

## Ask the Right Questions for Message Development

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As discussed in the previous column, there is nothing that can help – or hurt – your organization more than your message.

When the message is effectively driven and included in all aspects of your communications and marketing, it can enhance your business' overall credibility. However, too many conflicting messages of what your organization does or what you stand for will encumber your brand and your value proposition to the marketplace.

So, how do you either develop or fine-tune your message? First, include all levels of employees. Individuals from management to board of directors to executive assistants to levels in between should participate in a message meeting. We suggest that no more than 10 people participate in the meeting and that they be limited to no more than two hours.

During these session(s), you'll want to discuss the following topics:

- Ask attendees to provide the current "perceptions" your organization has in the marketplace. What are others, including your competition, stating about you? Encourage participants to be critical and open with their answers. Before your organization can move forward with appropriate messaging, you have to first understand what you are battling against.
- Identify what you "ideally" want customers and the market to state about you. What would you like others to repeat about your organization and its products/services?
- Identify your organization's or business' overall goals. Are you hoping to gain additional revenue? If so, how much and from what product division? Do you desire to gain additional visibility or donors for your non-profit organization?
- Recognize your audiences and sub-audiences to receive your message.

It's best to have an outside source facilitate these meetings as they would have no pre-conceived notions of messaging and can provide an objective overview of how to develop your message.

In the next column, I'll discuss how to formulate a concise and consistent message from these sessions and how to effectively manage message training within your organization.