

Strategic Communications in Academic Research Libraries:

Building Trust, Visibility and Impact Across Audiences

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AGENDA

- Strategic Communication Presentation - 25 minutes
- Case Study Activity - 20 minutes
- Group Presentations - 10 minutes
- Q & A - 5 minutes

WHAT IS STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION?

Strategic communication is the purposeful, planned and consistent use of communication to advance an organization's mission, values and goals.

Key components:

- **Message**
- **Medium**
- **Audience**
- **Timing**
- **Desired Outcome**

WHY STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS MATTERS IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES?

- Libraries compete for attention and resources
- Libraries must justify value and impact
- Libraries serve multiple audiences simultaneously
- Libraries hold responsibility for inclusive, ethical and culturally responsive messaging
- Research libraries deliver deep value not always visible or understood
- Communication bridges the gap between service and impact

ACADEMIC LIBRARY PERSONA: THE WISE GUIDE

Personality

- Trustworthy: Reliable, accurate and credible.
- Knowledgeable & Insightful: Deep expertise, makes complex ideas understandable.
- Welcoming & Approachable: Encouraging and patient, inviting all learners to engage.
- Ethical & Principled: Transparent, inclusive, upholds intellectual freedom and integrity.
- Thoughtful & Reflective: Pauses, considers context and communicates intentionally.
- Collaborative: Engages and amplifies diverse voices; builds community partnerships.

Tone

- Professional but Warm: Polished yet friendly.
- Clear and Direct: Communicates efficiently, avoids jargon unless necessary.
- Inclusive and Respectful: Honors diversity, equity and accessibility
- Confident yet Humble: Knows what it knows, but acknowledges limits.
- Strategic & Measured: Chooses timing, silence and response wisely.

BEFORE YOU COMMUNICATE ... ASK

- Who is this for?
- What do they need right now?
- What do I want them to know, feel or do?
- What channel best supports that goal?

These questions guide ethical, effective communication.

THE FIVE C'S OF COMMUNICATIONS

- **Clear:** Be specific and unambiguous, avoiding jargon so your audience understands exactly what you mean.
- **Concise:** Get to the point quickly, eliminating unnecessary words and focusing on essential information.
- **Concrete:** Use specific facts, figures, and tangible examples instead of vague statements, making your message more believable.
- **Correct:** Ensure your information, grammar, and spelling are accurate to build credibility and trust.
- **Complete:** Provide all necessary information (who, what, when, where, why, how) so the recipient doesn't need to ask follow-up questions.

TYPES OF MESSAGES

In academic research libraries, strategic messages most often focus on:

- Programs and Events
- Resources, Services and Initiatives
- Facilities and Operations
- Impact
- Mission, Values and Advocacy

ONE LIBRARY. MANY AUDIENCES.

Academic libraries communicate with:



Each audience brings different expectations,
needs and power dynamics.

WHERE MESSAGES LIVE

- Library and institutional websites
- Social media channels
- Library newsletters and annual reports
- Central communications office newsletters
- Departmental newsletters
- Remarks at events and public programs
- Signage within library facilities
- Invitations and event materials
- Blogs and feature stories



TIMING IS KEY

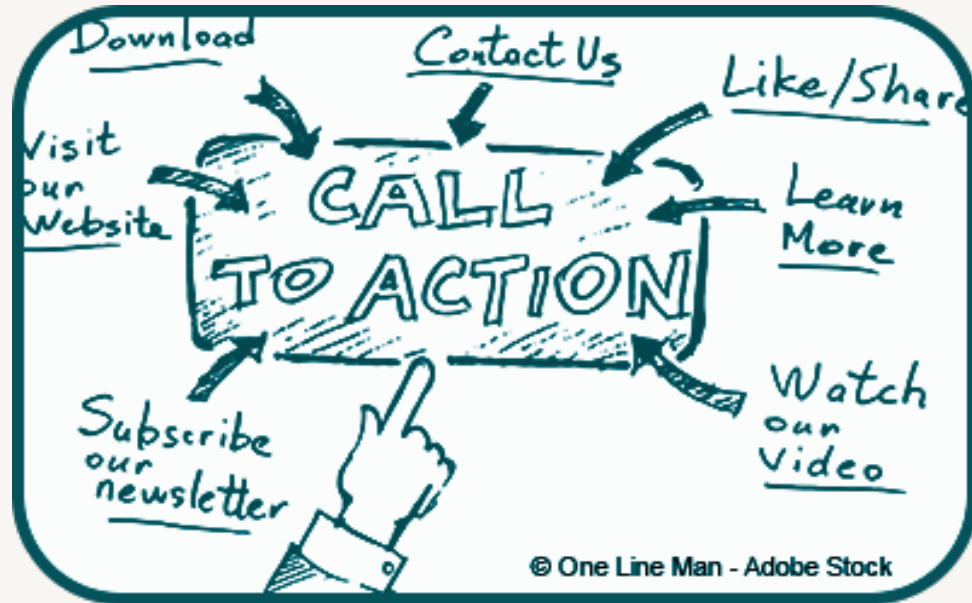
<u>Audience</u>	<u>Best Timing</u>	<u>Timing to Avoid</u>	<u>Notes / Considerations</u>
Students	During semesters, avoiding high-stress periods (midterms, finals)	Breaks, holidays, exam periods	Align with academic calendar and campus activity cycles
Faculty & Researcher	Mid-semester, outside grant or research peak times	Summer months, start-of-semester prep, major deadlines	Respect disciplinary rhythms and workload pressures
Donors & Alumni	Non-holiday periods, early in fiscal / giving cycles	Holidays, travel-heavy seasons	Provide lead time, prioritize clarity, and plan for thoughtful engagement
Library Staff	Winter and summer, when not heavily supporting student or faculty activities	Peak service periods, during major events or academic rushes	Allows for planning, reflection, and internal coordination

CALL TO ACTION

What do we want the audience to do? How will we know it worked?

