

## ***Communications for Small and Medium-Sized Businesses***

A communications strategy is essential for any organization that wants to build awareness of its services and products, educate constituents, develop and strengthen its brand, and support other business objectives. Taking a strategic approach to communications is as important for small and medium-sized businesses, as it is for the big guys. A few key steps can leverage your communications to produce meaningful benefits for your organization, no matter its size or industry.

- 1) *A Plan.* Having a workable, affordable and adaptable communications plan helps you follow a strategy aligned with your business goals. Most businesses have a website and social media presence, for example, but they may communicate in an arbitrary, generic or inconsistent manner. Are the messages and the medium you choose appropriate for the audiences you are trying to reach? Does your email marketing have a planned schedule? How do you know what is working and what isn't? A communications plan enables you to answer questions like these. It doesn't need to be formal or complex, but rather an operative document that guides your actions.
- 2) *Positioning.* A good starting point is to develop a positioning strategy and resulting statement, as they help define your organization and how you differ from competitors or others in your industry. You are expressing what your value is to customers/clients. What problems are you addressing? What need are you fulfilling? For example, "A's Italian Cafés offer award-winning organic, healthful pizza and Italian-inspired dishes for people along the Eastern Connecticut shoreline. Using fresh, local ingredients results in tasty as well as healthy and affordable meals." Communications content could include customer reviews, graphics illustrating health-related data on calories, fats, sodium, etc., visuals featuring farmers' market ingredients, stories about why the business started.
- 3) *Key Messaging.* Deriving from your positioning statement, key messages are essential points you want all your stakeholders to understand about you. They should be conveyed in all your communications whether digital, printed or spoken. Be consistent. You may emphasize different things to different audiences, but you want clarity and consistency in what you communicate. This is why it's important that your employees, ambassadors, influencers, volunteers, business partners or anyone else communicating about you hear the same information and, in turn, convey it themselves.
- 4) *Strategies and Tactics.* Your communications plan dictates specific steps to take, along with the content messaging, vehicles, and target audiences. Depending on what you want to achieve, timing and budget, typical communications elements may include a website, social media posts, email marketing, blogs, webinars, earned and paid media, print material – brochures, newsletters, flyers, ads -- events, speaking opportunities and more (or less).

The communications you undertake may be basic or multi-layered, but the point is to be strategic and thoughtful in what you do. The foundational steps outlined above can help make that happen.