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COMMUNICATION HANDBOOK

A Practical Guide for
Adventist Communicators & Ministry Leaders

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Table of Contents

COMMUNICATION ESSENTIALS	3
1. What Is the Role of Communication?.....	5
2. How to Develop a Strategic Communication Plan.....	7
COMMUNICATION BEST PRACTICE	11
3. How to Lead Local Church Communication.....	13
4. Rethink Your Brand to Increase Community Awareness.....	17
5. Why the Seventh-day Adventist Logo is Vital to Our Mission.....	19
6. Craft a Message for Every Generation.....	25
7. How to Improve Community Perception of Your Church.....	29
8. 20 Ideas to Increase Attendance at Your Next Event.....	32
9. A Step-by-Step Guide to Maximize Communication for Your Next Event.....	34
10. How to Get Your News in the News.....	38
11. How to Find Great Stories.....	40
12. 10 Great Newsletter Story Ideas.....	42
13. How to Become a Skilled Interviewer.....	44
14. 9 Tips for Writing a News Story.....	49

Look for this symbol  to watch corresponding videos by some of the handbook authors at columbiaunion.org/communicationresources.

15. Tips for Great Photos	56
16. Keep Calm and Communicate in a Crisis.	63
17. How to Avoid Violating a Copyright	65
COMMUNICATION DIGITAL STRATEGIES	67
18. You Can Be a Digital Evangelist.	69
19. How to Create an Engaging New Website (or Refresh Your Own).	76
20. How to Grow Your Church Using Social Media.	85
21. Grow and Mobilize Your Digital Audience on a Budget.	89
22. Do's and Don'ts for Building Your Social Media Presence	91
23. How to Engage Your Audience With Videos	93
24. How to Create a Must-Read Email Newsletter	97
COMMUNICATION RESOURCES	101
25. 12 Copyediting Tips Worth Remembering	103
26. How to Write Common Religious and Adventist Terms	108
 Graphic and Photo Credits	 110

Dear Colleagues,

When the children of Israel set out on the road to the Promised Land, God provided seven things to facilitate their journey:

He provided them the gift of His *presence*; a *way* through the water and the wilderness; *direction* through the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night; *leadership* through Moses and the elders of each tribe; *resources* for daily sustenance and strength; practical *guidelines* through the commandments; and a *vision* of the wonderful plans He had for their future.

The children of Israel aren't the only ones who needed God's provisions; we need them too. As communication ministry leaders, we need all of these accommodations to be effective in our work to advance the mission of Jesus Christ.

As members of the team tasked with telling the Seventh-day Adventist story locally and globally, we have a great opportunity to help God's people remain focused on reaching the Promised Land.

To help in your journey, we invited a group of experienced communicators in our field to share what they've learned on a variety of topics. Wherever you serve, we pray this resource will inspire and support your efforts to lead communication with courage and excellence.

In His Service,



Celeste Ryan Blyden

Project Coordinator and Editor

P.S. We've also created an online video series you can access for free at columbiaunion.org/communicationresources. Look for this symbol  to know which topics are also available as a video presentation.

COMMUNICATION ESSENTIALS

When embarking on the journey to communication effectiveness and excellence, don't leave home without a GPS—Goal-oriented Practical Strategy. It will make all the difference in getting you on the road to success and making sure everyone on your team is moving in the same direction.



What Is the Role of Communication?

By Celeste Ryan Blyden

Communication is the right arm of every effective organization. Whether it's a local church, school, large health care network, century-old conference or union office or a newly created ministry, communication is a vital part of organizational success. Communicators perform myriad functions and services, including, but not limited to:

- 1. News and Information** – Keeping members connected and informed about church, school or organizational activities, using every available avenue.
- 2. Public Relations** – Helping to shape our global brand by telling our story locally, building relationships with our publics and sharing our message points consistently and effectively.
- 3. Design/Branding** – Creating, monitoring (for consistency) and protecting the visual image of our organization and all its entities.
- 4. Media Relations** – Pitching stories and ideas to public media, handling media inquiries and representing the Seventh-day Adventist Church as a spokesperson.
- 5. Social Media** – Using Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and numerous other digital platforms to share news and information, promote events, monitor your organizational brand, field questions and share resources and inspiration.



Celeste Ryan Blyden serves as vice president for Strategic Communication and Public Relations for the Columbia Union Conference.

