

Chapter 12

Communications and Marketing

*Contributor: Nereida (Neddy) Perez,
Vice President, Inclusion & Diversity, National Grid*

Communications is one of the most critical steps in developing, implementing, and managing an effective diversity and inclusion strategy. Without a strong plan in place, executive leaders may not loan their support. If managers and supervisors who are charged with everyday implementation and execution of D&I efforts do not understand what is expected of them, they can disengage. If employees do not know what the long term objectives are, they too can easily get frustrated and feel that D&I is not a priority.

In addition to communicating a company's diversity and inclusion commitment internally, strong correlation exists between the presence of an unyielding diversity commitment and external brand leadership. Leading companies are using communications and marketing efforts to tap the tremendous growth potential that diverse markets represent.

Whether internal or external—through the internet, print media, or word of mouth—the importance of a strong communications and marketing strategy cannot be understated. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a framework that can be customized and used by all companies to create an overall communications and marketing plan to support diversity and inclusion efforts.

In this chapter, we will explore the following questions:

- How should an organization go about developing a communications and marketing plan?
- What people should be engaged in the communications and marketing process?
- How do best practice companies measure the impact of communications and marketing initiatives?
- What types of communications and marketing tools should organizations develop for maximum visibility?

Communications Planning

Most people think that coming up with a communications strategy is complicated, but it is fairly straightforward. Too often a communications plan is overlooked, but it is one of the most crucial areas of D&I strategy. A communications plan should lay out a comprehensive view of how you will communicate each of the core building blocks of your Diversity & Inclusion strategy. There are three building blocks on which you should focus:

- Internal branding should:
 - › Promote what the office of D&I is doing
 - › Build awareness on what the company and its leadership is committed to
 - › Update employees on policy and process changes
 - › Increase awareness of the employee network group/employee resource group activities and initiatives
 - › Tap into the company newsletter or other media (e.g. podcasts) to communicate D&I efforts
 - › Increase connectivity of D&I between leaders and employees
- Learning and Development
 - › Promote workshops and learning sessions designed to increase cultural competencies and inclusion skills
 - › Increase awareness of events sponsored by employee network groups/employee resource groups that are helping to increase inclusion skills
- External and Media Relations
 - › Develop materials to be used at conferences and events focused on inclusion and diversity, recruitment and retention, and customer markets
 - › Create and place advertisements outside the company
 - › Prepare articles and stories to position the company externally in the media
 - › Set up a speakers bureau that helps to develop diverse talent to speak at national and regional conferences or events about the company's D&I efforts
 - › Identify nonprofit organizations you want to participate in and negotiate for media presence on their websites and nonprofit publications
 - › Identify employees that will serve as spokespeople and can be ready for media interviews related to the company's commitment to Diversity & Inclusion

When developing your communications plan, there are three other areas you will want to consider working very closely with: recruiting, marketing, and supplier diversity. If you are

looking to create ads or buy ad space, you will want to make sure the messaging lines up with these three groups, depending on the event or publication in which you will be placing the advertisement. If you are partnering with a professional association that might provide an opportunity to recruit people, you will want to engage recruiting sooner rather than later in the partnership opportunities.

The following is a description of the key components that make up a strong communications plan. You should incorporate these items as you are developing your plan for each focus area mentioned earlier:

- **Define Need/Opportunity** You will want to clearly define what the aims are of your communications plan. Are you looking to address a particular issue? If “yes,” then define it in detail. If you are looking to increase overall branding of your D&I strategy, then describe the current state and what you hope to accomplish.
- **Intended Audiences** Describe who it is you want to reach with your messages, including employees, corporate leaders, investors, customers?
- **Goals and Objectives** Clearly define the three to five objectives you want to accomplish with the communications plan.
- **Define How to Implement the Plan** With the help of your communications team you will want to determine what vehicles of communications you will use to implement your plan as well as who should take the lead in implementing certain aspects of the plan. You will need to develop a timeline for implementing the plan.
- **Challenges** Define any potential challenges that you might face. For instance, if you have a small budget, will you need to collaborate or form a partnership with another department/business function in order to secure funding? Are there any people that could potential roadblock your ideas/plans? Is there a potential market condition that can impact your plans? You will also want to think through any potential challenges and come up with some alternatives.
- **Budget** Define what the costs will be to carry out your plan. For instance, will you need to pay for printing costs of a brochure? Will you have to buy promotional items to hand out at an event? Are you planning to bring in a national speaker that you have to pay? Will you be buying ad space in a magazine or establishing an external partnership with a non-profit organization that will require you to make a financial commitment?
- **Measurement and Evaluation** You will want to set some goals on the number of people reached through your various communications vehicles. Also, the communications team will be able to provide guidance on measuring impact of the program whether it is through a straight headcount or survey and assessment plan.

