

PR & Communication Planning:

The importance of message maps



Introduction

Does your organisation have clearly defined messages that it uses in all its non advertising communication?

If your senior executives had to speak to the media, analysts or stakeholders tomorrow do you have a messaging framework that you can instantly turn to?

Message maps are an essential tool for ensuring a B2B or technology company's PR and communications always stay 'on message'.

Here are 10 things you should know about them:



1. What is a message map?

A message map is a communication tool that acts as a messaging framework and assists in the creation of simple, concise key messages around a specific topic area such as corporate messages, brand messages or issue messages.

Using a hub-and-spokes architecture, message maps set out one central message which is supported by a number of key messages, which in turn are each evidenced by proof points (quantitative statements).

2. Why are message maps useful?

Message maps give a quick, visual representation of key messages in a way that allows the messages and the interrelationships between them to be easily understood and remembered. This provides, at a glance, the hierarchy of key messages that is both memorable for spokespeople and meaningful to the audience.

3. Why are message maps important?

To ensure key messages are communicated correctly and concisely in every communication opportunity, and to keep all company spokespeople 'on message'.

4. When should message maps be used?

Message maps can be used in every instance of PR and communication about the topic area that they cover to ensure that key messages are communicated strategically in each communication opportunity.

It can be used as a guide to ensure the correct messaging is used when preparing content such as product brochures, speeches and web site content.

5. Who should use message maps?

Anyone who is communicating with an organisation's stakeholders - customers, partners, suppliers, staff, etc. For example, a corporate message map can be used to develop answers to questions from customers, the media, shareholders, colleagues and just about any other stakeholder.

6. How do you use a message map?

Message maps provide a flexible framework for PR messaging and, as such, can be used either starting from the central message and then working out to the supporting messages and proof points, or from one of the key supporting message areas or proof points back to the central message.

The message map can also be used as a checklist to ensure that all relevant messages are included.

For example, if giving a media interview on a company's latest product it may be relevant to include information about the organisations high quality products and customer service but irrelevant to include information about the company being an employer of choice.

7. How often should a message map be updated?

Once a message map is created and approved it still functions as a living document because it evolves as new proof points can be added or substituted for those in the original message map.

New proof points or supporting key messages may need to be added if a new product or service offering is released, and if the organisation has any significant messaging or branding changes the central and key supporting messages may need to be re-examined.

8. Who should create a message map?

The best way to create a message map is via a structured session in which each of the internal messaging stakeholders are represented with a PR or communications specialist facilitating the brainstorm session.

This ensures that all aspects of the messaging are included and that there is 'buy-in' from all of the organisation's different areas.

9. What should the messages emphasise?

The messages should be phrased in a way that helps the organisation's communicators organise their thoughts and answer questions in ways that focus on how what the organisation does benefits people, not just on what the organisation does.

Additionally, the messages should emphasise the organisation's unique differentiators - the areas in which it stands out from competitors.

10. How should you train spokespeople to use the media map?

The message map can be used as part of spokespeople media training. During media training, spokespeople can be trained how to navigate the map during interviews and use examples strategically to emphasise the organisation's key messages.

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