



NAVIGATING THE NOISE

5 STEPS TO AUDIT YOUR EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	➔	2
PAST COMMUNICATIONS	➔	6
MESSAGING & BRANDING	➔	8
SURVEY	➔	9
STRATEGY	➔	11
REPEAT	➔	16
ABOUT US	➔	17

IMPROVE YOUR BRAND MESSAGING

Nonprofit organizations' communication with clients, partners and the media often grows organically. An NGO's founder opens a social media channel, writes press releases, and creates website content. That person gradually assembles a team that builds on what they've established.

Alternatively, many large organizations have press, social media and fundraising teams working independently, using different messaging and visuals. This becomes even more complex in organizations with multiple thematic departments or country offices.

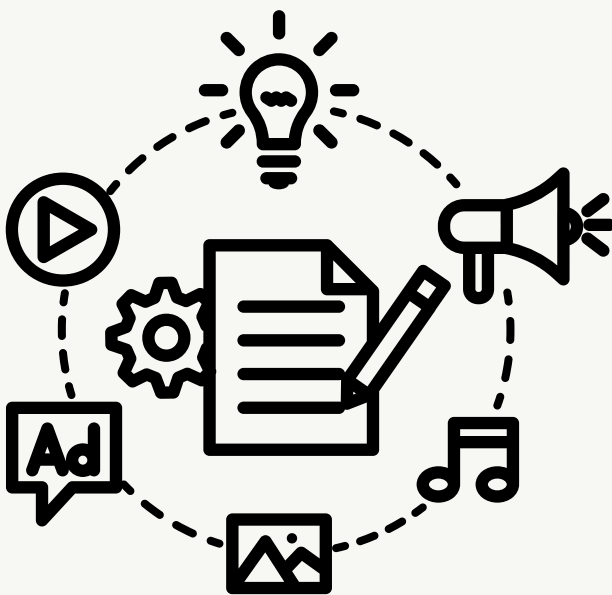
In both scenarios, organizations spend significant personnel and financial resources communicating with the outside world, without evaluating what they're doing and deciding what to do differently.

SEIZE THE OPPORTUNITY TO
ALIGN YOUR COMMUNICATIONS
WITH YOUR BUSINESS 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 navigate that 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 organization's mission and 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 REFINES
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 communications will become more valuable to your organization.

GATHER PAST COMMUNICATIONS



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

CHANNELS YOUR NGO USES



Social media

Website, blogs, podcasts

Press releases, media interviews

Public presentations and speeches

For big organizations, check other offices as well as headquarters' channels.

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 LEADERS 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 organization and management teams' 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 organization or leaders 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 imposter website, you'll likely need to involve your legal team. You may also find defunct accounts people have forgotten about that can be deleted.

EVALUATE MESSAGING & BRANDING

Now that you know what channels your organization (as well as executives, 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 organization 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 communicating 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 organization communicates. Surveys are another great way to collect feedback.

You don't need to engage with every press/social media/fundraising 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



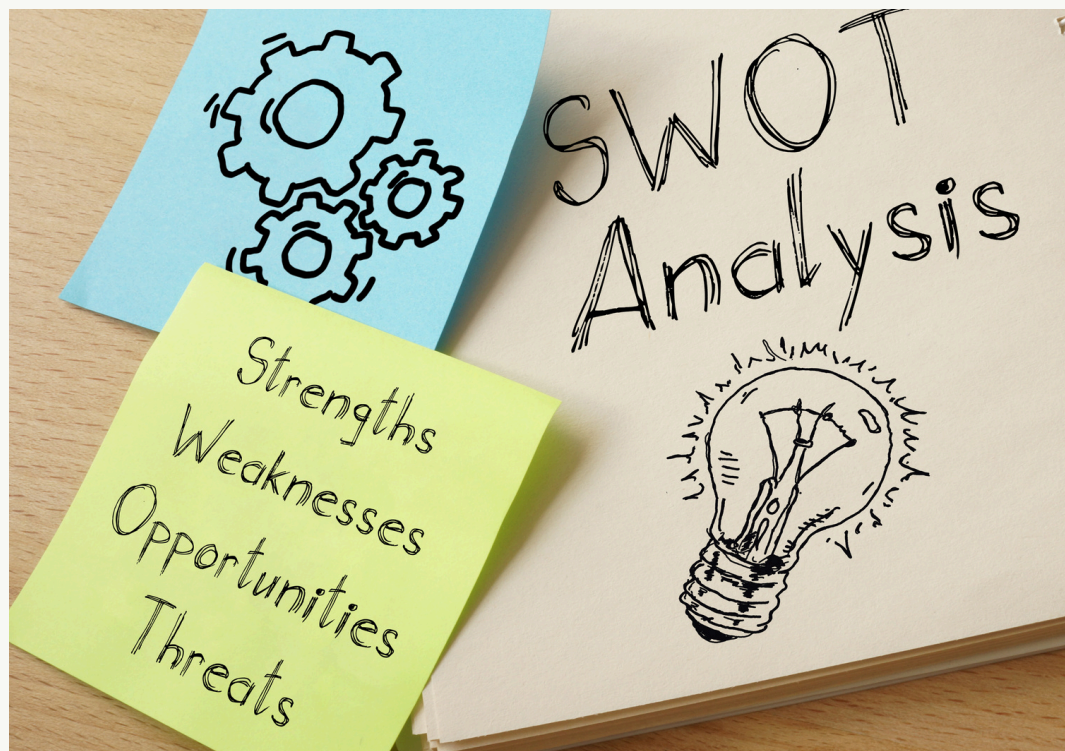
Find out what content scheduling and media listening tools, AI platforms, or other programs the communications teams use, if any. This will give you insight into day-to-day workflows and how to streamline processes. Are they utilizing available technology? Are better platforms available? Are they trained 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 organization 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 strategy are conducting a SWOT analysis, defining your key messages and setting SMART goals.

STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES & THREATS



A SWOT analysis is a simple way to visualize how your 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

Key messages are one of the most common areas that need improvement. Many organizations – 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 organization's 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 organizational mission and goals and differentiates you from others in your field. Everyone in the organization should use this “voice” on every channel – from the Executive Director’s keynote speech to a new hire describing the nonprofit 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 core messages will be the same.

HOW TO IDENTIFY KEY MESSAGES

HELP YOUR ORGANIZATION 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 want to prioritize in the near future.

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 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 organization 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 press/social media/fundraising 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 strategy. To ensure your NGO continues communicating your key messages to target audiences via the appropriate channels, repeat these steps in 6 months. Revise your strategy as needed.

Completing these steps will strengthen your company's external communications, and verify that your efforts support your mission and organizational goals, making you even more valuable to your organization and effective in achieving your mission.

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 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

[Email](#) / [LinkedIn](#)

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 media and public about everything from cardiac stents to war crimes. Corey loves creating strategies to tackle the issues facing the world today.



ERIKA CLUGSTON

Communications Manager

[Email](#) / [LinkedIn](#)

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 strategy on your own? Have a specific communications 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 stronger EU protections for civil society with MEP Sergey Lagodinsky and other leaders in Brussels on behalf of the Recharging Advocacy for Rights in Europe program.