

Planning communication

8 practical questions to ask

1. What do you want to achieve?

Pretty obvious really, but it's surprising how often people start thinking about what they're going to do before they're absolutely clear about why they're doing it. Think about the real objectives. What do you want people to do differently? How will attitudes be changed? What needs are you meeting? Make sure that your objectives are specific and achievable.

2. What does your audience need?

We're assuming that you know who your audience is – the real audience who are going to help you achieve your objectives, not the ones who are going to judge your success (deal with them separately). Think about what they need from their perspective not from yours. What do they think they need? This will give you the hook that will engage their interest.

3. What is your audience like?

Your audience are human beings and will react as such to the communication they receive. Different people have different preferences regarding the way they receive information. Different approaches and subjects will engage the interest of different people. You can't communicate with people individually, but groups often have shared characteristics that you appeal to – for example, sales people tend to be highly practical, focus on results and enjoy competition.

4. What's the best way to reach your audience?

Once you've considered the best style and hook to approach your audience with, you have to get practical. Where is your audience – all in one place, working from home, working on a shop floor, out on the road? What communication media would they have access to? Do they work at computers? Do they all have email? Will they be able to attend a face-to-face meeting? Do they already have so much to read that another manual would be useful only as a doorstop?

5. What resources do you have?

The resources you need will include cash and/or the time of appropriately skilled people. One or the other, or both, are likely to be finite. Tailor your communication to suit your resources. There is often a different, less costly approach, but be realistic. Bear in mind other resources you might need – like the time of managers, the time of other departments whose support you might need, the backing of a senior manager to act as a champion for your project. Also consider how much time you have to develop your communication – is there an absolute deadline and will this affect what you can get done?

6. What else is going on?

Consider the context in which your communication will be delivered. The issues on people's minds and the other demands on their time will affect the way your message is received and acted on. Perhaps you should change the timing of your initiative or link it in with another.

7. Will your communication stand alone?

If your message forms a part of, or is very closely allied to, another, it is best to integrate the two. For example, if you are announcing introduction of training in a new system, you need to combine this with information about why the system is being introduced and the benefits it will bring. Another aspect of this question is whether or not your communication will be one-off, form part of a series of communications or be something that needs to be kept for reference and updated. This will affect the medium/format you choose.

8. What other help do you need?

Many a communication exercise has been scuppered because assumptions have been made about the skills and time available to implement it. Does your writer understand the requirements of on-screen communication? Do you have a printer who can meet the deadlines? Getting the right help from the outset saves both pain and money in the long run.

Lynn Fraser, Writer and Communication Consultant, Zero-21 Communication Ltd.

Zero-21 is a consultancy that improves what and how you communicate – enabling you to bring your ideas to life and get the results you want. The person behind Zero-21 is Lynn Fraser, a writer and communication consultant with over 15 years' experience in corporate identity, marketing, selling, internal communication and training.



Contact:
Lynn Fraser
Zero-21 Communication Ltd
T 01223 240161 | E lynn@zero-21.com | w zero-21.com