

THE  
PROFESSIONAL  
ASSOCIATION  
STRENGTHENING  
PROJECT

***MODULE 7***

# **Visibility and Communication**

***survive & thrive***

professional associations, private sector and global health scholars  
saving mothers, newborns and children

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### Where to find the complete the Professional Association Strengthening manual:

The complete set of Professional Association Strengthening modules can be downloaded for no fee at: [www.StrongProfAssoc.org](http://www.StrongProfAssoc.org).

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# Visibility and Communication

## Why Do Professional Associations Need Visibility and Communications Efforts?

Professional associations (PAs) do not sell goods and services, such as clothing, cars, or phones. Their products are not tangible items that can be purchased with money. As noted in Module 4: Functions of a Professional Association, the products of a PA are visibility and influence.

A well-known and well-respected PA provides the following:

- A unified voice for the members of the profession that strengthens the reputation of the profession and increases professional opportunities for members,
- Advocacy for high-quality clinical services for the populations served, and
- Advocacy for health policy and educational standards.

In order to perform these roles, the PA must be known to its members, other PAs and the government. Visibility is the key to success because an association that is known and recognized can have a more significant effect.

Efforts to enhance visibility for a PA will focus on many of the traditional components of marketing. However, the goal of the plan is not to sell a product but rather to increase membership, member commitment, and member activity. This leads to an increased sphere of influence for the PA.

Members will pay their membership dues when they see a value added by becoming a member. The clear identification of the value of membership is at the heart of any visibility and communication plan.

### Objectives

- To discuss 4 components of a plan to increase visibility.
- To describe the steps in the development of a visibility and communication plan.
- To help a PA describe the value of membership.
- To provide case studies that represent simple and effective strategies to engage members and recruit new members.

## What is a Visibility and Communications Plan?

Effective organizations use a range of strategies that work together to create awareness, produce a positive image, and communicate effectively with a targeted audience.<sup>1</sup> A visibility and communication plan provides the structure for associations to demonstrate their value and grow and retain their membership.

The terms *visibility* and *communications* cannot be used interchangeably. Promotion of the association occurs through a purposeful plan to be visible in the health system and society at large. Visibility occurs through presence at events, at meetings, and through outreach and activities. Individual members assist to increase visibility through attendance at events and meetings on behalf of the association.

Communications represent the institutional perspective, establish a position statement, and connect that statement to the interests of the target audience. Best practice combines the most effective strategies to increase visibility with the most effective communications approaches.<sup>2</sup>

**Figure 1.** Establishing a visibility plan.



Professional associations that use a formal visibility and communications plan hold a distinct advantage over those that take a less structured and thought out approach. A well-organized plan serves as a roadmap that provides guidance and ensures that associations gain the credibility and loyalty they need to succeed in their missions.<sup>1</sup> This module provides the necessary tools to create and implement a visibility and communications plan.

## Steps to Creating a Visibility/ Communications Plan

The steps outlined below are taken from the Network for Good (7 Steps to Creating Your Best Nonprofit Marketing Plan Ever).<sup>3</sup> This information is used with permission from the Network for Good.

### 1. Perform an Organization Self-Assessment

The first step in creating an effective visibility and communications plan is to assess what activities are currently taking place at the association. Follow the recommendations

below to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of current outreach to members and the society at large:

- **Define your audience(s).** Who is your audience? How do you treat them? How often do you contact them?
- **Map your messages.** What have you been saying to your audience? Are these messages effective and consistent?
- **Define your channels.** What communication methods do you use and how often?

### 2. Set Goals and Strategies

A properly organized plan supports itself like a pyramid and is interlinked from top to bottom. Start at the top! Set goals. For each goal, create objectives; for each objective, create strategies; and for each strategy, create tactics.

**Figure 2.** Interrelationship of factors in the visibility and communications plan.



### 3. Determine Your Unique Value

What makes your association the only one of its kind? Determine your unique value proposition by breaking down the five Ws and an H:

- **Who** are your constituents,
- **What** is your issue area,
- **Where** are your constituents located,
- **When** do they need you,
- **Why** are you important, and
- **How** are you different?

Think about what happens at the intersection of what's important to your audience, what your organization is good at, and what are you doing that no one else is.

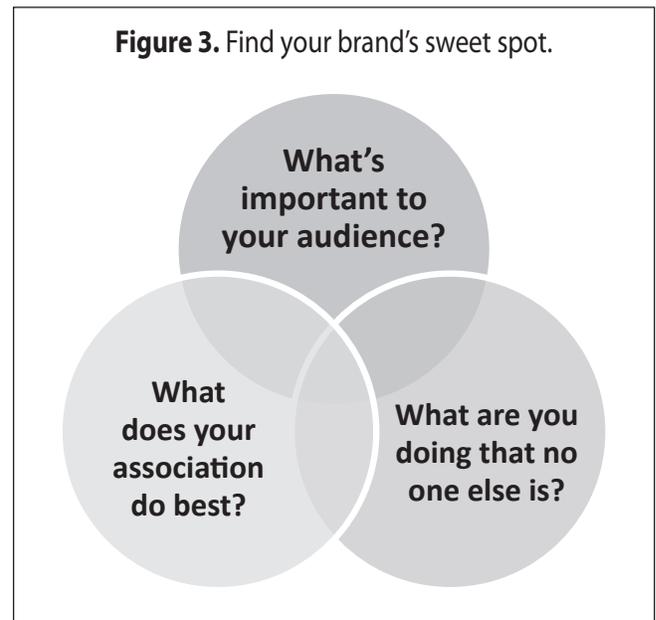
### 4. Craft Your Message

#### Put the Audience First

Now that you know where you'd like to go, you must determine how to get there by appealing to the values of the target audience. Instead of creating communications about

the organization, focus on what matters to your audience. Referred to as me marketing, this approach forces you to find the benefits of what you offer to the individuals you target.

