Hide Tides and High Returns: How a Low Cost Communication Method Can Transform Your Information Flow

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FEMA
BEFORE YOU HIT SEND ON YOUR E-NEWSLETTER, MAKE A PLAN!
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Communications Planning Process

1. Define specific and measurable communications objectives
2. Analyze stakeholder interests, concerns, needs, and preferences & identify target audiences
3. Develop key themes and tailored messages for your target audiences
4. Identify available and appropriate communications mediums and channels
5. Develop communications products & tools
6. Develop the communications & engagement schedule (i.e., when, why, who, what, how)
7. Disseminate products and messages according to plan
8. Measure reach, impact, and action (i.e., progress against goals) and adjust communications plan accordingly

Key planning steps before starting your e-newsletter

EVALUATE
ANALYZE
DEVELOP
DESIGN
IMPLEMENT

RiskMAP
Increasing Resilience Together
Setting goals and selecting your target audience

- Good communications goals clearly align the broader vision or goals of your organization/program with the awareness, understanding, ability, and commitment of the stakeholders that are critical to achieving them.

- Key questions to answer during the analysis phase:
  - What is my organization/program trying to achieve?
  - Who are the stakeholders that are interested, impacted, or responsible for implementing the mission of my organization/program?
  - Where are these stakeholders on the commitment curve regarding the goals of my organization/program?
  - What are each of their unique interests, concerns, and goals?
  - What are the best ways to reach these stakeholders? Who do they trust? How do they consume information?
Designing tailored messages and sending them through the right channels

**Timing**
- Front end/pre-decisional
- Linked to major milestones
- Recurring/drumbeat

**Themes**
- Awareness – informational
- Understanding – dialogue
- Ability – details, tutorials, training
- Ownership – cooperation, spotlights, best practice sharing

**Tailored Messages**
- Anticipate audience needs
- Address unique concerns
- Engage with shared interests and goals
- Solicit input and cooperation

**Tone**
- Informational
- Motivational
- Promotional
- Conciliatory

**Channels**
- Web
- Social
- Print
- e-newsletter
- Meetings & Events

**Tactics**
Creative content that drives key messages through what audiences:
- See
- Hear
- Think

- Feel
- Say
- Do

**Feedback Loops**
Ongoing opportunities for measurement that are:
- Accessible
- Genuine
- Responsive

**RiskMAP**
Increasing Resilience Together
Disseminate and evaluate on a schedule

Editorial Schedules

For each delivery:
- Start & End Dates
- Channel (e.g., e-newsletter)
- Vehicle (e.g., newsletter title & section)
- Primary Audience(s)
- Key Themes & Messages
- Tactic/Content Type (e.g., listicle)
- Content Contributors
- Evaluation Method →

Evaluation Methods

- Electronic
  - Feedback surveys
  - Open comment spaces
  - Web analytics
- Interpersonal
  - Stakeholder forums/ town halls
  - Individual interviews (formal & informal)
  - Focus groups
NOW, CREATE YOUR E-NEWSLETTER!

Vincent Brown, Senior Program Specialist, FEMA
Advantages to e-newsletters

- Relatively low cost
- Faster dissemination of information
- A great relationship-building tool
- Increases traffic to organization’s website
- Contact acquisition tool
- Receive fast and easy to read statistics
Research the best e-newsletter websites for your organization and build your database/subscriber list

Ensure the company follows your organization’s compliance rules and process

Some e-newsletter websites are:

- GovDelivery – offers digital solution to over 4,000 public sector organizations including FEMA
- MailChimp
- ConstantContact

Make it easy for people to subscribe and unsubscribe

- This includes a possible link on your organizations website, emails, and in the e-newsletter as well.
Create a production schedule

To create a schedule it’s normally easiest to work backwards

If you know when you want your e-newsletter to be published, working out how long it will take to print gives you your deadline for sign off.

The level-of-effort could be 20-40 hours a month for a monthly e-newsletter. The table illustrates a monthly production schedule:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Send solicitation email</td>
<td>4 weeks prior to publishing date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article and picture deadline</td>
<td>2 week prior to publishing date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Format e-newsletter</td>
<td>8 days prior to publishing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial Manager review</td>
<td>7 days prior to publishing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copy writer review</td>
<td>6 days prior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Manager review</td>
<td>4 days prior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publish</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Some things to keep in mind when creating a production schedule:

- Allow plenty of time to produce your first edition as this always takes longer.
- Plan out a production schedule for the whole year; the e-newsletter team will be aware of any deadlines ahead of time. Set up repeating calendar reminders on Outlook.
- In case the main team members of the e-newsletter production team are out, ensure there is a second member to handle the responsibilities.
- Plan for any risk such as articles that need to be rewritten or compliance procedures.
- Plan to have a final copy 24-48 hours before publishing.
Create/receive content

Work out what your stories will be

• What will be the lead story and how will you create a hierarchy for the rest?

• Will you have a regular editorial piece from the same person – or invite different people to front the material?

• Invite people to contribute, but be aware that you will need to edit the material into suitable copy
  • Encourage your audience/network to act as contributors.

• Encourage stories/ the story-telling style. Readers will be more empathetic and relate to the content
Design your e-newsletter, review and send!

Keep the design simple and easy for the reader to navigate

• Make headings into links because readers skim them and will click on them if it’s of interest to them
• Design your email for the email preview pane. Up to 80% of emails are read and actioned in the preview pane
• Be aware of disability considerations – size of text, alt tags on images, colored backgrounds, etc

Test your email before you send it
Send a copy to your team
Check all the links work – and go to the right place – before you send it

Thinks carefully about your subject line
What will encourage people to open your email, rather than consigning it to the recycle bin?
Determine the best time to send your e-newsletter. It will depend on your audience
Measure the effectiveness of the e-newsletter

Communications strategies should be reviewed and adjusted constantly. While they may seem small, adjustments to subject lines or color combinations can make a big difference in the way a message is received.

- Recorded number of opens
- Recorded number of click-throughs
- General increase in web-traffic to your website around the time of the e-newsletters dispatch (allow a week)
- Record the number of ways your contacts have interacted with you
Common e-newsletter Mistakes

Top mistakes of e-newsletters:

• The audience isn’t considered – consider what the reader would like to receive

• There is a misunderstanding of how people engage with online communities
  - Poor signposting for further information (readers generally prefer web links, not attachments)
  - Inappropriate personality

• The publishing frequency is inconsistent – either too often or too infrequent

• The two-way nature of e-communications is not recognized – need to offer a “reply” or “contact” option

• There is potential overkill – the risk of alienating contacts, if they receive too many emails. Limit the number you send and monitor the number of “unsubscribes”
Questions and Answers