Communication is the right arm of every effective organization. ■

6. Advertising and Promotion – Assisting with development, wordsmithing, design and implementation of marketing strategies that speak to specific target audiences.

7. Strategic Planning – Developing communication initiatives and materials that help the organization fulfill and effectively communicate its mission, vision and strategic goals.

8. Training and Mentoring – Providing annual training for local church communication leaders, and mentoring or providing internships for students and graduates who need experience.

9. Crisis Management/Crisis Communication – Preparing for and helping the organization communicate effectively in crisis situations.

10. Media Production – Producing videos, podcasts, e-newsletters, magazines and more that share news, mission stories or reports with members.

11. Teamwork – Playing an active role in the leadership team of your organization by lending ideas and input; solving problems; writing, editing and wordsmithing content; and helping to share the organization's story with its many target audiences.

That's a lot! Where to begin?

First, identify your target audiences and how to reach them.

Second, outline measurable action steps, and tackle them one at a time, as time and budget allow.

Third, regularly evaluate and report on progress.

How to Develop a Strategic Communication Plan

By Doug Walker

A conversation between Lewis Carroll's Cheshire Cat and the adventurous Alice is popularly paraphrased, "If you don't know where you're going, any road will get you there."

I've been there. Possibly you have too. You're careening from deadline to deadline, crisis to crisis, juggling last-minute requests from the boss, then on to the next deadline. And you ask yourself, "Where are we going? And will this vicious cycle ever end?"

Is your communication work pressing toward some particular mark? Or are you wandering the wilderness in circles?

If you have a strategic communication plan, you'll know.

A strategic communication plan is a road map that guides you toward a desired destination. I like to think of it as a point on the horizon that your ministry team has agreed to strive toward. The road map clearly displays the route you've chosen to take to your destination on time, on budget and on purpose.

You Don't Set the Mark Yourself

Any strategic communication plan begins with your organization's overall strategic plan. In fact, a strategic communication plan exists simply to advance the organization's overall plan. If there's not a formal



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strategic plan in place, don't worry. OK, worry—every ministry and organization should definitely have a strategic plan. But if there isn't, is there a consensus around two or three goals you want to achieve in the next year or two? A mission statement might be a good start. Do you have one? Who knows about it?

With a prioritized list of no more than three goals in hand, you can begin your strategic communication planning.

First Things First

You may be tempted to organize your communication plan around various communication platforms. "We need to redesign our website," someone might say. "Shouldn't we be on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram?" someone else asks. "The pastor ought to be blogging," another might suggest. All of these assertions may be correct, and they might be good ideas. Or not. How do you know? Start with your target audience. Ask yourself, "Who are we trying to reach?" We're not looking for broad answers here, like, "everyone" or "the general public." Be specific about demographics, needs, location, etc.

Next, once you identify who you need to reach, ask yourselves what you want them to think and feel and do when you engage them with your message? Create your message with the answer to these questions. Your message should be relevant, concise and memorable. It should be comprised of three, maybe four points your entire team can rattle off reflexively and that your audience can repeat back to you if asked.

Only when you answer these questions are you ready to think about how and where to reach your target audience. Do they watch TV or live stream content? Do they listen to the radio or subscribe to podcasts? Are they on Facebook or Pinterest, or do they surf the web?

Timing is Everything

In your planning, schedule messaging themes that link to points on the calendar.

A strategic communication plan is a road map that guides you toward a desired destination. ■

You might focus on themes around forgiveness in January, salvation during the Easter season, family togetherness during vacation months or civic activism during your state's legislative session. Use your calendar as a communication planning tool. Develop messages for all of your target audience segments and across all of your communication platforms. Draft them in advance. On social media platforms, you can even program them for future release along your strategic timeline.

If Anything Can Go Wrong ...

No strategic communication plan is complete without a plan for how to communicate during a crisis. Again, let the audience you're targeting guide you. You don't know what crisis will develop, but you have a good idea who you'll need to contact when it does. Who needs to be reached first? What's the best way to reach them? Who are the back-up contacts?

Plan Vs. Planning

Finally, the point of strategic communication planning is not to have a nice formal plan to place on your shelf; the point is to do the strategic thinking it takes to get the plan on paper and implement it. But don't be rigid; think of it as a living document. Update it as ideas for improvement occur to you, or as you navigate organizational changes and needs.

Happy planning!

