



What We've Got Here Is A Failure To Communicate

Originally Published: Inc.com

Many firms suffer from poor communications. It's my theory is that too few firms have the necessary communications program in place to do it well. Take the following steps to develop an effective communications program plan:



1. **Delineate your objectives** – Determine what you expect to gain from your communications program. Objectives could range from enhancing service delivery and improving staff loyalty to gaining a bigger marketplace influence or upgrading relations with the media and regulatory entities.
2. **Baseline your current communication practices** – Once you know your objectives, perform a communications audit and evaluate how your business communicates. This characterization should involve: brainstorming with staff, interviewing senior leaders and surveying customers, suppliers and distributors with the sole purpose of discovering how, when, why and where your people communicate and message for, and about, your business.
3. **Determine your key audiences** – List all the audiences that the firm might want to contact, attempt to influence, or serve. At a minimum, these will likely include customers, staff, industry groups, business partners, and the media.

4. **Translate these audience sectors into specific projects and programs aimed at delivering information in the best ways possible to each group** – You'll need to consider your baseline results (as determined earlier) and map that against available human and financial resources, of course. But, by crafting initiatives for each group, you'll be much better positioned to achieve your Communication Program's objectives.

5. **Establish a timeline for execution** – With the initiatives (which comprise your Communications Program) identified, it's time to craft a calendar grid that outlines when each effort will begin and be accomplished. Group the projects and programs into 18 month intervals (what I like to call "Implementation Plateaus"). This enables your organization to better understand what will be done when to improve its communications infrastructure.

6. **Estimate costs at an implementation plateau-level** – By "chunking" the work effort into 18 month intervals and giving an estimate of that total investment, you can shift dollars as needed among the initiatives that make up a given implementation plateau. This provides some wiggle room for your organization as it evolves its communications strategies over time.

7. **Begin to execute and evaluate** – Shape a method for measuring results into each project / program plan that you launch. Be sure to track project / program progress on a monthly basis and report it back to your senior management sponsors as you evolve each effort.

To close, a solid Communications Program plan requires about 60-90 days to complete. Once in place, though, with the proper level of executive commitment and maintenance you will have a communications asset that can be kept in sync with your organizational advancement for years to come.

If you like this article, please subscribe to my column and you'll never miss another thought piece!

Originally published at: inc.com