Techniques and channels for communications and engagement

Introduction

Once you have identified your engagement objectives, the audiences / stakeholders you want to reach, and your key messages, your next task is to identify the best tools to reach them.

There are lots of tools available and your selection will be based on a few key factors:

- What will work best for the audience (email, meeting, document / case study, video or podcast etc.).
- Your budget (for example if you want to organise an event or produce a video).
- Your time and (if you're not working in a communications role) the support available from your organisation's corporate communications and engagement team.

To be effective your channel selection needs to be based on knowledge / insight about your audience.

If possible, speak to someone from the target audience, but if you aren't able to, try and put yourself in their place and think about how you would like to receive the information.

Consider the following questions:

- Format:
    - How would they like to receive the information?
    - What format works best for your message?
    - Are you just providing a quick update (in which case an email or newsletter story may be OK), or do you need to get the stakeholder on board with a new idea or project (in which a case more bespoke / personal approach may be needed)?
- Length – how long should the message / communication be? For example, it's not worth sending a busy clinician a 30-page document or 15-minute video unless they're expressly asked for it.
- Frequency of communication – there is a fine balance between sharing useful updates and bombarding busy people.

Below are some of the tools that we use at Health Innovation East Midlands.

Note that this isn't an exhaustive list, we have selected these as they work for us, and they are split into two categories:

1. Targeted and personal techniques – these work best where the stakeholder is key to the success of a project, building awareness and buy-in at project development / launch stage.
2. More general techniques – these can be useful to remind people, or keep them on board.

1. Targeted and personal techniques

- Personal emails (to an individual or group of recipients).
- Personal phone calls.
- Meetings – 1-2-1 or small groups.
- Graphics and data visualisation packs ('size of the prize')
- Personally addressed letters and documents.
- Invitations to events – as participants but most effective for roundtables and / or opportunities to contribute as speakers.
- Invitation to submit guest blogs, submit joint awards submissions.
- Ad hoc opportunities (for example where the stakeholder attends a meeting you are also taking part in).
- Host in-person or virtual showcases (for strategic leaders / VIPs.

2. More general techniques

- Updates in newsletters, websites etc.
- Social media messaging (LinkedIn, X / Twitter etc.).
- Invites to events and workshops.
- Sharing useful resources – case studies, 'how to' guides etc.
- Promoting digital content – videos, podcasts etc.
- Media relations (print, online publications, broadcast media etc.).
- Hosting your own events or exhibiting at others' events.
- Cascading information via partner networks and communications channels.

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