

# The Communications Audit

Used with permission from Meredith Gould's book, *The Social Media Gospel*, Appendix C: The Communications Audit, pages 149-151

“So where do we start”

I'm most frequently asked this question in emails, on the phone, and during social media workshops. Everyone seems shocked when I vehemently suggest starting with a communications audit before doing anything else different or new.

In reality, I already know they'll probably need to redo their website and set up social media accounts but in my never-ending quest to work within best practices, I always recommend an audit to assess whether existing materials are consistent, coherent, and on target. Generally they are not. Plus, should a strategic plan for communications exist, and audit will reveal whether goals are being met. In the absence of an existing plan, an audit will identify gaps and clarify needs so an actionable plan can be created.

Optimally, a communications audit should be done by someone qualified to review and analyze everything created and used by a church/organization to communicate with all audiences.

Everything = print, digital, broadcast.

All audiences = internal as well as external.

Your auditor must be able to interview everyone involved with creating and using materials to tease out information about what works, what doesn't, and what could work better. Your auditor must be able to keep an eye on the prize (i.e., big picture) and love working with details because a comprehensive audit involves:

- Assessing consistency and continuity of message, content, and design within and among materials;
- Identifying inconsistencies and redundancies within and among materials;
- Recommending ways to consolidate and/or eliminate materials to reduce costs; and
- Proposing next steps for taking action and a timetable for their completion.

None of this can happen without full cooperation up and down the church management food chain because if you agree to an audit, you'll have to provide copies of all:

- Printed materials including but not limited to publications, collateral materials (e.g., flyers, posters, mailings, brochures);
- Printed materials used to identify your church/organization (e.g., stationery, business cards, name tags, decals, banners);
- Images and logos;
- Broadcast media (e.g., radio and television announcements);
- Written plans or memoranda outlining plans or request for communications relative to mission, vision, identity, special projects, and any other initiatives;

- Budgets created for general and department-specific communication efforts;
- Existing policies relative to communication; and
- Current style guides and brand books.

You'll also need to provide:

- URLs for online materials created and used by everyone in the church/organization including but not limited to the website and social media (e.g., blogs, Facebook pages, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn); and
- Samples of e-newsletters and email blasts.

When I perform an audit, I ask the chief communications person (or beleaguered soul stuck with picking up communication slack) to prepare a brief memo outlining the top three goals, priorities, and needs.

I also request that all crooked paths be made straight so I may and can have confidential conversations with everyone on staff, including those in charge of finances. Frankly, I love talking with finance people for two major reasons: (1) they're grateful to be included for a change; and (2) I *always* find out where costs can be cut and money can be saved. And because it took me a senior person (i.e., pastor, bishop) be involved with the interview process and receive a copy of the final report.

Sound like a lot of work? It is!

Still, a full audit can be completed relatively quickly if and when you provide unimpeded access to materials, staff, and in some instances, outside vendors. Again, completing a communications audit is an essential first step, especially if the final report is used as a checklist of things to get done and if there's a genuine commitment to move forward. Alas, sometimes there isn't, but that sorry truth will also come out during an audit.