Key People to Engage

There are a number of people you will want to engage in the creation of an D&I communications plan to ensure that materials developed are used/read. Below is a list of the people/departments to connect with and a brief description of why you will want them to be engaged as well as how to engage them:

- **Internal Communications** can develop, design, and write internal materials like announcements of programs and events. The department can also create posters and promotional materials as well as advise you on what the best forms of communications are to reach people.
- **External Communications** can create and edit brochures and press releases and manage media inquiries. They can advise on the best publications to promote the company or the best spokespeople within the company.
- **Community Relations** can help to identify external partnerships that you can collaborate with to strengthen the company's visibility as a strong corporate citizen. They can review articles and provide feedback on ads to make sure the messaging is in sync with the company's diversity mission and external presence.
- **Safety** can review articles and provide feedback on ads to make sure the messaging is in sync with the company's diversity mission and that pictures used are in compliance with safety protocols.
- **Recruiting** can identify external partnerships that you can collaborate on in order to attract diverse talent. They can review articles and provide feedback on ads to make sure that messaging is in sync with the company's diversity mission and their overall attraction goals.
- **Marketing/Consumer Products** can identify external partnerships that you can collaborate on. They can also help develop ideas for articles and review them. Moreover, they can possibly help cover the costs of ad placement or provide guidance on how to get the best advertising prices.
- **Union Relations** can help review articles and advertisements that feature union representatives to ensure that what is said or pictured will not be misconstrued as a violation of a union agreement. Also, the Union Relations Manager/Leader can give you feedback on which people to feature that are role models for the company and/or review articles as well as generate ideas for articles.
- **Legal** can review materials, particularly if external articles are being written on controversial topics that will put the company at risk.
- **Human Resources** can review articles and provide feedback on ads to ensure HR policies and processes are not being violated.
- **Employee Network Group Leaders** can review articles, provide story leads, and serve as resource/subject matter experts to represent the company.

Measuring Impact

There are many ways to track impact. The following are some measures that can be easily tracked in the area of Communications:

- **Advertising Impressions** You can track the total circulation and the cost size of the ad placed. The size of an advertisement will also determine visibility; for instance, a ¾-page ad will not get as much attention as a full page ad.
- **Online Advertising** You can track the number of electronic impressions received on your particular page.
- **Non-Paid Articles** These are articles that are not purchased and/or written as advertorials. These can be tracked based on size of the article written as well as the placement of the article. A front page story, for instance, will yield a bigger readership rate than a third page article. In magazines, a double page spread and length of article will also matter.
- **Paid Articles/Advertorials** These can be assessed based on the size of the advertisement and the readership.
- **Speaking Engagements** You can track the number of external public speaking engagements by accounting for the total number of attendees in the session.
- **Conference Presence** You can track total number of conferences and total (actual) number of attendees at the conference/event being sponsored.
- **Non-Profit Board Positions** If you have secured any positions, you will want to track the number of board positions and the organization's membership.

Developing Communications Materials

The following is a list of the critical communications materials that you will want, at bare minimum, to help raise awareness about your company's D&I efforts:

- **Advertisement** Contract an agency or your in-house communications team to create a series of advertisements designed to promote your company's diversity efforts. Following is a short list of ads:
 - › A generic diversity ad that can be easily modified in various sizes that can be reproduced
 - › An advertisement for use at conferences

- › An advertisement for use by your Recruiting department. Work with recruiting to make sure they are not creating their own advertisement. The ad should depict a wide range of individuals.
- **Annual Report** If your D&I department and initiatives are new, you may want to wait two to three years before you create an annual report to give you time development and accumulate information about your programs. If you feel you have enough information and your programs are well-established, definitely create a comprehensive report to help highlight your D&I efforts and achievements.
- **Brochure to Promote Diversity & Inclusion Function** Create a general brochure designed to promote the work of the Office of Diversity & Inclusion.
- **Brochure to Promote Employee Network Groups** In order for employee network groups to grow and be understood, they need to be promoted.
- **Brochure for Diversity Recruiting** This brochure should be developed in conjunction with your recruiting team and should include a letter from the president and head of diversity about the important of inclusion and diversity. Employees in a wide range of positions should be depicted.
- **Employee Network Group/Resource Group Handbook** If you have employee network groups/employee resource groups (ERGs), develop a set of guidelines for operation.
- **Message from the President** This is a critical piece to create for use on your company website, in your company brochure, and in your new employee orientation folder.
- **Website** Your website should have section dedicated to diversity and inclusion. Develop the site in conjunction with the company's Communications Team. The site should include at a minimum:
 - › A President's message
 - › A message from the head of D&I
 - › Tabs or sections for the employee network groups
 - › A list of diversity resources (books for reading; videos available to be used, leaders in the company, etc.)
 - › A list of training opportunities available within the company
 - › Links to other company functions, such as Recruiting, Human Resources, etc.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we:

- Recommended key steps in developing a communications and marketing plan.
- Discussed who should be engaged in the communications and marketing process.
- Shared how best practices companies measure the impact of communications and marketing initiatives.
- Summarized the types of communications and marketing tools organizations should develop for maximum visibility.

Best practice companies understand that their growth and livelihood are highly dependent on an overarching and sustainable diversity and inclusion plan that is communicated effectively. Through a wealth of new and innovative resources, such as social media and networking, and through tried and true techniques, such as print media and word of mouth marketing, these companies are building committed employees and loyal consumers.

