

## Building a Strategy, a Brand, and Marketing

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### Strategy

Through strategic communications, an organization tightly focuses its communications activities on achieving its goals. A group that communicates strategically takes into account:

- ❖ Its strengths and weaknesses
- ❖ Its long-term aims and short-term objectives
- ❖ Issues of timing and opportunity
- ❖ Projected benefits, costs, and risks of alternative courses of action

A strategically sound communications plan therefore recognizes the department, program, or project's pressing and horizon issues, its capacity to implement specific communication ideas, and how it can "work smarter, not harder." A group that doesn't take a strategic approach is at risk of falling into common traps:

- ❖ Failing to recognize the importance of its image, which influences the response of key constituencies
- ❖ Making the decision to focus on specific communication products, whether they are the best way to carry the message and reach target audiences or not, thereby misdirecting scarce resources
- ❖ Allocating communications resources in the ways it always has, without considering the relative advantages and disadvantages of alternative approaches, and, most importantly,
- ❖ Disseminating a vague message that is not audience-centered or carefully targeted.

The overarching strategy identifies the main communications activities that will be deployed, communication vehicles, key players, and some form of timeline. The strategy is not etched in stone and should lend itself to be revised as necessary.

Some sample overarching strategies are:

"Because we need to reach young people as well as the older population, we will focus not just on the local daily newspaper but also on the Department website and youth-access media, with all activities conducted by the communications officer in consultation with the senior management group. We will check monthly to make sure these sources are addressed opportunistically."

“Because our target is recent immigrants and migrant workers, we will reach out to Spanish language media and leaders of the local Puerto Rican and Mexican-American communities through regular meetings, frequent emails, development of joint statements from time to time, and dual-language tours of our facility, and we will develop a telephone hotline that is open from 8 AM until 8 PM every day of the week. All of these will be in place within 30 days. Nancy and Miguel will operate as the communications team and will distribute monthly updates for the next six months.”

“Because we need to reach as many area parents as possible with this walk-to-school campaign , we will use editorial board conferences, radio public service announcements, a kickoff news conference planned to maximize broadcast and print media coverage, high-profile student activities, and a visual image and tagline. All these will be put into effect on Sept. 15, with the communications consultant working closely with the deputy director and all major decisions cleared by the steering committee.”

## The Brand

Strategy is strongly linked to an often misunderstood concept, branding. Branding is about meaning: what does the name of the department, program, or project mean to key audiences? Some firms, organizations, and prominent individuals enjoy very positive brand identification, while others suffer from negative brand identification. If you think about it, you will come up with examples on both sides.

To illustrate, generally positive brand identities belong to Google, which is associated with technological innovation, integrity, reliability, and user-friendliness, and the U.S. Marine Corps, associated with courage, patriotism, strong individuals, and effectiveness. Similarly, the Red Cross is associated with volunteerism, readiness, impartiality, and competence.

In recent years, entities of all kinds have worked hard to create a solid brand. The brand becomes part-and-parcel of everything the entity does. It enhances visibility, which contributes to influence, helping the entity achieve its goals.

NACCHO is developing a brand identity for LHDs nationwide. This effort is needed, because local public health in the United States has long been overlooked, taken for granted, and misunderstood.

Not only LHDs but also specific local health projects, or coalitions, can benefit from a positive brand.

**Tip: Organize an Event:** Events garner publicity, solidify your team, and reinforce your brand—for example, a local summit, media conference, or workshop on blood pressure awareness could help establish a group’s identity as the “blood pressure experts.”

## Market Position

While a brand is absolute, market position is relative: It differentiates one entity from potential competitors. To develop a market position, a group should:

- ❖ “Scan the terrain” to identify other organizations or projects that could attract similar types of support in the same geographic area
- ❖ Compare its relative strengths and weaknesses with those of the identified organizations
- ❖ Decide what position it would like to occupy in the field, such as the official source of information, the broadest coalition or voice, the go-to source for news media, the largest recipient of grant funding, the most youth-friendly group, or the strongest link between clinicians and academics

The main challenge in developing a market position is to figure out how to maximize your position.

Examples of techniques for improving market position include:

- ❖ Preparing and distributing a fact sheet
- ❖ Sponsoring a public opinion survey and announcing the results
- ❖ Holding an inclusive “summit” conference or workshop
- ❖ Meeting regularly with key leaders in the community
- ❖ Cultivating relationships with health reporters
- ❖ Assembling a formidable team to develop grant proposals or entrepreneurship
- ❖ Setting up an advisory committee of young students
- ❖ Establishing a presence at a school of public health
- ❖ Serving as a consultant to a medical society or nursing association committee

Conduct this type of strategic exercise—developing ways to improve market position—from time to time, to stay ahead of the competition.

# Subliminal Marketing

On the other hand, to avoid spending a lot of time and scarce resources on branding and market position, here's a shortcut also known as subliminal marketing.

As a group, decide on one to three attributes to include in all communications. Examples of attributes include, but are not limited to, passion, consistency, science, quality, hope, babies, pain-free, wise decisions, wellness, confidence, family, disease prevention, and partnership. These one to three attributes should be mentioned in one way or another in all news releases, interviews, testimony, brochures, announcements, website updates, and other formal communications. This approach will convey a sense of what the organization, program, or project is about.