

# Comms Planning Guide

Creating a good and effective communications plan is a skill every communications professional needs to master.

Use this Comms Planning Guide to gain a better understanding of the steps you need to take to create a comms plan that is aligned with your organisation's objectives.

## The Key Sections

<b>Background</b>	A summary of the analysis of the current situation, context, business need and the communication opportunity.
<b>Objectives</b>	An outline of your organisation's objectives and your communication objectives.
<b>Stakeholder/ Audience Analysis</b>	An analysis of the stakeholders the communication activity will target with accompanying insights.
<b>Key Messages</b>	A summary of how you want your organisation to be perceived.
<b>Strategy</b>	How you will get to your desired objective(s) for the plan.
<b>Tactics</b>	What you have to do to achieve your objective(s).
<b>Timeline</b>	A breakdown of the execution timeline for the tactical activities.
<b>Budget</b>	An estimate of how much it will cost to implement your plan.
<b>Evaluation/ KPIs</b>	The metrics to determine the success of the comms plan and strategy

# Creating your Plan

## Background

The starting point for any good comms plan is to understand and establish the **context**. Research is critical here and you must get all the important information you need to make your comms plan an effective one.

You need to know:

1. **The business need** – What's the current situation within your organisation and what are the challenges the organisation is facing?
2. **Trends and context** – What are the existing trends within the sector your organisation operates in? Research both local and global trends and identify shifts that will be relevant to the business need.
3. **SWOT Analysis**. Analyse the Strengths, Opportunities, Weaknesses and Threats of your organisation within the industry and in relation to its competitors and the environmental context.
4. **The communication opportunity** – In what way can communications be leveraged to solve the business need and close any gaps identified in your research? Your comms plan must clearly articulate how the strategy you are proposing will contribute to the success of your organisation.

## Objectives

What do you want to achieve through the comms plan and by when?

- i. Start by outlining the overall objectives of your organisation.
- ii. Outline your communication objectives, ensuring that they are aligned with your organisation's objectives.

Aim to have a mix of the important categories of objectives:

- i. **Output-based Objectives**: These measure the direct results from your communication activities which can be counted. For example, website visits, social media comments, etc.
- ii. **Outtake-based Objectives**: These measure the impact on the audience in terms of awareness, perception and engagement.
- iii. **Outcome-based Objectives**: These show change in attitude and opinions that can be quantified and have a greater impact on the business need.

It is crucial for your objective to be SMART - Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound.

## Stakeholder/ Audience Analysis

This is where you define the 'who'. Do a thorough analysis of the stakeholders that will be impacted by your communication activity and the specific audience you want to target.

Segment your stakeholders into different groups with similar attributes or preferences (psychographics, demographics, etc.) and prioritise them. Avoid being generic here. For example, your target audience should not be the 'general public' or 'consumer'. You need to narrow down properly and be as specific as possible. You also need to break down your stakeholders into primary and secondary audiences.

After the analysis, you need to get audience insights through consumer research to know the thoughts, needs and perceptions of the audience you want to target. Don't make assumptions here. Get real insights which will help you to create the right strategy to solve the business need.

## Key messages

Your key messages should communicate what you are doing and why you are doing it. It is, therefore, important for your key messages to be authentic to your organisation and it should also resonate with your target audience.

Your key messages will be the foundation for the taglines and messaging you use for your communication channels.

Write out a list of 3 to 4 key messages that captures how you want your organisation to be perceived.

## Strategy

Your strategy is a broad explanation of how you will achieve your objectives and why you are going with the stated approach. Examples include stakeholder engagement strategies, experiential strategies, content marketing, etc.

It is important for your strategy to be based on data and insights gained from research and engagement with your senior leaders to understand the business need and the communication opportunity.

In creating your strategy, think about what you want to achieve, your target audience and what you'd like them to do. It is also important to ensure that your strategy aligns with your objectives.

**NB** - Don't confuse your strategy with your tactics. Your strategy is the bigger picture while your tactics break down how the strategy will be achieved..

## Tactics

There are many tactics you can explore but the key is to be guided by your objectives and your strategy. A good starting point for mapping out your tactics is the PESO Model – Paid, Earned, Shared and Owned Media. Your tactics should include the communication channels (social media, email) and the specific types of content (web series, storytelling).

Some things to also consider when choosing your tactics include: how effective they will be in helping you to achieve your objectives, if the channels selected are the best ones to reach your target audience, and whether or not you have enough resources to implement the tactics.

## Timeline

This is where you include your calendar for execution and show the timeframe in which the tactics will be implemented.

Try to make it as visual as possible so that you can give a picture of how the tactics will be implemented and what activities will happen by when.

## Budget

It is essential to have your tentative budget in mind when you're developing your comms plan. You don't want to create an elaborate plan only to realise your organisation cannot provide the resources you need to implement.

When you are creating your budget, you should calculate the cost of every element and line item in your tactics. This may range from the cost of media relations, influencers, TV commercial production, to vendor engagement and so on.

Avoid putting a lump sum figure without making a case for why you need that amount of money. Instead, you should explain how you arrived at the figure, what you will do with the money and how it will impact your organisation.

## Evaluation/ KPIs

This is the final part of your plan and it is extremely important because this is what will show how your comms plan had an impact on the business need and the objectives of your organisation.

You should, therefore, clearly articulate how you will measure the success of your plan and the benchmarks that will be evaluated to assess how your strategy and tactics have an impact on what your organisation wants to achieve.

It is important to have KPIs and metrics you can track throughout the implementation of your comms plan. Don't wait until you've completed execution before you measure and evaluate.

To learn more about KPIs and tools to measure them, download this [guide](#).

## ***YOUR COMMS PLAN CHECKLIST***

- ☐ Have you spoken to your boss/ senior leaders to understand why they are asking for a comms plan/ strategy?
- ☐ Can you answer the question, 'What does my organisation want to achieve here?'
- ☐ Have you done your internal due diligence to understand the current situation of the organisation and the challenges that are hindering the business strategy?
- ☐ Do you know the key stakeholders that you are to target with your comms plan? How do you want them to respond to your plan?
- ☐ Have you obtained insights from your audience?
- ☐ What are the key messages for your plan? Will they resonate with your audience?
- ☐ Are your objectives SMART? Is at least one of your objectives outcome-based?
- ☐ Are your objectives aligned with the objectives of your organisation?
- ☐ Is your strategy aligned with the objectives of your plan?
- ☐ Do you have the resources you need to effectively execute the tactics in your comms plan?
- ☐ How much will it cost to implement your comms plan?
- ☐ How will the success of your comms plan be measured? What are the KPIs/ milestones that will be tracked and evaluated?

## Conclusion

Your comms plan should be a living strategic document that should evolve as the needs of your organisation change. Doing a thorough analysis of your organisation and the context will help you to lay a strong foundation to develop your comms plan. The most important thing you must remember is that your comms plan must be aligned with the objectives of your organisation. Your comms plan must also include metrics for proper evaluation and measurement.

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## About The Comms Avenue



The Comms Avenue is a capacity-building and networking platform for communications professionals across Africa and beyond. We currently have over 1000 communications professionals from 20 African countries in our mission-driven community.

Our vision is to raise and uphold the standard for Comms talent in Africa and build a strong community of communicators who are empowered to contribute to positive change in various industries, across Africa and globally.

To achieve this, we put together programs, webinars, knowledge exchange and networking events that allow our community members to Learn, Collaborate and Connect with senior communications professionals and peers across the African continent and beyond.

We also produce practical resources and learning materials to help communications professionals to perform better on the job.

To support the work we do or partner with us, click **[here](#)**.