

O Communication

Overview

Timely and effective communication is one of the more significant 'measurements' of a healthy curling organization. Communication takes place at the club and individual level and both are important to success - no matter the size!

A good communication includes:

- External communications: from the club to the public, media, potential sponsors, and government departments.
- Internal communications: within the 'family' such as members, clients, suppliers, partners, staff, and volunteers.

There are many ways to communicate and some are more complex than others. In addition, individuals responsible for communication at your club, need to ensure the message is not only sent, but received. Most activity that a club conducts has a communication element. Whether you are promoting a new program or service or an event, communication is critical.

For example, if you find yourself facing issues or problems, you need a communication strategy to resolve it. If you are going through significant changes you need to communicate this to your members

Why communicate

Our curling clubs need to communicate frequently, openly, and consistently. Why?

- To inform. You may need to let the public know who you are, what you can do for them, what they can do to help you, or even just how to get in touch.
- To build understanding, ownership or change in policy. You may want to encourage others to think, act or feel in a certain way to, for example to consider banning smoking. Remember, what you think as a Board is not important. What is important are the needs of your customers and an effective communication process will go a long way in helping you develop policy. A good communication plan will also prevent misunderstandings. Again, you ensure good communications by putting yourself in your customer's position, paying attention to their needs and getting to know them. Groups with a weak communication program are prone to conflicts and morale problems.
- To present a point of view. Often, this is all you need to accomplish your goal.
- To establish and promote the club's goals.
- To develop and implement plans (e.g. membership, revenue generation, recruiting and retaining volunteers)

Examples of those you communicate with

- Members, Clients & Customers
- Partners & Stakeholders
- Staff & Volunteers
- Mass Communication Representatives:
 - Newspaper editors and publishers, key reporters
 - Radio and TV station managers, news directors, key reporters and announcers.
- Business People:
- Government Officials and Elected Representatives:
 - Local MP and MPP
 - Civic Leaders:
- Official of chambers of commerce or boards of trade
- Farm organizations
- Community service organizations
- Officers of service clubs
- Veterans associations
- Community action groups
- Minority group leaders
- Youth group leaders
- Sport, recreation and active living groups and their leaders
- Members of school boards
- Educators:
 - School superintendents
 - Principals & Teachers
 - Parent Councils

Communication Planning

The communication plan has been described in a number of ways, including:

- foundation on which to base decisions and create ideas
- means to focusing on where you want to be and what needs to be done to get here
- a tool for discovering opportunities, optimizing challenges and initiating change.
- it is a straightforward, step-by-step process that will help you summarize what you want to say to your intended audiences and map out how you will deliver that message.
- keep in mind, the same logical process is used to launch a new consumer product on a national basis can also be used to inform parents about a bake sale to raise funds for their child's school trip.

The Six Steps of Communication Planning

Step One - the Audit: Taking Stock of Your Current Situation

Start your communication planning with a review of your current communication activities, and gather some pertinent information. This can be an extensive as commissioning a public opinion poll or as simple as talking on an informal basis with your clients or staff, volunteers or members. It also means asking the following questions about your current situation and what affects it:

1. What are your organization's strengths and weaknesses? Having a clear picture of what your organization wants to achieve will help determine a good course of action for your communications.

2. What resources do you already have? Information, people, money, time, and support from your community and the public are all valuable assets. Determining which assets you have and which ones you might need will help you decide on the scope of your communication program.
3. Is there any current research that will help you? Do you need to do any research?
4. Has this type of communication activity taken place before? If so, what was the result?
5. Where are your opportunities? Perhaps the local newspaper is always interested in your activities. Or maybe there is an annual meeting coming up where you can present your messages.
6. What are your major communication barriers? Perhaps you don't have a lot of money to spend on communications so you will need to look for low cost opportunities.

Step Two - Setting Goals and Objectives

Define your goals and objectives of what you are trying to achieve. This will help you focus on the who, why, when, and now of your communication planning.

- Goals are the overall changes you wish to cause.
- Objectives are the short-term, measurable steps you take to reach your goal.

For example, if your goal is to increase community support for your club, your objectives might be:

- increase funding from the business community
- encourage positive media coverage of your activities
- inform the community of the benefits of community development
- achieve support for your activities from local civic leaders.

Your objectives should form a clear statement of what it is you are trying to do. They should be: specific, realistic and listed in order of importance. They should also be measurable. When you evaluate your communication plan, you will measure your results against your objectives.

