

A simple external communications model

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A short presentation to help small businesses understand what they need in a communications plan.

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Overview

- When you are first setting up a business, the prospect of establishing communications with customers may seem overwhelming and complex.
 - It is possible to break the process down into a series of manageable steps that reflect the increasing maturity and needs of your business.
- This paper outlines a simple external communications model that can help you use the process of establishing the communications as part of your overall business development.
- At every point, it is important that your communications be clear, correct, consistent, and credible.
 - Strategy, mission, and goals are important but don't get carried away and mislead your customers about your present capacity.
 - Beware of "write only documents": no communication all by itself accomplishes anything unless information is actually received and processed by your audience.

Understand what you want to accomplish, and when

- If you want to externally announce your business you will need:
 - A brochure, business cards, a single webpage, an advertisement, and stationary for a “press release”.
- If you want to externally promote your business, and enter into active commerce, you will need:
 - A more detailed brochure or formal product/service description, more information on your website that describes the benefits of what you are selling, and customer-visible documents for correspondence, specifications, ordering, and invoicing.
- If you want to internally support and sustain your business, your internal communication requirements are specific to what you produce – this goes above and beyond things like legal and tax records.
 - Don't short change yourself, internal communication may be more important that you might first think and should be developed along with external communications.
 - Good internal communications means that work can be shared among multiple persons, and it makes your business more attractive to investors and partners.
 - This paper does not include a model information for internal communications.

External communications channels

Communications from
inside the business

Communications
from outside

SOFT COMMUNICATIONS

User pulls



The stars represent multiple ways that a single bit of news can shamelessly be presented, using different documents which may each have a different channel audience.

Web hosted documents

Home pages

Newsletter download

blog

Service pages

Links

Adver-
tisements

Pushed to user

email

fax

Newsletter
emailed

CRM
letters



All soft and hard communications should use the same graphics, fonts and colors as consistently as possible.

HARD COMMUNICATIONS

User pulls



The "newsletter" in all three cases is the same document, distributed in three different ways.

Pushed to user

brochure

Business
cards

Newsletter
printed

Business documents

internal

Delivery
documents

correspon-
dence

Adver-
tisements

get ready

GIRD

Notes on the model

- These days, communications can be soft (digital) or hard (printed).
 - You need to make them both work for you. Try to have them complement each other instead of just duplicating each other. Despite the glamour of digital communications, many people still put a lot of value in printed things they can hold in their hand.
- You will distribute your information using channels inside your business, as well as use other channels outside your business (in the form of ads, etc.)
 - Again, use both. It's your job to keep the information you are distributing in synch with the information that may be moving through outside channels.
- Some communications are pushed, meaning you make the effort to deliver the newsletter, fax, etc., or they can be pulled, meaning that the listener has to make the effort and go to the website, etc., to get the information.
 - You still have to use both. You also need to make sure that everything that needs to be “pulled” has some kind of a trigger event to get the process started – e.g., maybe you put your website address on the outside of your van.

Other notes on external communications

- “If a tree falls in the forest and no one hears it, did it make a sound?”
 - External communications make your business real.
- Always build your communications from the “listener’s” point of view.
 - What you want to say is not as important, as what you need your customer to hear.
- Do informal surveys or other sanity checks to make sure people are getting your message. (Sometimes you just need to ask.)
 - It doesn’t matter if you have written something beautiful if no one is reading it.
- Don’t be afraid to reuse information if it means reaching additional people in different ways.
 - It’s OK for the same news to appear in more than one place (see the model).
- You can grow your communications channels gradually using your website.
 - Start out by keeping your website up to date with new information.
 - If you find you are adding useful information regularly, start a newsletter.
 - Adding links or hosting information from other websites can help establish partnerships.
 - Blogging by you or other “experts” can be valuable as it makes your information more accessible.