3, 2, 1, Launch
Planning for a successful launch

You've spent months, or even years, planning and developing a new report, partnership, website, campaign, or other initiative. On launch day, it can feel like you've crossed the finish line of a long and strenuous marathon. Finally being able to launch your new project or product is cause for celebration – and a deep sigh of relief.

But it's not time yet to kick up your feet and relax. The launch of your project or product is your prime opportunity for communication. And preparing for that outreach needs to happen simultaneously to planning your project or product. While planning for a successful launch will reflect many of the best practices of your organization's broader communication planning process, there are some unique considerations to keep in mind, including competing needs for staff time, a short window to make a splash, and helping your audiences understand what you're launching and how it relates to your broader work.

Below are some of Springboard's best tips and lessons learned for planning a successful launch.

Before the launch
Make the important strategic decisions early.

Good communication planning advice will always recommend planning early. But with a launch, there may be a temptation to wait until you're nearly done to have a good grasp of what your communication looks like. However, doing your communication planning as you do your other planning is the most effective approach. This will help you address a few key needs:

- **Understanding how this project or product will be positioned in relation to your other work.** How this relates to your broader organizational work is a fundamental question. Will it be a standalone project or product with its own branding, messaging, and website, or will it be positioned as a subset of your organization's work with aligned branding and messaging? What are the drawbacks and benefits to each approach – from name recognition to staffing considerations to funding? Making these strategic decisions early will not only allow you to answer the more concrete questions – like what URL and color scheme you will use – but also the bigger questions like what kind of messaging you need and if you be looking for new funding sources.

- **Making sure every piece of the launch is strategically sound and your messaging is aligned.** By starting your communication planning alongside planning for your new project or product, you can strategically think through all the communication pieces

involved – from the name to the launch date to the materials to the language on your website.

In most cases, you'll need specific messaging, such as a core message that explains what the new project or product is and why it matters. This core message should be aligned with your broader organizational core message. In addition, you may need audience-specific messages that you can use before and during the launch. Developing this messaging early will help ensure all the communication pieces for the launch are aligned.

- **Recognizing the limitations.** The limitations around communicating a launch are unique. There are two major limitations to be aware of:

  - *A time-limited plan:* A launch provides a great hook but you'll have a short period of time to capitalize on it. Your launch plan will only carry you through the launch and a few weeks further. However, a successful plan will need to get detailed enough to know what is happening each week, day, or even hour leading up to and after the launch. Mapping activities can help ensure that everyone knows what they should be doing and what others are taking care of when things are moving fast.

  - *Working with limited capacity:* In most cases, your team is going to be busy working on the finishing touches for the launch, whether that's doing final writing and editing or testing technical capabilities or getting final sponsors on board. Capacity for implementing your communication plan will be limited. Planning early will help you determine what your team can handle and what needs to be outsourced, such as editing, design, social media, or pitching press contacts.

- **Ensuring you have support from partners – or can negate potential naysayers.** The most important time to reach out to your potential partners is before the launch – not during or afterward. Having an engagement plan to reach out to these audiences early can help ensure that when you're ready to launch, you've got a community of people ready to support the launch and amplify your reach. For example, you may ask these audiences to provide quotes you can use in your communication, be a contact for interested media, speak at or organize events, or share about the launch through their communication channels.

It's also a good idea to prepare for some of the tough questions you may receive before the launch. If important audiences raise concerns, request a meeting or have a partner with a good mutual relationship organize it, and use the time to share more details about the project or product to address any misunderstandings or concerns or better understand their next steps.

During the launch
Get the right systems in place to ensure success.

Launches move quickly, but with the right planning you can make sure your launch team is running like a well-oiled machine. Figuring out the systems and processes you'll use to implement the plan and keeping tabs on everyone before the launch will help reduce confusion or potential train wrecks during it. There are a few key ways to make sure this happens:

- **Keep everyone on the same page.** A successful launch will depend on everyone knowing what is happening when and keeping on schedule. Before the launch, figure out how everyone involved will keep in touch – that may be a daily or even hourly email update, a morning conference call, or a WhatsApp group chat. Make sure everyone is aware of how they will receive launch updates and who they should be getting in touch with should there be issues or questions. These regular check-ins will be a great opportunity to gauge how things are going, what has been successful, or where there are challenges you may need to overcome.

- **Track the impact and amplify the engagement.** Launches are unique in that there's a very short turnaround time to track your impact and make the most of it. Especially in the world of social media and fast news, you may need to track and amplify messages and outreach within hours for it to be relevant.

  To make sure this happens, be ready to track communications from your key audiences, partners, opponents, media sources, and others. The best ways to track include setting up Google Alerts, creating Twitter lists and following hashtags, turning on your Facebook alerts, and making sure you have staff at events and press conferences who can report back in real time. When you do find people communicating about your launch, look for ways to broaden the reach, whether it's sharing social media posts, developing new graphics, sharing press hits with partners to push through their channels, or adding quotes and endorsements to your webpage.

- **Be ready to course correct.** All the planning in the world can't help you anticipate every potential issue that may come up. As you listen to feedback from your team, be sure to watch for any potential issues and be ready to course correct or adapt to address them. The course correction may be small, such as developing a new outreach material or tweaking planned responses to tough questions. Or, you may find a major course correction is needed – such as revising one of your messages that isn't landing or engaging a new spokesperson who can speak to concerns.

After the launch
Make sure you think about what comes next.

Once the dust has settled from your launch, it's critical to take a step back and think about what happens next. While your launch communication plan may be complete, you don't stop communicating – and you don't want to lose any momentum you created. There are two main needs to address as soon as possible:

- **Debrief from the launch to capture real-time feedback and opportunities.** Find a time to pull together your team to reflect on the launch, including what went well and where there were challenges. The insight you gather during this debrief will help inform your next steps, such as if there's an audience you need to better engage, if you need to make adjustments to your messaging, or if there are new press contacts you should connect with.

- **Figure out how you'll pick up communication planning long-term.** As mentioned, a launch plan is time-limited. Once it's complete, you'll need to think about how to continue your planning. You could wrap it into your organization's regular communication planning process, or you can create a separate planning process. Regardless of which route you go, make sure to look for an opportunity to kick off your planning as soon as possible to ensure you don't miss any opportunities.

Need a hand?

Do you have a launch coming up that could use communication planning? Get in touch with our team to find out how we can help you.