



# The marketing and communications plan – communicating key messages



## What is a marketing and communications plan and why is it important?

A marketing and communications plan is a tool to help you implement or realise your marketing strategy. It should be developed only when you have completed your marketing strategy and identified your key messages.

Your marketing and communications plan will be the reference document outlining the steps or actions that should take place to meet the objectives of your marketing strategy. A marketing and communications plan also involves setting out how you will communicate your key messages to your chosen audiences by allocating time and resources in the best possible way.

Key messages are what you want to communicate to customers, beneficiaries, key influencers and other relevant stakeholders. They can be about anything you want – as long as you are not misleading. Key messages are also likely to be part of your existing product and service definition. They can include the benefits that your organisation provides (e.g. 'reduced stress through holistic therapy') or the social or environmental impact that your organisation creates (more disadvantaged young people into sustainable jobs).

Most enterprises will have a variety of messages for a variety of audiences; this is particularly true for social enterprises, as they are likely to have additional key messages around social and environmental impact.

## How to develop a marketing and communications plan

Your marketing and communications plan must do more than just say what you want to happen. It must describe each step required to make sure that it happens.

**1) Target audience** - who do you want to reach? This relates to the customer groups that you identified in your marketing strategy. Remember it is not just about your direct customers; you should also have something to say to your potential beneficiaries or end users and to key influencers in your sector.

**2) Key messages** – what do you want to say to your target groups? Keep the message simple, vivid and, if possible, try to lead it to specific actions. This is particularly important if your customers and beneficiaries or end users are not the same. For example, you may sell products to the wider public commercially in order to sustain employment for formerly homeless people. Or you may provide business to business services, or sell your products through wholesalers or retailers. You will need a message for each of your target audiences, including those using your product or service as well as those making the initial purchasing decision.

There may also be key messages for other relevant stakeholders such as your potential partners, suppliers, the media, as well as your funders and member organisations (if applicable).

**3) Marketing channels** - how are you going to communicate your message? How can you best reach your audience? Think about where you can best promote your key messages so that you can reach your target audience as much as possible. Marketing channels include everything that helps promote your products and services, from displays at the point of sale, information on your website,

banners or information on other organisations' websites or in specific publications, brochures, newsletters, advertising placements, events etc.

**4) Resources** – what resources do you need and what will the marketing channel you selected require? (For example, advert or brochure design, write up, coupons...). How much is it going to cost to design, develop, print or deliver and can you afford it? How much time is this going to take? Are there other ways to reach your target audience more effectively or efficiently? Ensure you are not spreading time and resources too thinly and concentrate your efforts.

**5) Duration** – how long are you going to communicate these messages for? Setting timescales is essential to ensure you review your messages regularly and stay relevant and effective.

**6) Outcomes** – what are you aiming to achieve through this action? Relate this directly to your marketing strategy objectives. This could be an increase in potential leads, contracts, sales, awareness of your products or visits to your website, etc. Make sure that your objectives are SMART (Smart, Measurable, Accurate, Realistic and Timed) and that you have defined what the success looks like (e.g. achieve a 20% increase in new memberships by the end of the year).

**7) Actions** – finally, what exactly are you going to do to make this happen? For example, you could place an advert within a specific publication, send a press release about your new service, write on your blog about your impact, or even have an in-store promotion or organise a launch event.

### Example of a marketing and communications plan

You are meant to have as many target audiences as you have identified in your marketing strategy.

