



guide: new year marketing and communications assessment



brand strategy
brand content
brand communications

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The start of a new year provides the perfect opportunity to take stock of your current marketing and communications efforts. Examining what’s going well, what can go better and what needs work provides focus and can help you prioritize plans for the year ahead. Our guide will assist in fine-tuning and concentrating your efforts for maximum impact.

contents

marketing and branding	1
media relations	3
social media	5
crisis preparedness	6
website	7
about Vehr	9



marketing and branding

It's the perfect time to assess the strength of your marketing and branding efforts. Examining your brand expression on an annual basis can help maximize your visibility in the market.

Conduct a thorough audit of all communications, including marketing materials, social media, advertising, signage and packaging. Inconsistent design and messaging can lead to poor recognition (and likewise low awareness of your company among target audiences).

Visual consistency

As you look across all collateral, are your visuals consistent? While you likely want some variety, all materials should look like they're related. Pay attention to the typography, color palette, logos, photography style and design elements (e.g., circular photos, angled color blocks, etc.).

Messaging

Do all your communications employ the same voice? In addition to visuals, your brand messaging should be consistent across all touchpoints. Be sure to check that your content, point of view, tone of voice and grammar are uniform (even the details, like whether or not you use Oxford commas).

External brand management

While reviewing how your organization is leveraging your brand, be sure to check on how your extended partners are using it. Do your printers have the updated PMS colors? Do your nonprofit partners have the correct logo? Does your industry association have the new company boiler plate?

If your audit has revealed inconsistencies, you have your homework: ensure that you have cohesive brand guidelines and enforce them. If you documented long-term, consistent use of your branding and feel that your brand awareness is low, it may be time to consider a brand refresh (update of your existing brand expression) or a brand redesign (a complete overhaul) to make your brand more relevant and attention-grabbing within your market. In that case, interviewing key stakeholders and consumers is the next step toward determining the best strategy with which to move forward.



media relations

Successful media relations starts with the identification of the right media outlets and contacts, but fine-tuning your media strategy doesn't stop with researching reporter beats and editorial calendars. Take a look at the data.

Media referrals

Getting that hard-earned media placement is great. But, does it go far enough? Check your website's analytics to find out.

If online media placements drive traffic to your website, that's good news. If they aren't, that should give you pause. Go through your placement lists and see how many include links to your website. Then, gauge how to adjust your media materials and conversations with reporters. Are you including or sharing links? Make it easy for prospective visitors by trying to get your link included in online articles at the get-go.

Media and social integration

Media relations and social media go hand-in-hand. Integrate your media relations and social media efforts by linking to your positive online media coverage via your company's social media channels. This helps drive links to media websites and might even make reporters more inclined to work with you in the future. If you've been doing this, now is a good time to check your social media analytics to see which channels generate the most clicks on media stories. For instance, do media stories receive more engagement on Twitter than Facebook? Then consider only sharing media articles via Twitter moving forward. Not only will this help keep reporters happy, it will help you decide which content best suits your social media channels.

Key message inclusion

Pay close attention to your media coverage to assess message inclusion. Did the soundbites in a broadcast clip capture all of them, one of them or none of them? Did an article weave in your key messages — via quotes or otherwise? Evaluation is key.

If your key messages were sufficiently used across most of the coverage, keep up the great work. If they weren't, take a hard look at your messages. Are they too long and complex for soundbites? Is your spokesperson adequately trained on incorporating them in interviews? Do you have too many key messages? Are they too “salesy” for a reporter’s liking? (Note: It’s OK if your key messages aren’t relayed 100 percent verbatim in an article or by a reporter; it’s most important that the central ideas get across.) If you find room for improvement, adjust your key messages.



social media

The one constant with social media is that each platform constantly changes. If you developed a content strategy last year, it likely needs a reboot based on new algorithms or the shifting preferences of your followers and fans. Here are three considerations:

Engagement

Reach and impressions can yield impressively big numbers, though a more important metric is your engagement rate. Although your content may be seen by many, are fans liking, commenting, clicking or sharing? If impressions and engagements are out of balance, it's an ideal time to determine if you are targeting the right people with the right content, through the right channels at the right time.

Social referrals

Although the goal for social media varies from company to company, most would agree it can help drive consumers to a website. Using Google Analytics, smart URLs or tools such as Facebook Pixel or LinkedIn Insight Tag, determine which platforms and pieces of content drive the most organic and paid traffic. The numbers will give you a better idea of ROI and answer the internal debate on whether to focus on Instagram or Facebook.