Step Three - Determining Target Audiences

The next step in the planning process is to determine your target audiences by listing the groups with whom you need to communicate and analyzing each group. When choosing the people or groups you need to influence, it may be helpful to think about the many different ways you can describe them. For example, your target audience may be couples 24-35, but it could be more helpful to know that your target audience are couples between 24-35 who are car owners, parents, and who have joined recreation programs in your community

The more clearly you can define your audience, the easier it will be to make choices about your messages and communication vehicles. When analyzing each group, consider:

- What do they already know about your organization?
- How are they likely to react to your message and why?
- What are some factors influencing the audience that receives your message? For example: literacy levels or multicultural differences?
- Are there any difficulties you might have in communicating with each group?

Step Four - Key messages

Taking into consideration your objectives and target audience, it is now time to identify the essential idea or set of ideas that you want to communicate. Ask yourself:

- What does the audience already know about this issue or situation?
- What does the audience need to know?
- What do we want to tell the audience?

Now develop the message or messages you want your target audience to hear and believe. Write down each message in a simple, specific statement. Keep in mind, to motivate people, you must show them that you will meet their needs. A clear description of the benefits to your audiences will help ensure that your message is received, understood, and acted upon.

Step Five - Communications Strategy

Tactics: There are many communication vehicles available from which to choose. A number are listed below. Having done your communications analysis you will be able to narrow your choices to the communication vehicles that:

- will fit with the resources you already have
- is the most effective communication vehicles to reach your target
- will help you achieve your goals and deliver the outcomes you want.

Timing: Timing is another very important consideration when choosing your communication vehicles. You don't want your messages competing unnecessarily with other events.

Budget: Finally, there is the budget. Don't let a limited budget discourage you. There are many inexpensive ways to communicate. Determine the scope of the budget needed for communications, and the general co-ordination of information and its distribution.

Theme: Your communication plan may need a theme to tie it together. The theme line should be a short, punchy version of your main message and should be the link between all you activities and materials. For example: "There's no taste like home" - Foodland Ontario slogan that promotes buying Ontario-grown food.

Step Six - Evaluation

How will you know if you are successful? Will the audiences receive the messages you intend to receive, or will they get an entirely different message? Evaluation helps you determine the value of your programs, services and activities. An organization's resources shouldn't be wasted on an activity that is not worth the investment of people, time or funds.

By evaluating your communication plan, you can learn how your plan worked with various audiences, which activities had the most impact, and which parts of the plan did not meet expectations.

Questions to ask when evaluating a program, activity or service (activity):

- Why did we decide to go this route in the first place?
- What has happened as a result of this strategy?
- Have we achieved the objective or results expected?
- Was the activity worth the investment of resources and effort?
- Are there any other ways we can achieve the same outcome in a more effective or efficient manner?
- How can we avoid repeating mistakes, and avoid oversights in the future?

Examples of Strategies for External Communications

<p>Print Materials (good for providing details)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brochures/pamphlets/publications - good communication tools if they are targeted to those who need the information and are open to the message • Posters - highly visible for a long time, can suggest a special occasion or event • Newsletters - a good communication tool when targeted carefully • Outdoor - good for mobile audiences • Transit ads - good for urban audiences • Fact sheets • PSA's, news releases <p>Government Relations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular contact with key officials • Add government officials/offices to your mailing list • Briefings/briefing documents 	<p>Media Relations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Radio - effective if carefully targeted • Television - effective in reaching broad target audiences, expensive • Regular contact with journalists • Mailing lists - must be well maintained • One on one interviews with the media • Meeting with editorial boards • News releases – print • Electronic releases - video, audio • News conferences • Talk shows • Information kits - background information, news release, Public Service Announcement (PSA's) - Cable television and radio often accept community PSA's. • Letters to the editor • Issues spokesperson - having someone to speak • about an issue or make an announcement • Feature articles
<p>Community Relations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mall displays - good consumer targeting, mix of • urban & rural • Direct mail - direct, expensive • Public speaking - very effective personal contact, needs time and commitment • AV presentation - provide a dramatic message • Personal contacts - effective, time consuming • Public meetings - bring people together, can • provide competition or opposition with a platform • Site tours - provide in-depth information, can eliminate suspicions • Educational opportunities - visit classrooms, • meet with teachers • Sponsorship opportunities 	<p>Organization/Corporate Communications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spokesperson • Speeches • Special events • Display • Trade shows or special client-group meetings • Annual and other reports • Annual meetings • Video's