



Communication Audit and SWOT Analysis

Before you begin building your strategic communication plan, you first need to perform an analysis of your current communication situation and efforts. A communication audit will seem time-consuming, but it will be very beneficial once you begin building your strategic communication plan, or campaign.

Step I: Identify Your Issues

The reason you create a communication plan is because you have an issue (or issues) that you want to resolve. They may not be intense crisis situations, but there are problems that need to be solved with communication. You need to identify those issues. Make a list of the issues that you believe your school/system faces. They usually fall in these categories:

- 1) Internal issues (issues involving students, teachers or staff members)
- 2) Social issues (issues concerning public opinion or your reputation)
- 3) Economic issues
- 4) Political/regulatory issues
- 5) Competitive issues (issues involving competing schools or other entities)

For each issue, identify the internal (within the school/system) and external (outside the school/system) factors that affect it, for better or for worse.

Step II: Identify and Prioritize Your Audiences

Next, you must determine whom you communicate with on a regular basis.

- 1) Create a list of every group of people that you communicate with on a regular basis (i.e. students, parents, teachers, board members, etc.)
- 2) For each audience, as detailed as possible, answer four questions:
 - a) What are the characteristics of this audience? (Any demographic and psychographic information that you can find would be beneficial here.)
 - b) What is this audience's communication situation? (What does this audience want, need, expect from you?)
 - c) What is your current relationship with this audience? (How do you impact this audience? What is your current reputation with this audience?)
 - d) How does this audience get news and information? (Not just from you, but in general)
- 3) Based on this information, group your audiences into two groups: primary audiences (audiences that will receive most of your communication because of relevance, importance, etc.) and secondary audiences.

Step III: Evaluate Your Existing Communication

Gather all your previous communication, print (news releases, fliers, brochures, newsletters, etc.), electronic (radio PSAs, television spots) and digital (social media outlets, blogs, websites). Answer the following questions:

- 1) How did you inform your audiences about school/system business? What worked? What didn't?
- 2) Were your messages and visuals consistent?
- 3) What were your key messages? Did they come across effectively to your audiences?
- 4) Did you successfully tell your story in your communication efforts?



Next, and this will take some outside work, send a quick five-question open-ended survey to members of each of your audiences:

- 1) Based on your knowledge of our school/system, what would you consider to be our strengths? What would you consider to be our weaknesses?
- 2) What are the best sources of news and information that you are receiving from our school/system?
- 3) Do you believe that there are barriers that are keeping our school/system from communicating with you effectively?
- 4) If you could grade our communication efforts, what grade would you give us?
- 5) What are some things that we could do immediately that you believe would help us communicate better?

Step IV: Evaluate Your Media Coverage

Take a look at any press coverage that your school/system has received, including television features and interviews, news articles, radio interviews, etc. Answer the following questions:

- 1) How often are your stories picked up in the news?
- 2) Are your key messages being promoted?
- 3) Are you reaching your target audiences?
- 4) What media opportunities do you believe you're missing?

Step V: Build Your SWOT Analysis

Based on all the information you have collected in the first four steps, you should do a SWOT analysis of your communication. This chart consists of eight parts:

	Strengths These are the positive characteristics within your school that give you an advantage when communicating.	Weaknesses These are the negative characteristics within your school that put you at a disadvantage when communicating.
Opportunities These are the positive characteristics that exist outside your school that you can take advantage of when communicating.	Strengths/Opportunities Intersection How will your strengths help you take advantage of your opportunities?	Weaknesses/Opportunities Intersection How will your weaknesses keep you from taking advantage of your opportunities?
Threats These are the negative characteristics that exist outside your school that will hinder your success when communicating.	Strengths/Threats Intersection How will your strengths help you counter the threats to your success?	Weaknesses/Threats Intersection How could your weaknesses keep you from overcoming the threats to your success?