

Crafting Compelling Messages

in an Increasingly Complex World



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The complexity of today's business environment requires solid messaging strategies. If companies are not dealing with financial issues, they likely find themselves challenged by a changing regulatory and political environment, a scaled back workforce with a waning morale, fewer facilities and resources yet increasing competition for consumer attention and preference. In addition, customer expectations are higher and the demand for transparency is stronger.

Never has it been more important for companies to get their messages across.

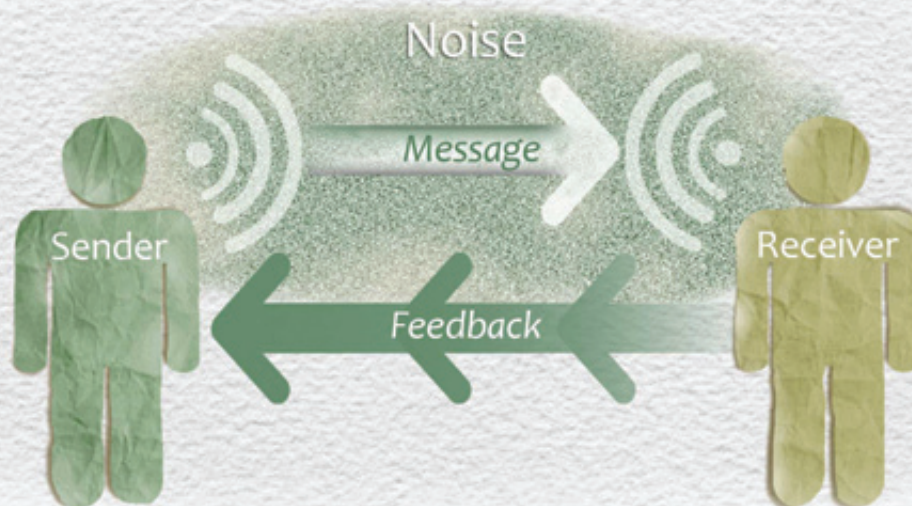
Leaders are leaning on public relations professionals both inside and outside their companies to help them develop effective strategies and messages for a wide variety of difficult situations that resonate with a lengthening list of stakeholders, not just shareholders.

With an expanding opportunity to shape and actually enhance organizational reputation, we

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must ensure our messages do indeed resonate. It's tempting to rely on traditional approaches to messaging that worked well in the past when the more linear model of

The Traditional Communications Cycle



sender-receiver communication ruled the day. But in the new “CommUniverse™,” communication often occurs without the involvement of the organization itself. Compounding the complexity is the exploding number of digital channels that have given rise to countless new communities and further enabled 24/7 conversations – and many times confusion – about companies.

Effective messaging is not as easy as it used to be, particularly when the chips are down and the stakes are high. Many times messages are designed to respond to a situation and simply stop, falling far short of communicating what organizations need and stakeholders want from conversations.

Establishing a process for

developing a more strategic approach to messaging can help public relations professionals prepare their organizations to respond in a manner that will not only resonate with stakeholders but more importantly accomplish the organization’s larger goals. Following are several points for communicators to consider when crafting organizational messages.

CommUniverse™



What needs to be considered?

What needs to be accomplished?

- What are leadership's goals with stakeholders?
- What are the needs and interests of stakeholders that must be fulfilled to help the organization succeed?
- How well do leaders believe they are doing in the eyes of stakeholders?
- What are the perceptions, concerns or demands of stakeholders?
- What happened: Facts, figures, dates, locations, times?
- What has been or is being done to correct or alleviate the situation?
- How did the organization attempt to prevent or mitigate risk or injury, to solve the problem, and will prevent the problem in the future?
- What are the relevant issues in the bigger business environment?
- Is something similar happening to competitors or just your organization?
- Was this something we caused or that happened to us by external forces?
- Do you have a track record of problems in this area?
- What is the level of risk/severity?
- How important is this to individual stakeholders as well as in the larger scheme of things?
- Could this situation escalate at a later time? If so what could trigger that?
- What are the opportunities with or potential negative impacts on: people, the environment, facilities, brands, sales, business units and overall reputation?
- Who needs to be communicated with and in what order?

NOTE: Start with the stakeholders most impacted by the issue and work outward in concentric circles. The only exception to this rule is employees should always be informed first when it becomes a public issue.

- When should you respond?
- What is the opposition doing?
- How long can you wait? How quickly should you jump in?
- How available and prepared is your spokesperson(s)?

Align messages with organizational goals

Consider the status of existing relationships

Clarify what has happened

Explain what is being done

Demonstrate organizational accountability such as processes, procedures, safe guards, best practices or commitments

Consider the context

Properly prioritize the potential for risk

Identify impacts

Preserve relationships with key stakeholders

Earn trust through timely response

What needs to be considered?

- What specifically do stakeholders need to know?
- How much can the organization share with whom?
- How are stakeholders going to respond?
- What questions will they have?
- Who thinks differently than you do on this issue?
- How will detractors criticize us?
- Is there common ground to be found?
- Who are your subject matter experts?
- Who has credibility with stakeholders?
- Have they been trained?
- Are there third party spokespersons you can use who could add a new dimension to the discussion through credentials, degrees or credible objectivity?
- How should the message align with the larger corporate story?

What needs to be accomplished?

Anticipate stakeholder reactions

Acknowledge different viewpoints

Present a credible and reasonable voice to stakeholders

Remind stakeholders about who the organization is and why they should care

When it's well done, strategic messaging can be a powerful tool in today's complex "CommUniverse™" that not only helps the organization respond to situational needs but leverages the opportunity to accomplish larger organizational goals. 🗣️



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Elise has more than 20 years of experience in the field of public relations, working on both the agency and corporate side of the business. She founded Mitchell Communications Group in 1995 and has built it to be a highly respected, award-winning integrated communications and organizational development firm serving some of the world's largest companies and best known brands.

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