Target audience	Key messages	Channels	Resources	Duration	Outcomes	Actions
Young people not in employment, training or education in East London	Our social enterprise can help you find an exciting job through our 3 month training and mentoring programme	Youth centres, shops and local voluntary organisations and statutory bodies working with youth	Design and printing for 2000 brochures.  Cost: £500.00	2 months recruitment period until the programme starts	50 increase in young people from East London applying and engaging with the training programme	Distribute 2000 brochures through the identified channels.
Local Authorities in East London	Our training programme will reduce youth unemployment in your borough through our high success rate	Direct emails, phone calls with key opinion leaders & face-to-face meetings	Time to schedule meetings, draft emails and attend meetings.	Ongoing until meetings are arranged.	Get two Local Authorities from East London to commission our training programme for next year.	Devise list of contacts and call, email to arrange a meeting to present training programme.
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## Monitoring and improving

Once your marketing plan sets out what will be done and by when, make sure you refer to it as often as possible to avoid losing sight of your objectives under the daily workload. As well as setting out the schedule, the plan needs to say how it will be controlled. You need an individual who takes responsibility for pushing things along.

A good marketing and communications plan should be clear and easy to monitor. Make sure that you take the time to regularly stand back and ask whether the plan is working (i.e. that the actions are achieving the desired outcomes which are helping meet your marketing objectives).

When things fall behind schedule, or costs overrun, you need to be ready to do something about it and to adapt your plan accordingly. Ask yourself what you can learn from your mistakes and how you can use what you know to make a better plan for the future.

You can use the Understand, Plan, Do, Review strategy tool to help you do this (read our guide on Understand, Plan, Do, Review strategic tool for further information).

## Marketing and communications on a budget

A marketing and communication plan does not need to be costly to implement – you can tailor your actions to the budget and resources that you have. For example, it may be that you have the time to invest and have recruited an intern to help you, but that you do not have money to spend on advertising or promotion.

There are many truly effective ways to promote your products and services – and most are almost free. See our guide on making the most of networks and PR to see how you can make simple tools work for you - such as word of mouth, articles and case studies, collaborations and partnerships and new technologies.

A social enterprise can leverage its social or environmental impact on its way to marketing success and adopt a 'beg, borrow or steal' strategy by joining forces or exchanging resources with other people, enterprises, campaigns, or organisations. People that understand your passion and share your values can help you achieve a lot.

Digital communications and online tools such as websites, blogs and social networking sites are free to use and can complement your own newsletters and website.

## Tips for writing a marketing plan

It is important for a marketing plan to:

- always keep your marketing strategy in mind otherwise your plan will work against you and damage your brand
- set clear, realistic and measurable targets - for example, increasing sales by 10 per cent
- include deadlines for meeting targets
- provide a budget for each marketing activity
- specify who is responsible for each activity
- think about the impact of your marketing and communications plan on your sales and your ability to deliver your products and services on time and on budget

A plan will not happen by itself. You need to make someone responsible for monitoring progress and chasing up overdue activities. Reviewing progress will also help you learn from your mistakes so that you can improve your plans for the future.

## Things to look out for with your marketing and communications plan

Don't confuse your marketing and communications plan with your marketing strategy.

A marketing strategy is based around your overall business strategy and helps you understand and clarify where you are, where you want to be and how best you can get there.

The marketing and communication plan is based on this marketing strategy and is meant to help you put it into practice by outlining specific actions that need to take place. It should not exist as a stand alone document or be independent of your overall marketing strategy.

### Further information

**Read our guide on Developing an effective Marketing Strategy:**

<http://www.blondon.com/socialenterprise/Marketing.html>

**Read our guide on Identifying your stakeholders:**

<http://www.blondon.com/socialenterprise/Identifying-your-stakeholders.html>

**Read our guide on Collaborations and partnerships:**

<http://www.blondon.com/socialenterprise/Develop-your-social-enterprise.html>

**Read our guide on Delivering your product or service on time and on budget:**

<http://www.blondon.com/socialenterprise/Home-page.html>

**Read our guide on Developing an e-marketing plan:**

<http://www.businesslink.gov.uk/bdotg/action/layer?site=181&r.s=tl&r.l1=1073861197&r.lc=en&r.l2=1073866263&topicId=1075384972>

**Read our guide on Understand, Plan, Do, Review strategic tool:**

<http://www.blondon.com/socialenterprise/Develop-your-social-enterprise.html>

**Read our guide on making the most of networks and PR:**

<http://www.blondon.com/socialenterprise/Marketing.html>