

## **DFI Communications Plan**

### What Is a Communications Plan?

Communications include all written, spoken, and electronic interactions with your audiences. A communications plan puts in writing:

- agency objectives you want to accomplish with your communications,
- goals or program of work-methods by which agency objectives can be accomplished,
- audiences-people to whom your communications will be addressed,
- timetable, tools, and budget-what specific products you will produce to accomplish objectives, when those products will be developed, and how much they will cost,
- evaluation-how you will measure the results of your overall program.

### What Products Are Included in a Communications Plan?

A plan encompasses objectives, goals and tools for all communications, including, but not limited to:

- periodic print publications, annual reports
- online communications, (internet and intranet)
- documentation and manuals,
- meeting and conference materials,
- media and public relations materials,
- consumer materials, factsheets, brochures,
- legal and legislative documents,
- incoming communications, including reception procedures and voice mail,
- email messages between staff and mass emailing to employees or external audiences,
- agency identity materials, including logos, signage, print and packaging, invoices,
- surveys,
- certificates and awards,
- and speeches.

## When to Develop the Plan

The best time to develop your plan is in conjunction with your annual budgeting or organizational planning process.

## Where to Get Information

Data for the plan comes from five sources:

- your agency's vision and mission statement,
- a communication audit (that is, review of all materials currently being used),
- customer surveys and focus groups,
- discussions with employees and other department heads.

## How to Develop the Plan

Take the following steps to develop an effective communications plan:

1. Conduct a research-communications audit. Evaluate your current communications. To conduct your own audit, find out:

- what every employee is doing in the way of communication,
- what each communication activity is designed to achieve, and
- how effective each activity is.

To get the answers to these questions:

- brainstorm with staff,
- talk to department heads,
- survey customers (licensees and consumers) and
- host focus groups.

2. Define your objectives. After you've made an audit, define your overall communications objectives (that is, the results you want to achieve). These might include such objectives as:

- improve service to customers,
- achieve more uniform identity for materials,
- increase cost-savings per transaction,
- centralization of the communications effort,

- increased employee teamwork,
- improved employee retention and recruitment,
- improved product delivery,
- visibility for the agency, and
- influence on media, consumers, and other audiences.

3. Define your audience. List all the audiences that your company might want to contact, attempt to influence, or serve. Included on your list may be:

- customers (licensees), others in regulated industries
- legislators,
- general consumers, (may be split demographically)
- Other government entities - federal, state, regional, and local,
- suppliers, subcontractors,
- employees, field staff (as a separate group)
- prospective employees,
- educators, and
- the media.

4. Define your goals. With stated objectives-and considering available human and financial resources-develop your goals or program of work. Develop a comprehensive approach to achieving each objective.

5. Identify tools. Decide what tools will be used to accomplish the stated goals. These tools are the usual ones, plus any new ones we can think of - everything from a simple handout to a thick licensing manual to the Internet to a CD-ROM. Also forms, posters, report covers, software and web sites. Plan to brainstorm ideas with staff in a totally open session.

6. Figure costs. In order to select among the options available, develop cost estimates for each approach. Estimates are close enough to work within established budget limits so that you can make choices. Make projections based on less money in the budget. Later, more precise costs can be pinpointed.

7. Establish a timetable. Once objectives, goals, audiences, and tools have been identified, quantify the results into a calendar grid that outlines roughly

what projects will be accomplished and when. Separate objectives into logical time periods (monthly, weekly, etc.).

8. Evaluate results. Build into your plan a method for measuring results. Your evaluation might take the form of:

- a monthly report on work in progress,
- formalized reports for presentation at staff meetings,
- periodic briefings of the ADs,
- a year-end summary for the annual report.

Developing a written communications plan takes effort. Once in place, it should help give your day-to-day work a focus, help set priorities, provide a sense of order and control, protect against last-minute demands, and help you make sure you're doing the best possible job with the least amount of expense.