



## Establishing management tools in communication departments

### How to select and introduce methods that suit your needs

- ▶ There are lots of established and proven methods for managing corporate communications, ranging from stakeholder maps and SWOT analyses to editorial plans and social media analytics.
- ▶ However, few organizations document these tools in a consistent way and select the ones which are useful and successful in their specific environments.
- ▶ This Communication Snapshot shows you how to select the most suitable tools for your needs and build toolboxes for communication management.

### What are management tools?

Communication management tools can be defined as methods, procedures, concepts and frameworks (thinking tools) for the analysis, planning, implementation and evaluation of communication activities in organizations as well as for steering those processes (Zerfaß & Volk, 2019).

This terminology is based on the established understanding of tools in strategic management. Business scholars such as Porter or Kaplan and Norton and management consultancies such as BCG and McKinsey have been very successful in transforming complex theories and solutions into easily understandable tools. They are taught and used globally and are appreciated by top management.

91 percent of communication leaders in Germany agree that tools should be part of the knowledge and skills of communicators (Zerfass et al., 2018). However, the same empirical study revealed that only a minority of communication departments systematically document how they solve problems. Rarely are tools actively managed and tailored to specific demands, for example in a toolbox.

### Top 12 communication tools

The following communication tools in the areas of analysis, implementation, planning and evaluation enjoy the highest satisfaction rate among PR practitioners:

<b>Analysis</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication touchpoint analysis</li> <li>• SWOT analysis</li> <li>• Benchmarking</li> </ul>
<b>Implementation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication briefing</li> <li>• Communication checklist</li> <li>• Editorial plan</li> </ul>
<b>Planning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mission statement</li> <li>• Topic planning</li> <li>• Communication target house</li> </ul>
<b>Evaluation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reputation analysis</li> <li>• Media response analysis</li> <li>• Brand assessment</li> </ul>

### What are the benefits of a toolbox?

Providing a selection of tools in one or more company-specific toolboxes provides orientation and makes everyday work easier for all team members. Toolboxes enable communicators to work more efficiently and effectively based on common terms and standardized processes. They also support collaboration in agile teams and across functions and highlight the unique competencies of communication departments.



Process to identify tools and build toolboxes

» If the only tool you have is a hammer,  
(it is tempting) to treat everything as if it  
were a nail. «

Abraham Maslow (1966)

## Two types of company-specific toolboxes

Communication departments can benefit from two different types of toolboxes, which can then be combined:

**A master toolbox** includes a selection of the most important tools for all phases of communication management: analysis, planning, execution and evaluation. All co-workers can be trained to use these tools. The toolbox shows “how we do it” and illustrates common competencies. It can also be used quite flexibly for any upcoming challenges.

**Tailored toolboxes** comprise a smaller number of tools which are needed to solve specific problems, e.g. a toolbox for positioning a corporate brand, for solving a crisis or for running a product launch campaign. They are easier to apply as there is no need to choose tools from a larger pool. However, not everyone in a department will need every toolbox.

## Implementation in four steps

### 1 Identify, categorize and assess existing methods and approaches for managing communications:

- ✓ Which tools are used in your department? How often are they used? Are they documented?
- ✓ Are there alternative ways to solve similar problems – which are better or more common? How satisfied are colleagues with the different tools?
- ✓ Which tools are suitable for key management phases (master toolbox) or problems (tailored toolboxes)? Where are gaps?

### 2 Select additional tools from guidebooks or develop new tools on your own:

- ✓ Browse descriptions of communication management tools (e.g. the 44 tools presented by Zerfaß & Volk, 2019), check project documentations, or work on additional or more concise tool descriptions.
- ✓ Which additional tools are needed to cover the most important tasks (master toolbox) or to address specific problems (tailored toolboxes)?

### 3 Combine existing and new methods with a clear focus on acceptance and cost/benefit ratio:

- ✓ Optimize existing approaches and adopt methods from the literature to suit your needs.
- ✓ Ensure that tools are compatible to general management approaches in your company and to your department culture.
- ✓ Make sure that many tools can be used in the master toolbox as well as in tailored toolboxes.

### 4 Create company-specific toolboxes and start institutionalizing them in your department:

- ✓ Develop formal and visual guidelines for describing and documenting communication management tools.
- ✓ Establish a process for introducing, training, evaluating, improving (and abolishing) tools and toolboxes in your department.
- ✓ Define overall responsibilities for tool development and qualification objectives for all co-workers.
- ✓ Talk with top management and business partners about your achievements to position your department.

## Read more

Zerfaß, A., & Volk, S. C. (2019). *Toolbox Kommunikationsmanagement. Denkwerkzeuge und Methoden für die Steuerung der Unternehmenskommunikation*. Wiesbaden: Springer Gabler. <http://bit.ly/tools-buch>



Volk, S. C. et al. (2017). *How to play the game. Strategic tools for managing corporate communications*. Leipzig: AGUK. <http://bit.ly/ComInsights>

Zerfass, A. et al. (2018). *Management tools for corporate communications – Relevance, benefits and experiences. Results of an empirical study in communication departments*. Leipzig/Frankfurt: Leipzig University, LS. <http://bit.ly/tools-cc>

Pfannenberger, J. et al. (2019). *Die Kommunikationsstrategie entwickeln*. Stuttgart: Schäffer-Poeschel.



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