Ad targeting and spend

How much are you spending to boost each Instagram, Facebook or LinkedIn post, and do you know if it is working? Look at the metrics to see if you are targeting and optimizing your ads correctly. For example, are you spending hundreds of dollars per post to generate thousands of impressions, yet are getting just a small boost in engagement? You may be spending too much money targeting the wrong audience with the wrong content. Likewise, you could have precisely the right content for the right audience, yet poor performance could mean you've chosen the wrong ad format or that a \$20 boost isn't enough to compete in the ad auction, especially if you are advertising to a national audience or around key spending periods such as holidays. After addressing audience, content and ad format, see if your cost per result, cost per thousand or cost per click improves and make incremental adjustments.

crisis preparedness

The old maxim that says, “It’s not whether a crisis will happen at your workplace, but when,” is a universal truth for which every company should prepare. Don’t let the year pass without making sure your company is ready for something you hope never happens.

Information validation

When’s the last time you reviewed your company’s crisis preparedness manual or crisis communications plan? Do you know where it is, whether in a binder on the shelf or saved online? When’s the last time you reviewed the crisis action team list? Are the contact lists, telephone numbers and emails addresses current? What about your media lists and directories for local emergency services and community leaders?

Practice makes perfect

The need for the core team to be prepared to take action in a crisis is just as important as ensuring that your communications plan isn’t collecting dust. Routinely run through vulnerability scenarios or consider conducting regular tabletop exercises to keep the team sharp and engaged. Repeated practice will help to create the muscle memory needed to stay focused on the issues in the midst of a crisis.

Remember your dark page

If you’ve created a dark page on your website to be activated only in the event of a serious business disruption, when’s the last time you coordinated with IT to ensure that making it live can happen in a matter of minutes? Have you reviewed the content and links to ensure they are still relevant?



website



Google Analytics can be a maze of metrics, but knowing which reports to pull for a proper website audit will go a long way toward ensuring your brand's success.

Traffic

To discover which channels are directing the most traffic to your website, check out your Channels and Referrals reports:

Your Channels report will show you a breakdown of the sources for your traffic and revenue. This can help you determine whether or not you may be investing in the wrong channels. If you're pouring money into social but are still seeing far greater acquisition numbers from search, you may want to reallocate your budget from paid social to paid search.

The Referrals report breaks down which webpages are sending visitors to your site. This can help you determine your most effective social channels as well as the effectiveness of any influencer marketing campaigns.

Speed and compatibility

Ensure your website is compatible with your audiences' mobile device, tablet, browser, operating system or service provider with the Mobile, Technology and Site Speed reports.

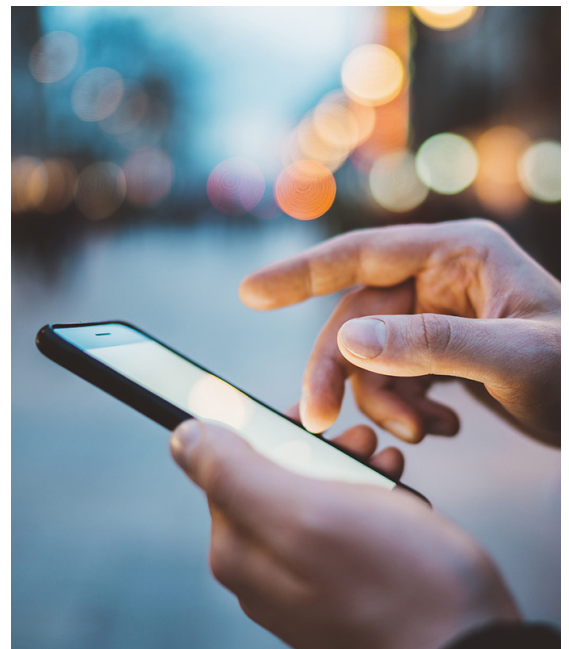
The Mobile report evaluates your website's accessibility from desktop, mobile and tablet, while the Technology report can help you guarantee your website is up to par no matter your users' browser or operating system.

Slow site speeds can affect everything from bounce rate to number of returning users and even negatively impact your Facebook ad performance. Check your Site Speed report for all the stats.

Navigation

Use the Site Search report to see how easy it is to find and navigate information. If users consistently search your website, this may indicate information is hard to find. You can uncover potential issues by examining Search Terms and Search Pages.

Take advantage of this time of year to review your marketing and communications efforts. Resources, whether time or money, are too scarce not to make sure they are being used efficient and wisely.



about Vehr

We **think** deeply, **create** boldly and **engage** completely to help our clients win.

Vehr started in 2007 with a big idea and a desk for one in Cincinnati, Ohio. Today, we're an award-winning agency with a multi-disciplinary team of thinkers, creators and advisors who collaborate with consumer and b2b brands of all sizes on strategy, planning and positioning; internal and external communications; media relations; content development; design; social media engagement; community relations; special events and sponsorships; issues management and crisis communications and more.

We value authenticity, transparency and honesty in everything we do. We invest in relationships over transactions. We commit to listening, learning and growing along with our clients. We believe in quality of life in our community and in our own lives. We're competitive and like to win for our clients. And, we like to have a little fun in the process.



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