



THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND

Diocese of St Edmundsbury
and Ipswich

How to prepare a communications plan

A communication plan will help you to communicate to your target audiences in a clear and concise way. It should give your communications structure both for overall top 'corporate' communications through to individual campaigns.

A communication plan should include:

1. Aim
2. Objectives
3. WHO? Target Audience
4. HOW? Strategy
5. WHAT? The Message
6. WHERE? Which communication method
7. WHEN? A timing plan
8. WHAT? What resources/budget is available
9. Review

Aim

What is overall goal. Try to limit this to a single aim that the activity needs to deliver.

An example aim could be to grow our congregation with younger audiences.

Objectives

Having established a primary aim you can break this down into objectives clearly setting our outcomes and impact. These objectives can be SMART – Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timed.

Example objectives:

- To run one youth event in the next year
- To hold a monthly families service and have 3 families attending
- To raise awareness of our 2020 family Christingle service so that attendance reaches 20.

WHO? Target Audience

Who are you trying to reach? Where are they? These are key questions to ask and then you can target your communications directly to them. Don't just think about the audience – think about who may influence them too – for example the audience may be young people or children but the influencers (often the decision makers) are parents, peers, teachers, grandparents etc.

HOW? Strategy

Think about the whole campaign and project you are offering. If it is an event, project, activity or if you want to provide general information about your church and the good work you do – think about the whole campaign and how it relates to others in your church. Setting the scene and understanding the purpose of your activities is really good practice as it shows specific projects are part of your overarching strategy.

WHAT? The message

A clear message is key to any communication. Offer a concise message highlighting key information: what it is, when it is, how much it is, where it is.

Do not forget to include a 'Call to Action' – as this is what you want people to do next. Do you want people to email you, come along, visit your website, sign up or phone you?

Be clear in your writing – avoid jargon, be consistent, be engaging. Tell stories and create materials that are memorable or shareworthy! Easier said than done!

WHERE? The communication method

Looking at your target audience and your budgets may help you decide what communication methods are best for your campaign/project.

Limited budget:

We would suggest you use your local magazines and Facebook pages to start with alongside networks such as schools, related groups (such as those using a church hall for example). We also recommend the free advertising services run by the local newspapers or online event advertisers such as <https://www.visitsuffolk.com/whats-on/>. These tend to work best for local events.

If your event is 'high profile' or has appeal to those across the diocese send the information to communications@cofesuffolk.org by the Tuesday of that week and we will do our best to promote this in eNews.

If your event is something a little different and of interest to wider audiences (beyond the Christian community perhaps) the Diocesan office can help in terms of getting the profile covered on wider media such as Radio Suffolk or in the papers. This can work before the event to promote it or afterwards as part of our reputational PR. If you have a project like this in mind, do get email communications@cofesuffolk.org. To see some examples of the type of things we produce do have a look at the news on our website.

If you have no budget consider all the free activities such as producing a press release, social media posts, use of your website, and for larger events in the Diocesan eNews, posting adverts in local newspapers online events facilities.

Small budget

If you have a little budget consider cost effective activities such as producing your own posters and printing them on your own printer an advert in a local parish magazine. Boosting a post on Facebook can reach new audiences with small financial investments.

If you have a larger budget you could consider advertising in local press and magazines, sometimes an advert will include free editorial, bus backs, radio, and the complete mix of media available.

Remember that it is considered that a person would need to see an advert of communication seven times before they will act on it. Also remember that a person will need to be invited to church 56 times before they are likely to attend!

These two factors highlight the quantity of communication required. Try not to be repetitive tweak the message or rotate messages so people do not get bored by your advert or their interest may be piqued by a slightly different headline.

Media sources include:

Personal selling – do not forget the power of being personally invited to an event/activity. Ask your congregation to promote your activities for you!

Direct mailing – this could be leaflets handed out in services, posting a leaflet through peoples letterbox, popping a leaflet inside another publication or asking a local retailer for example to pop a leaflet in their shopping bags or inside the menu in a local café. Dropping in leaflets to the local school for pupils school bags.

Advertising – traditional advertising in a magazine, newspaper, radio, bus backs require creatively designed advert to catch the eye. Posters on noticeboards, for schools, for local shops and town noticeboards. Produce adverts on social media these can be boosted with paid for promotion on line.

Public Relations – consider writing a press release and sending it to local publications for free publicity. See our help guide on writing a good press release available on our website.

Sales Promotion – highlight if an activity is free – or includes free drinks or food, consider offering parents/carers come free, or discounts for siblings. Consider including entry to a competition or prizes will be offered. Using financial and non-financial incentives can really work!

WHEN? A timing plan

Set a realistic timing plan for the milestones you need to achieve to implement the communications plan. This may include agree the project, decide what communication is needed, produce first drafts of materials, finalise production of materials, printing time, delivery, availability of media bookings, advert deadlines, date of activity. It is always best to add in some flexibility to the schedule.

WHAT? What resources/budget are available

A key element of any communications plan is how much money do I have to spend and how much will it cost? You will need to research the costs for printing posters, leaflets or placing adverts in publications - be realistic in any budgeting of costs.

Don't forget to consider the cost of yours and others time – it is easy to forget the resources of time – have you got the people to run the campaign, who is available to help what are they skilled at? how much time is needed? This may be to run the communications campaign to running the project itself.

Review

It is important to review how well you thought a communications plan went. You can look at results from social media – shares/likes, and although some activities can be difficult to review, you can look at attendance or take up figures for events. It is also worth asking people – Did you see my poster? Did you like my advert?

Reviewing is an important part of the plan as it will help you do a better job next time!

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