



Content Creation for Effective Communication

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Identify the processes and plans needed for clear communications
- ✓ Develop, maintain, and evolve effective content for your communications

Content Creation for Effective Communication

Using Stories to Communicate

The Importance of Story

As human beings, we are wired for stories. We don't often hold a whole list of items or facts for long, but we will remember the gist of a good story for a lifetime. Metaphors and analogies are often a part of storytelling.

Using stories can help make your communications more compelling, more coherent, and clearer. In his book *All Marketers Are Liars*, Seth Godin talks about the power of a story to draw in customers and to persuade. He also shares some things we can learn.

Stories have to make you stand out.

If you simply repeat someone else's story and try to make it sound original, it won't. If you are trying to convince your spouse that a holiday to the Mediterranean is in order, and it is the same story your friends are telling each other, you won't be very convincing. Tell your story.

7-Up called their product "the un-Cola" to differentiate from all of the cola drinks in the marketplace. You have to find something that helps you stand out from the crowd. If there is nothing that makes your story stand out from all the others, your results won't stand out either.

Your story has to be believable.

If your story is not true, you won't get results. You cannot persuade by telling lies, can you? Well, actually you can! This is why people buy garbage from watching infomercials: they become convinced that this particular gadget will do what they need, make them look like they want, or bring them some kind of status. The reason that stories that actually lie still persuade people is because sometimes people want to agree with you. Once they do agree to something, they do not like to be proven wrong.

Storytelling works when it makes something more.

If you believe storytelling, then you may believe that a different glass makes your wine taste better. Does food cooked in cookware endorsed by a famous chef taste better than that cooked in the same product without an endorsement? If you believe the story that comes with it, it sure does!

Have a beginning, middle, and end.

A story is not the same thing as a paragraph or an argument. A story is complete, with a beginning, middle, and an end. Using this format will help your story to be memorable and to carry your meaning.

Be conscious of our attention span.

While we are wired to respond to and appreciate stories, we've also become accustomed to short messages on billboards and text messages. Remember your audience and think about capturing their attention without giving them license to be distracted as you deliver your message.

Tell Me A Story

Review this advertising statement:

“For the discerning coffee lover who wants fast, convenient, low-cost, top-quality coffee at home, QuikBrew is the ideal solution. QuikBrew is the first single-serve coffee brewing product that offers 100% organic, certified gluten-free, fair trade coffee at a low price.”

Develop a story that could be used in communications to promote this product.

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Polishers and Time Savers

Communication Fact Sheets

Preparing Fact Sheets

Checklists and fact sheets put essential information at the ready, at a glance. This can make the development, polishing, and delivery of a communications piece more efficient. Often, these one-pagers are called “cheat sheets,” but the concept is not cheating at all, unless it is the cheating of inefficiency in your workplace.

Here are some examples of one-page information sheets that can help your communications projects run smoothly.

About Us

This sheet should include:

- The company’s official title
- Branding title (if different)
- Mission, vision, and values
- Date of founding
- Number of employees
- Core products/services
- Number of offices
- Net worth and annual sales
- Any other facts you wish to share with the public

This sheet can be used internally to help with fact checking. It can also be circulated as an attachment to media releases.

Pitch Summary

Include:

- Your elevator pitch
- Marketing targets
- Communication goals
- Key words for online presence.

This sheet is helpful for crafting media releases and blogs.

Social Media Summary

Include:

- Each platform (such as Facebook, Twitter, or WordPress) that you post on
- Company contact (person responsible for monitoring and posting to this platform)

- Topic list
- Frequency of posting
- Length of posts

This can be used to keep social media contacts on track or as a quick training guide for temporary or permanent replacements. User names and passwords should be kept in a secure file with at least two trusted employees in order to protect the integrity of the site while allowing company access if needed.

Strategic Summary

Include the executive summary and primary goals from the company's guiding documents, such as the:

- Strategic plan
- Business plan
- Communications plan
- Marketing plan

Having all documents and goals listed together ensures continuity in operations, highlights conflicts, and helps familiarize key people with all planning.

Contact Lists

Include:

- Media contact names and preferred contact method (e-mail, cell phone, or text message)
- Company contact names in the event of an immediate or after-hours demand for a quote or the unavailability of the primary contact

Maintaining Fact Sheets

Compiling these sheets can take one to two hours, depending on the research and volume of information involved. However, those hours will be saved quickly when related projects run more smoothly. No more frantic digging for a company profile or the exact wording of the mission statement when writing a document on a deadline! Once the sheets are compiled, assign staff to review and update as needed.

Text Your Knowledge

What other one-page sheets could assist your communications operations?

How can these one-pagers make your company more efficient?

Who is best to compile and update them?

Getting It Together

Choose a fact sheet that would be useful for your organization. Start compiling it in the space below.