Maintaining and growing a diversity and inclusion commitment, from workplace to marketplace, suppliers to consumers, requires extensive communication internally and externally, and across all functions and geographies. However, arriving at a strong and trusted diversity and inclusion brand—brought to life through meaningful action—is no quick and easy task. This takes time, dedication, resources, and above all, a true belief that diversity and inclusion is a vital corporate asset.

Case Study: Walt Disney Parks & Resorts

No strategy can be successful without a communication plan, one that informs employees, shareholders, and consumers alike. Strategic communication ensures that everyone is on the same page about values, best practices, and policies, especially when it comes to implementing diversity and encouraging inclusion. In doing so, many companies and organizations choose to use a top-down approach, but that is only effective when the “down” is aware of and informed about what the “top” is doing.

Walt Disney Parks & Resorts is a massive organization, one that encompasses multiple international theme parks that cover hundreds of square miles, require tens of thousands of employees, and draw hundreds of thousands of guests. Communicating to all of these audiences is nearly impossible. Walt Disney Parks & Resorts recognizes this, and instead of addressing the general populations, it targets its communications to niche groups with special needs. One such group is people with disabilities.

Walt Disney Parks & Resorts, like most successful companies, begins its diversity communication with the employees. “We inform our cast of our vision, mission, and action plan through inclusion of diversity presentations in our monthly information sessions, our quarterly updates, and our written communication media on e-mail,” says the company of its diversity recruitment strategy. The global locations and seemingly universal appeal of Disney naturally draw a multicultural consumer base. The vast, diverse nature of the guests and the physical nature of the attractions combine to present a unique problem: many guests with disabilities want to visit and enjoy a Walt Disney park or resort, but cannot because of physical or mental conditions.

Guest Assistance Cards (GACs) were the first step taken by Walt Disney Parks & Resorts to address this problem. This card allows for extended access and privileges to guests that need assistance or special care. A GAC is a very personalized, one-on-one form of communication between individual guests and “cast members,” or Disney employees. The card tells cast members what a guest’s needs are and can make for a much easier experience.

In addition to GACs, a publication entitled *Walt Disney World® with Disabilities*, an unofficial resource that was written from the experiences of people with health conditions, has been instrumental in communicating Disney’s commitment to serving people with disabilities. The book provides useful information about hotels, parks, shops, restaurants, and rides and is aimed at people with minor to major health issues, special needs, and disabilities. It discusses, for example, what rides are intense or fear-based that could cause trauma for children or those with phobias. It also ranks the rides based on comfort, speed, and level of physical strain. Moreover, *Walt Disney World® with Disabilities* offers support for diet issues as well as tips for transportation and wheelchair use.

In addition to the book, there is an exhaustive supplemental website which provides free content and information about the physical and emotional “feel” of Disney World rides and attractions. It also educates guests about the wide variety of guest support services the resorts offer of which most guests are not aware. This allows for a more enjoyable experience for all involved when traveling to a Walt Disney park or resort.

Case Study: Merrill Lynch & Co., Inc.

Merrill Lynch begins external outreach through internal support for diversity. Employee networks and affinity groups provide the research and basis for marketing and advertising techniques to various minority groups. The drive behind new diversity marketing strategies comes from within. This allows for Merrill Lynch to have one of the most inclusive marketing and advertising plans not only among investment bankers and wealth managers, but also among all U.S.-based global companies.

The Multicultural Marketing group creates integrated marketing programs for multicultural investors and business with a high net worth to help establish Merrill Lynch as the financial services leader. The main focus of this is to increase brand relevance in diverse communities and to expand development into new business markets. Part of the company's marketing strategy are its strategic alliances with Merrill Lynch's affinity groups and targeted messaging that takes into account all cultural and societal factors. For example, the company forms community-based partnerships with African-American organizations. It aims to capture their growing market share through programming that resonates with wealthy African Americans. The company also aims to establish a market share for affluent Hispanics through these same strategies.

The Merrill Lynch Native American Banking and Financial Services initiative seeks to establish relationships with Native American tribal governments, enterprises, and members. It currently serves more than 60 tribes, and the company has a long history as an advisor to several tribal governments.

Merrill Lynch's South Asian Marketing Efforts initiative focuses on identifying and meeting the financial needs of individuals from India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka by creating awareness. In addition, Merrill Lynch provides educational materials and seminars targeted to the financial needs of affluent South Asians.

The LGBT program focuses on organizations at local and national levels, instead of being community-based. Merrill Lynch wants to establish brand relevance in the LGBT market and is developing specialized services for domestic partners. Special Needs Marketing focuses on affluent families who have children/adults with special needs by providing specialized wealth management tools, trained Financial Advisors, and customized solutions that address the particular financial needs of each family situation.

The Women's Marketing program, led by 28 Managing Directors, works to increase brand relevance while empowering and attracting female investors to Merrill Lynch. It encourages women to work together to address unique business needs and is primarily focused on boomer women and women in transition. It also holds an annual investor conference for women clients to bring them together with Merrill Lynch's product and market specialists.