Message development

The challenge of messaging

Messages are the most fundamental tool of strategic communications. They distil complex ideas into clear statements that stand out in the minds of the people who matter. They help us to reinforce the right ideas consistently from channel to channel and month to month.

Messages define reputation, and reputation drives business. We must choose messages that make a point in a way that stakeholders find convincing, appealing, and relevant to their lives and interests.

When messaging is strong, stakeholders get the same idea at every touchpoint from media interviews and press releases to tweets and customer meetings. When messaging goes wrong, we talk in a jumble of voices and people tune out. We say too many different things, and none of them stick.

Effective messaging depends on a strong core messaging document accessible to everyone in the organisation whose communication reaches stakeholders. Messaging documents help everyone to say exactly the right thing, in harmony with each other and consistently over time.

Message development is the art of distilling everything we could say into the few things that we must say. It is also the science of connecting our business objectives to our stakeholders’ interests, through the filter of existing knowledge and preconceptions. It’s a specialised process and one that often benefits from external expertise.
We help companies build crisis communication capacity across three main service areas:

- Crisis Preparedness
- Crisis Training
- Crisis Simulation

HOW ISOC HELPS

ISOC message development teams can support message development in various ways, from background advice to facilitating workshops or running the whole process.

- We have specialised experience in message development
- We have crafted messages for hundreds of organisations worldwide.
- We understand international best practice in message development
- We know the science and psychology of making ideas stick.
- As outside consultants we bring a fresh external perspective.
ISOC message development: how it works

Scoping
We will work together to agree what type and form of messaging documents you need.

Intelligence
We will analyse your existing formal and informal messaging based on document review and meetings. We will review whatever formal and informal messaging exists already. We will evaluate your stakeholder environment.

Workshops
We will facilitate message development workshops ideally involving a wide group of internal stakeholders with useful knowledge and perspective. These workshops also help embed the messages by giving everyone a sense of involvement and ownership in the ultimate message document.

Finalisation
We will work independently to assimilate all of the inputs from the intelligence and workshop phases. We will identify forms of evidence and proof point where necessary. We will produce drafts for review and approval. We will format and structure the messaging documents for circulation, including procedures for updating time-sensitive information so that it remains fresh.
Outputs and deliverables

ISOC messaging documents are concise, clear and simple; linked consistently with supporting evidence and proof points; and custom formatted to suit the requirements of each organisation. They can take many forms to cater for diverse needs.

All organisations need strategic core messaging documents:
- Identity messages (values, character, beliefs, principles)
- Product messages (USPs,
- Divisional messages (for business units or segments)
- Explanation messages (for complexities, science, technology)

Many organisations also benefit from tactical messaging:
- News messages (for announcements)
- Interview/press conference messages (for media encounters)
- Crisis messages (for contingencies)
- Issue messages (for recurring topics)
- Stakeholder messages (for particular audiences)
- Minefield messages (for sensitive/legal areas)
MESSAGING PITFALLS TO AVOID

- A message won’t work if it reads like a brand slogan or a marketing line. Credible and neutral statements with a factual tone are more effective in strategic communication.
- A message won’t work if it is all about us. Most messages should start from, or at least contain, the audience perspective.
- A message won’t work if it’s all promise but no proof. Every message must be backed up by evidence and examples to convince minds and win hearts.
- A message won’t work if it contains too many ideas crammed together. Strong messages, like athletes, are lean. We ruthlessly cut everything non-essential.
- Messages won’t work when they are too numerous. We may have multiple sets for specific purposes – but messaging for any given moment must be short and simple.
- Messages won’t even be used if they are presented in an impenetrable format. We must produce a concise document that is accessible and useful for everyone.

Messages are supposed to be simple – but the process of creating them is usually difficult, sometimes neglected and often poorly executed.