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Reduce, Re-Use, and Recycle

As discussed, your core message is the core strength of your communications effort. To attract and retain your audience, however, you cannot repeat your message or postings too often. Some repetition is considered boring. Intense repetition is considered spam (the online equivalent of those repeated nuisance telephone calls during dinner). Just like the communications industry has a no-call list by which outbound telemarketers abide, there are also rules against spamming. Internet Service Providers (ISPs) can suspend service to those caught spamming, and social media sites may suspend accounts of people against whom complaints are lodged for unsolicited frequent advertising messages. Even if your service is not sanctioned or suspended, you do not want to risk alienating your audience by pushy or rude behavior.

That being said, there are limited topics that you can post about, only so many keywords, and a minimum amount of time to create and distribute daily or weekly messages. As a result, media management can be time-consuming or even impossible unless time management is reinforced. Just as the three R's (reduce, reuse, and recycle) have helped homes and businesses get a handle on solid waste management, the three R's can also help with media management.

Reduce

The length of posts, messages, and releases.

Keep the topic focused, include the five W's and a call to action, and use descriptions that are vibrant but brief. Attach fact sheets and a contact for supporting information. That's all you need!

The frequency of posts and mailouts to a manageable number.

Some companies have the resources to post five tweets and two Facebook messages daily. Some do not. The single greatest factor in media success is consistency. It is best to do a blog post once every week rather than three days in a row and none for the next two weeks.

The number of platforms to a manageable number.

Proponents of various sites will claim their platform is the best, leading companies to believe they must be on every platform to be successful. Unless your company has significant human resources to manage this multitude of platforms, keep your choices to a select few that you can manage well. An unused account is the derelict building of the information highway: better it not be there at all than be abandoned. Each platform must be a contributing part of your community.

Reuse

Blog postings on your site.

If the topic remains timely after a few months or even a few years, you can post it again with an update of when it first appeared. Or, run a Best Of series with a look back at some popular posts. Review some popular blog sites: most if not all of them do this. There is no expiry date on good information, but there is a premium on time.

Blog postings on other blog sites.

Offer your article as a guest post to sites offering similar or related information as yours, and invite their bloggers to do the same on your site.

Content.

You can use media releases as blog posts and vice versa. Or, share your mission, vision, and values as a Facebook post or tweet. They can be an interesting reminder for your audience and your staff while providing solid content on a slow news day.

Recycle

Blog postings as social media postings.

Use the title, the catchy first line, a key statistic, or an interesting quote as your posts. Spread these posts over a few days with a link back to your blog and you will promote your blog as well.

Postings between media.

You can recycle and re-craft posts to use between media, but do NOT use identical postings for different platforms. Facebook and Twitter, for example, have many of the same users but the style and etiquette are unique. Folks know when a Facebook post has been copied as a tweet, and they do not look upon

the offense kindly: they will see your company as lazy or incompetent. If you wish to use the same content, be sure to word the message as it should read from the various sites, using the appropriate tags.

Media releases as social media postings.

You can use the title, opening line, quotes from key people, or any other stand-alone sentences from media releases and blog posts as a social media post. This can provide posting fodder for several days while keeping your topic in the spotlight.

Customer correspondence as social media postings, if they are something you wish to share.

Thank-yous, testimonials, interesting stories, photos, and other messages sent by customers are interesting to the audience and a great advocate for your message. If carefully done, even negative correspondence can be a successful social media posting: a company that finds a successful solution to a problem, owns up to its mistakes, and takes customer satisfaction seriously will gain support from an audience that values authenticity. Be sure to edit out any identifying information (such as customer name and address, for example) for their security and yours. You may also want to get permission from the customer to use their correspondence.

Enhancing Your Results

Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

What is Search Engine Optimization (SEO)?

No matter how popular your company is, or how unique your name is, people still have to be able to find you online. Thinking again of our multi-lane highway, the Internet is a frantic bumper-to-bumper 40-lane highway at rush hour. Your online presence, including your website, blog postings, and social media posts, needs all the help it can get to direct traffic from the chaos of the Internet to your message.

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) can help you gain and maintain a digital reach that is both broad and deep. When you optimize your web pages, social media sites, blog, and wherever else you have an online presence, SEO helps you to get as close as you can to the top of search results – preferably to the top of the first page.

In order to get to the top of a search page, you need to select search terms and keywords that people look for, and then optimize your content to make it easy to find, or “search friendly.”

Test your Knowledge

Think about the last time that you searched for something online.

What words did you use?

Which links did you click on from the search page?

Did you just look at the paid ads at the top of your search or the first few organic links?

Did you go to the second page?

Metatags

When your web pages are created, there will be a space for a **metatag** where you can list your keywords. These metatags are not required for search engines, but they will enhance your ranking and they help you keep track of your keywords. Visitors to your web page don't see the metatags either, but they do appear in your coding. A good strategy is to vary where you position search terms on different pages because search engines truncate keyword tags at different lengths.