Examples:

- Attend
- Apply
- Donate
- Read
- Share
- Advocate



MEASURING OUTCOMES

What do we want the audience to do? How will we know it worked?

- Open Rates and Click through Rates for Emails, Newsletters
- Event/Workshop Attendance Numbers
- Applicants for Grants/Awards
- Social Media Engagement
- Website Traffic and Analytics
- Donations
- Qualitative feedback (surveys, interviews)
- Gate counts
- Behavioral changes
- E-resources downloaded, ILL requests, materials checked out, etc.

Strategic Communication Plans: Case Study Activity

You will work to develop a strategic communication plan for one of four real-world academic library scenarios.

Consider the following for each scenario:

- Audience – Who needs to receive the message?
- Message – What is the key information to convey?
- Timing – When is the best time to communicate?
- Channels – Where will the message live?
- Call to Action – What do you want your audience to do?

Scenario 1: Transitioning to Free Database Solutions

Situation: Your library must cancel access to several costly electronic databases, but you have identified free alternatives.

Goal: Ensure users understand the changes, know about alternatives, and continue accessing resources seamlessly.

Challenges: Multiple audiences (students, faculty, researchers) may feel frustrated or confused by changes.

Scenario 2: Statewide Open Education Symposium

Situation: Your library is hosting a statewide symposium on open education and needs speakers, facilitators, and attendees.

Goal: Build awareness, encourage participation, and foster collaboration across institutions.

Challenges: Messages must reach diverse institutions, departments, and community partners.

Scenario 3: New Special Collections Facility

Situation: Your library is building a new special collections space and wants to raise awareness and support funding for the project.

Goal: Highlight the vision, mission alignment, and community impact to generate excitement and contributions.

Challenges: Tailor messaging to donors, faculty, students, and community stakeholders while balancing aspirational and practical information.

Scenario 4: Launch a Research Data & Design Commons

Situation: Your library is opening a new Research Data and Design Commons, replacing the Student Multimedia Design Center.

Goal: Raise awareness of the new space, highlight updated services and resources, and encourage adoption by students, faculty, and researchers.

Challenges: Multiple audiences with different expectations—communicate the transition clearly while emphasizing benefits.

Case Study Activity: Your Mission

- Develop a **one-page strategic communication plan** addressing:
 - a. Audience(s)** – Who needs to hear your message?
 - b. Message** – What are you saying?
 - c. Timing** – When is the best moment to communicate?
 - d. Channels** – Where will you deliver your message?
 - e. Call to Action / Outcome** – What action or result are you seeking?

Case Study Activity: Scenario Report Outs

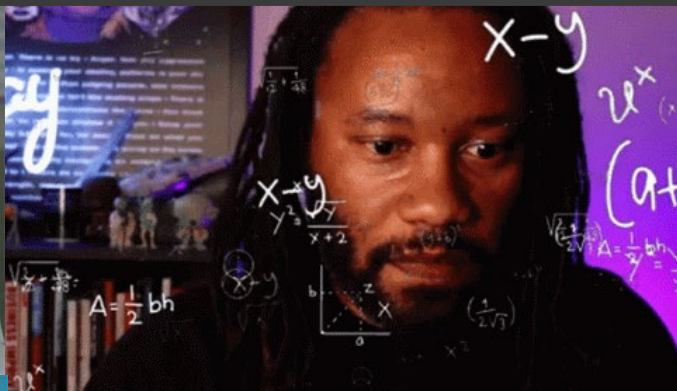
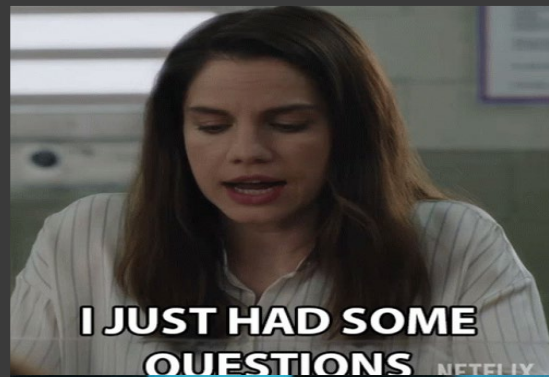


WHEN COMMUNICATION MISSES THE MARK

Messages often fall short when:

- The audience is too broad or undefined
- The message tries to say everything
- The channel doesn't match the goal
- There is no clear call to action
- Implicit biases influence assumptions about audiences, intent or impact

THOUGHTS? QUESTIONS?



LET'S KEEP IN TOUCH!

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