

ROADMAP SERIES: COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES: TALKING THE TALK

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Yashasvini Rajeshwar is the Founder and CEO of AuxoHub, a Chennai-based social sector consultancy. She has several years of experience working in social sector organisations across the country, specifically contributing to their communications strategy and content. She also has over 12 years of experience as a freelance journalist, with bylines in publications including The Hindu.

Yashasvini started the session by stressing the importance of communications in the social sector, even while recognising that it is often ignored. In this session, Yashasvini explained what can be done to make communication more effective.

By way of introduction, she explained AuxoHub's attitude towards communication. Instead of seeing it as advertising, the team tries to work with their clients to give words to the work that they do. This helps the work speak for itself and makes sure on-ground work reaches the intended audience.

Yashasvini went about explaining the different reasons why organisations may communicate.

1. To make others understand the work they do: To pique interested in people about projects, communities and/or initiatives
2. To adhere to procedure: As a part of due process, such as annual reports, donor documentation etc.
3. To attract resources: To attract funders, volunteers, sponsors, grants, etc.
4. To document internal processes and procedures: To ensure organisational knowledge, lessons and learnings are recorded for generations to come

What makes for good communication?

For this section, she took an example from Swiggy's fourth birthday emailer, using the poster to illustrate good communication. She pointed out the factors that contributed to its effectiveness.

1. Use of logo and brand (Swiggy logo)
2. Use of colour patterns which is similar to brand (orange)
3. Use of language which is simple and fun (Happy Burpday!)

4. Use of words that involve the audience building conversation.(Eg: *You're* invited to the party, *we* couldn't have done it without you)
5. Use of communication channels to keep in touch, even outside of business relations (no call to order from Swiggy, instead invitation to “join the party”)

The second example she mentioned was the “Corona Song” which was trending on Youtube and other social media platforms. This is a Vietnamese song which is simple and has a catchy tune. Yashasvini used three frames from the song which portrayed why the song was an example for good communication.

- In the first frame, there is a boy and a girl in a living room watching news of Covid-19 on TV. The frame established a certain relatability. Having both a boy and a girl ensured basic diversity as well.
- The second frame introduced coronavirus as a monster. The self-explanatory picture established the evilness of the monster.
- The last frame was from the chorus of the song and was a line that translated to “wash our hands, rub, rub, rub.” It was a line that occurred multiple times in the song. The simple, catchy chorus was sure to stay in every listener’s mind. It showed how repetition helped in branding and message recall. The use of subtitles ensured that a Vietnamese song was able to reach a universal audience.

How can we plan a good communication strategy?

1. Characteristics

Consistency: Particularly when it comes to social media campaigns, the one thing worth remembering is consistency. This does not come overnight. Communication is anchored on consistency, irrespective of the different platforms used.

Attention to detail and personalisation: This is something that is often forgotten but goes a long way in establishing relationships. Key areas of personalisation include the names of the people, names of organisation, spellings, capitalization of names, etc.

Storytelling: All communication is storytelling. Most effective storytelling is a combination of emotions and facts, and this is worth keeping in mind when creating content.

2. Actions

Choosing platform: While communication may be undergoing a major shift towards digital platforms (websites, e-brochures, etc.), it is important to recognise that this may not be always necessary. Choice of platform should be undertaken after considering your project and specific stakeholders.

Networking and offline activity: Most NGOs often neglect this mode of communication. However, it is very important to take as many opportunities as we can to speak about our work in person. Examples could be at networking events, conferences, etc.

Photography: Photographs are great tools to grab attention. However, we have to make sure that the pictures we take are ethical and sensitive, especially when dealing with vulnerable populations.

Internal policies: Communication policies can range from a single pager to a multi-chapter document. While the length depends on what is most relevant to the individual organisation, it is key that all employees and/or volunteers share the same message when representing the organisation.

Templates: It is good to have basic templates and pages (for example, 'about us' and 'current projects' as well as donation amounts) that can be used for different communication purposes.

3. Things to avoid

Tendency to standardize: The difference between templating and standardization is an important line to keep in mind. Standardisation, even in communications like emails, must be avoided. Standardised content reflects very little effort has been put in reaching out to your stakeholders.

Typos/Misspellings: It is crucial to avoid typos and misspelt names. It is good practice to double check the mail or document again for errors before sending them.

4. To keep in mind

Factors: When deciding communication platforms and strategies, it is important to consider your audience. How much access to technology do they have? Who is your audience in terms of age, gender, education levels, etc. and does that influence the way they consume content? What language best suits your needs? Do you have a budget for communications or are you choosing organic messaging?

How much communication strategy do you need? As a team, it is important to identify what is most relevant to your organisation. Do you need a posting calendar? How active are you on social media? How active do you need to be? Do you have formal ethical guidelines in place? Also, who would be best suited to act as the single point of contact for all communications-related matters?

5. What tools can be used to make your process more robust?

There are a variety of different tools, many of them free and easy to access.

- Google Calendar – for scheduling and reminders
- Trello – For project management
- Grammarly – for spell checks and basic grammar correction
- Canva – for design

Questions & Answers

1. How can we draw a powerful impact story without playing around stereotypes or sensationalisation?

As there is a need to attract attention and get people to feel the core of the work, there is a struggle to maintain the balance between the both. In Yashasvini's experience, in case there is a need to

“dramatise”, what helps is drawing on the situation or externalities. For example, in case of Covid-19, it would mean playing up the pandemic itself instead of individual people and their stories.

2. How can we translate the pointers to offline communications? Like workshops?

In offline spaces, it helps to be more inclusive, accessible and interactive. For example, having translators in spaces where language is a barrier and ensuring multiplicity of perspectives could help in offline spaces. In Yashasvini’s experience, people in the social sector have found it easier to communicate offline perhaps due to the comfort of doing projects on the ground.

3. How can we improve recall value in offline spaces?

Follow up and completing the circle is very important. The last mile is often problematic in the Indian context, with teams losing steam after the pinnacle of the project. It is important to push that last mile, complete the communication loop and create reasons to keep in touch.

4. Do you suggest all organisations need a documented communication strategy? Does AuxoHub help prepare the strategy and how much would it cost?

Yes, we do suggest that all organisations have a documentation strategy because anything on paper makes it easier for everyone to access the information. It does not, however, need to be a complicated document and can cater to the individual organisation’s needs. This is primarily to reduce individual dependency and build organisational capacity. AuxoHub does help prepare such documentation and we are happy to discuss costing once we better understand the scope of work.