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# 101

# Create Your Own Communications Product Launch Blueprint

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## 1. The Lowdown

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Most great designs and architectural wonders start with a blueprint. Just as in engineering, the right blueprint can mean the difference between a successful and an unsuccessful project. The same is true for building the right new product launch strategy. New product introductions are an important part of any business's strategy. They can help position companies for growth, respond rapidly to changing market conditions, and reach new customers. Yet sometimes the role of communications is underestimated in its power to help meet these critical business needs. Frequently, product marketers, engineering, sales, legal, and manufacturing are cited as the primary/key contributors to new product introductions. At the same time, the communications team, working in concert with other team members, can also be a key strategic partner and an integral part of the success of a new product introduction.

## 2. Why do I need to know about it?

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By taking a strategic approach and using a common set of tools and templates to manage your work, you'll be able to drive a consistent launch strategy and provide the metrics for your integrated communications plan, which sometimes can be elusive. In doing so, you'll reap the benefits of creating a truly integrated communications plan that leverages internal and external insight to drive awareness and acceptance of your company's new product.

### **Building the playbook**

#### Assess

For example, we've divided the communications work into three areas—assess, plan, and activate. In the assessment phase, you're taking the time to review the current landscape, including business, social, and competitive issues that impact your new product. More important, you're taking a look at the potential impact each of these areas could have on your project. Review competitive offers, especially messaging, so that you can understand how to differentiate your company. By understanding the landscape, you'll get a better sense of all the key influences on your customers' purchasing decisions. What's more you'll develop an integrated plan to help manage those influences more effectively and define the key differentiation points that can help persuade customers to choose your product.

#### Plan

The planning phase involves taking the information you've learned during your assessment and using it to develop an integrated, strategic plan that fits your business needs. More important, it includes a mix of both internal knowledge and external observations and insights. After all, as a strategic communicator, you'll not only want to ensure that your plan represents the needs of the business, but also that you can demonstrate an understanding of the external marketplace that cares about your new product. One tool that you may choose to use at this stage is an integrated planning template that captures key business objectives, communications goals, and recommended tactics. The plan includes an audience assessment, as well as a review of the

communications tactics that work for your target audience. In establishing this correlation, your clients are more likely to be assured that you have carefully considered your audience's purchasing behaviors and communications preferences when building your plan.

#### Activate

This stage enables you to execute the plan you've built and offers the chance to measure its effectiveness and ROI. One of the key ways to measure your plan's ROI is to ask for feedback. As part of your launch team's debrief process, you'll probably meet to discuss what worked well, what didn't, and what needs to be improved. This is a critical step in this phase, as you can document your key learnings and apply them to future projects. You may also choose to create a brief customer survey to test awareness of the new product, knowledge of the recommended communications elements, and the impact of those elements on customers' intent to act. In addition, you may consider surveying your sales team to understand their perceptions of the launch and whether the sales tools and communications tactics provided helped the team sell more. This is a good time to ask, again, if there are any tools the sales team needed but didn't have. You'll be able to use all these insights from your key stakeholders to build future plans.

### 3. The thing to remember is...

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Let's face it—we're all being challenged to find better ways to do more with less. Today's economy requires this of all of us, including the communications function. By using standard, strategic tools and templates as part of your integrated communications plan, you'll have the ability to demonstrate your function's value-add to the business. The blueprint elements not only help you manage your work, they also help the other key players in your launch firm up their plans and deliverables. Using the methods discussed here will help you demonstrate the strategic value your function brings to the business—they provide an opportunity for you to present metrics for the communications tactics that you execute.

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