health organizations. She has communicated with the public and the media about everything from cardiac stents to war crimes. Corey loves creating strategies to tackle the issues facing the world today.



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Erika is a writer and editor. She served as editor at FUKT Magazine, digital editor at LOLA Magazine, and has contributed to publications such as Daddy Magazine, The Beam, and Next Generation Living. As a fine artist, she brings her eye for design to her communications projects.

Photos by [Polina Georgescu](#)

FREE 1-HOUR CONSULTATION

Overwhelmed by the thought of conducting a communications audit or creating a communications strategy on your own? Have a specific PR or marketing challenge that you haven't been able to crack, or don't have time to work on?



**SCHEDULE A FREE 1-HOUR CONSULTATION
WITH DIRECTOR COREY BARBER**



OUR SERVICES

COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY
AND CONTENT

COMMUNICATIONS TRAINING

EDITING AND TRANSLATION

ALIGN YOUR COMMUNICATIONS WITH YOUR STRATEGIC GOALS TODAY.



Corey Barber advocating for EU action with Member of European Parliament Sergey Lagodinsky and other leaders in Brussels on behalf of the Recharging Advocacy for Rights in Europe program.