



Top 10 Tips: Creating Successful Communications

You may want more people to attend the event you're planning. Or support your idea. Or join your group. Whatever the purpose, whatever medium, using these 10 tips will help ensure your message is received as intended – and within your budget.

1. **Know your goals.** It's common for people to start their communications project at the *end*. They'll say they want a brochure or a letter or a video – without fully understanding what they want their communications project to accomplish. Before you begin, take time to understand your situation. Identify the key problems you want your communication problem to address. Outline your goals. Quantify results if you can. Then, and only then, will you be ready to start your project.
2. **Know your audience.** If you remember anything, remember this – successful communications hinge on how well you connect to your audience – and the people you're "talking" to may not be anything like you. Take time to get to know your audience. Identify who are they and where to they live. Are they young or old, new to the area or longtime citizens? What about educational, religious or cultural background? What are their most pressing concerns or deepest held values? What motivates them – or turns them off? What will persuade them to accept, what you have to say? Answers to questions like these will help you use the right tone, the right theme and right language.
3. **Know your budget and your deadline.** There's no such thing as a free lunch. Producing communications – from writing to printing to mailing – costs money. It helps to start a project knowing what you have to spend and having a firm deadline. When resources are limited – and they always are – eliminating mistakes, do-overs and rush charges are key.
4. **Keep it simple.** Short one or two syllable words and short sentences help create clear and concise communications. If you must include technical terms or acronyms, make sure you explain or define those words. As a rule of thumb, write to an 8th grade reading level or less. Most word processing programs contain tools that measure reading level. Once you finish a draft, edit it – and see how many unnecessary words you can remove or long sentences you can shorten.

5. **Use active verbs and conversational language.** In the English language, verbs contain the power. Use active verbs, rather than inactive verbs (like *is*, *are*, *was*, and *were*), whenever possible to strengthen the impact of your message. Talking to your audience in more informal and personal way also helps your message connect to them. Remember you're not writing an essay for school; it's okay to use contractions, phrases, and conversational English in your writing.
6. **Include necessary information.** Your piece should answer journalism's basic questions – who, what, where, when, why and how. If you're launching an event, include complete details; day and date; time; location including street address; directions, if needed; contact information, etc. Consider setting this apart from other parts of the message by putting it in a text box, highlighting key detail in bold, or setting it apart with bullets.
7. **Point out the benefits.** Think of communications piece as your sales pitch. It must propel them into action. Since facts and emotional appeals generally don't motivate people to take the next step, tell your audience what's in it for them. How will they benefit or others benefit from doing what you want them to do? If benefits are numerous, pick the top three – people are more likely to remember them.
8. **Use graphics, pictures or catchy phrases.** People learn in many ways. Breaking copy up by using bullet points and short phrases, text boxes, illustrations, or pictures can aid reading and enhance comprehension. So can a catchy phrase, a jingle or to enhance your message. Sometimes a picture tells a story or conveys a message more effectively than words.
9. **Coordinate your communications.** One communications piece seldom gets your message out all on its own. Often, you need to use several different communications tools as well as different message to different audience to accomplish your biggest outcomes. If you're considering a larger-scale campaign or effort, take time to map out a communications strategy and timetable so that your overall message is coordinated and consistent.
10. **Check and recheck your work.** Proof your product before it's printed or mailed. Try reading the text backwards to avoid "seeing" word that isn't there. Better yet, have another person who is less familiar with your work proof it for you. Because if you didn't see it before it goes to press, you'll certainly notice it afterwards.