**Figure 3.** Find your brand's sweet spot.



To focus outreach, ensure that messages meet the following criteria:

### Connecting

- Connect to things your audience cares about, such as saving time, feeling good about themselves, feeling powerful, etc.

### Rewarding

- Identify and offer a compelling reward for taking action. Remember that good rewards are immediate, personal, credible, and reflective of your audience's values.

### Actionable

- Have a clear call to action. Good actions are specific, feasible, and easy to visualize. They should advance your mission.

### Memorable

- It's memorable if it's different, catchy, personal, tangible, and desirable.

## Create a Call to Action

A call to action is an instruction to the audience to provoke an immediate response. An effective call to action has five necessary attributes.

- **It is specific.** Focus on a precise, specific action.
- **It is feasible.** Your action needs to be easy and not overwhelming to potential supporters.
- **It is prioritized.** Keep in mind that your audience can't do everything.
- **It is free of barriers.** Honour your audience's time by being as straightforward as possible. Remove unnecessary steps.
- **It is filmable.** Help the audience visualize what they will be doing.

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### EXAMPLE OF A VISIBILITY AND COMMUNICATION EFFORT

An obstetric society promoted early recognition of preterm labor through billboards and radio ads.

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## Engage Your Audience

Now that you have a message, you need to engage the target audience to pay attention:

- **Cross-channel promotion.** Give supporters online and offline options, and make the pieces work together.
- **Make marketing a conversation.** Enable a two-way conversation with your supporters.
- **Be accessible, easy, encouraging, and intimate.**
- **Show accountability.**
- **Make it easy for people to find you.** Publish your office location and phone number. Create a website.
- **Segment your way to success.** Talk to your supporters differently depending on who they are.
- **Test!**
- **Make your supporters your messengers.** Ask them to spread the word among their colleagues and friends.

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### EXAMPLE OF A VISIBILITY AND COMMUNICATION EFFORT

Sierra Leone: A radio station played short jingles in various local languages with pregnancy health messages from the Midwives Association.

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## 5. Choose your Tools

### Decide your Online and Offline Visibility and Communications Mix

When it comes to deciding on a marketing mix, there is no single recipe for success. It will depend on what makes most sense for your audience. Consider the following tools:

#### Online

- Website
- Social media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube)
- Paid advertising
- Public relations placements on websites/blogs
- Special events pages
- Email outreach (e-newsletter, fundraising appeals)



Source: ©Depositphotos.com/mipan

## Offline

- Printed collateral (brochures, annual reports)
- Direct mail
- Newsletter
- Paid advertising (outdoor, print)
- Public relations placements (TV, magazines, newspapers)
- Special events



Source: ©Pixabay.com/geralt

## 6. Define Budget, Timeline, and Resources

### Determine Your Budget

Now that you've determined the right mix for outreach, it's important to decide how much money you need to produce materials; email; offline outreach expenses; and paid media, such as advertising or search engine marketing. Track your budget depending on the level of detail you need.

### Develop a Calendar and Assign Roles

A calendar is one of the best ways to coordinate efforts to increase visibility and communication. Start by listing major priorities and any regularly occurring outreach and fill in the tasks to make them happen. The calendar may be organized by audience, channel, or specific program. Clearly outline who on the team will be responsible for managing and completing each action item.

#### EXAMPLE OF A VISIBILITY AND COMMUNICATION EFFORT

Georgia: Midwives were little known and little recognized in the health system. With a small grant from a non-governmental organization, a pamphlet was made and widely distributed throughout the country.

## 7. Measure and Track Your Results

Regularly review results to verify that goals have been met and to determine if new strategies are in order. Carefully measuring and tracking results allows the proper allocation of funds and best return for each dollar spent. Include the following items to round out the evaluation plan.

- **Timeline.** Determine how often you will review your plans: monthly, quarterly, annually?
- **Measure success.** Measure success by what you want to accomplish. Consider items such as website analytics, email open rates, and number of volunteers signed up.
- **Evaluate.** Revisit Step 1 and perform an organization self-assessment to determine how visibility and communications activities have changed and/or improved your association's situation.

#### EXAMPLE OF A VISIBILITY AND COMMUNICATION EFFORT

Ghana: Midwives and students hold a health promotion event with the First Lady of the country and increase the visibility of midwives.



### Useful Resources

- **American Society of Association Executives**  
<https://www.asaecenter.org/resources>
- **Network for Good**  
[www.networkforgood.com/resources](http://www.networkforgood.com/resources)
- **Nonprofit Marketing Guide**  
[www.nonprofitmarketingguide.com/resources](http://www.nonprofitmarketingguide.com/resources)
- **Nonprofit Marketing/Promotion/Social Media Resources**  
<http://nonprofit.about.com/od/nonprofitpromotion>
- **Nonprofit Resource Center**  
[www.nprcenter.org/marketing-communications](http://www.nprcenter.org/marketing-communications)

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