Getting the Best Results

Your best SEO results come from having great content on your sites. This will also help you attract people who are interested in what you have to offer; the **qualified prospect**. Throughout our conversations about SEO, it's important to remember that nothing is effective unless you offer good, strong content.

Unless you appeal to visitors to your site, they don't become qualified prospects and convert to customers.

Developing Keywords

Here are five tips for getting a solid list of keywords:

- Brainstorm a list of potential keywords and phrases.
- Ask colleagues, friends, and employees for ideas.
- Use the names of all your key products and services, company name, subdomains, and nicknames.
- Include industry and geographic (location) terms and jargon. If you have a popular name, try to secure as many versions of it as possible. For example, London is a city in England and Canada.
- Use a search tool like the Google Keyword Search tool (used for Google AdWords) to help identify keywords and phrases.

Remember that searchers have to be desperate before they will look at a second page of search results. You need to be on the first page in order to get visitors to your site.

Optimizing Our Results

Brainstorm a list of 30 search terms (words and short phrases) that can be used among the different pages of your hub site.

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Taking Your Communication Pulse

There are many ways to analyze the results of your communications efforts. As with most everything these days, there are software packages that you can purchase to monitor your brand's activities, social presence, market share, and customer response. You can also hire a company to manage analytics for you.

There are, however, also some low-cost or no-cost methods that you can use. You may, in fact, have access to a lot of information that you're not aware of. You can set up notifications electronically (through Google Analytics, for example) that will help you find people who talk about your company or products on their web or blogging sites. You can track people who have clicked on links in your e-mails or e-newsletters, or simply those who visit your website.

You can also use internal and external focus groups to check in with the people connecting with your brand. Some key questions to ask include:

- How are we meeting our brand promise?
- What is working for you?
- What is not working?
- What new trends are you seeing?
- How do you feel about the brand?
- How does this compare with how you felt about it last month? Six months ago?

Focusing on the Research

Choose a topic for a focus group that would benefit the market research for your company.

Where would the group be held?

Who would be invited?

What information would the company hope to gain?

SWOT Analysis

What is SWOT?

SWOT stands for the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats facing your company. The strengths and weaknesses are usually considered to be internal, while the opportunities and threats are generally external to the company. This analysis helps you ask yourself, “Where are you now?” It can also help you identify where you need to go.

A SWOT analysis should consider:

- Your company and its strengths and its weaknesses
- Your products and/or services and their strengths and weaknesses
- The community and what is currently going on that may affect future planning
- Your primary and secondary target markets and what they want/need
- The competition and what they are doing
- The external forces that will affect your business
- Opportunities that are available to you and your company
- Environment and market factors that could threaten your business

SWOT Matrix

You can perform a SWOT analysis using a matrix like the following:

	<i>INTERNAL</i>	<i>EXTERNAL</i>
<i>P O S I T I V E</i>	Strengths	Opportunities
<i>N E G A T I V E</i>	Weaknesses	Threats

Next Steps

Once you have used SWOT analysis to answer the questions about your company, you will repeat the process to consider your competition. After you have gathered this information, you may have ideas to help lessen the impact of the competition. For example, perhaps you have eliminated barriers that the competition has not been able to minimize for themselves. If you have partnered with a great distributor and the competition is struggling to get their product out to stores, you have eliminated a barrier. These facts can become part of your communication strategies and can help you communicate what your brand is all about.

Test your Knowledge

Complete your own SWOT analysis chart.

	<i>INTERNAL</i>	<i>EXTERNAL</i>
<i>P O S I T I V E</i>	Strengths	Opportunities
<i>N E G A T I V E</i>	Weaknesses	Threats

Maintaining Your Message in Crisis

Crisis communications have a different intensity than much of our other work, but the essence is the same in that you must communicate effectively, consistently, and in a timely manner. In the case of an emergency, if an emergency operation center needs to be set up, the most senior member of the team remains in charge until the team leader reports in. If you aren't the team leader or the communications leader, you absolutely should not be making statements to the media. Let the communications leader, who has been trained in what to say (and not to say) look after that function when they arrive.

It can be very practical to have colored vests for each member of the team, so that other members and employees know who is in charge. You can use vests that match your operation in some way, or coordinate with what your local emergency services use. Just make sure that people are visible. Think about blue for spokesperson, orange for first aid, yellow for transportation, green for the person in charge, etc.

Work with, not against, emergency services personnel who may also be responding to the incident. Regardless of the circumstances, you need to make sure they can complete rescue and recovery, transport injured people, and conduct investigations as needed. You also need to keep yourself informed about what is going on, what is being said in the media (if you can), and prepare to communicate frequently.

The chain of command for your crisis management team (the order of who is in charge) is a necessary part of your crisis management plan. It needs to be communicated to, and understood by, everyone in a communications role.