

NEIGHBORS  
BUILDING  
*Neighborhoods*

CREATING NEIGHBORHOODS OF CHOICE

**Bringing Neighbors Together**

Creating a  
Neighborhood Communications Plan

*The challenge is to think about neighborhoods in a new way - not as problems to be solved - but as assets to celebrate and grow.*

David Boehkle, "Great Neighborhoods, Great City: The Healthy Neighborhoods Approach in Baltimore"





*Attracting attention* is difficult these days. Different studies state the average person is bombarded with anywhere from hundreds to thousands of messages per day. So how do you stand out? How do you get your message across and reach your target audience?

You may be asking what does this have to do with community outreach and communication, but if you want to be able to grab the ear of your neighbors, rally them to make change and keep them engaged, basic marketing communication know-how is key for success. Just wanting to create a means for neighbors to share information and get to know one another is reason enough to develop a plan for communicating. It is certainly needed if your goal is to make change or take on a community improvement project.

Back in the day when front yards and porches were a primary mechanism for social interaction, it wasn't so difficult to keep in the loop with the neighbors. Being out front created a natural means to communicate to your neighbor about Mrs. Harold having the flu or George who was laid off, or Tammy and Pete's 25th wedding anniversary coming up. Now it isn't uncommon for neighbors to go weeks or even months without seeing each other. Does this mean we are less social? Not at all! Just look at the social media craze. Is no accident, but a product of how we communicate now due to our lives being a bit more complicated.

“The average American is exposed to 247 commercial messages each day.”

-- Consumer Reports Website

“The average American adult is exposed to over 600 advertising messages in a single 24-hour period.”

-- Managing Business to Business

“Marketing Communications, De Bonis and Peterson.”

“Advertising is the most pervasive element of the marketing mix: the average American family of four is exposed to 1,500 advertising messages a day!”

-- Fordham University College of Business Administration

“The average American is targeted by 3000 messages per day. That includes phone calls, e-mail, meetings, conversations.

-- Data Smog by David Shenk



# The Basics

## Audience

Understanding who your target audience is very important. You probably already knew that. But let's examine that in more detail and in the context of a neighborhood. Say you have young children and you feel that the neighborhood playground is in bad shape and in need of new play equipment. You might just complain to those that also have children to try and get them involved in fundraising and volunteering, but



what if there are more households that do not have children? Other neighbors may not be so interested in getting involved if the outreach isn't something that resonates with them. Creating a message that is just focused on making a better place for the kids to play may not be the best strategy. No-children households may however, be concerned with a run-down park attracting criminal activity or decreasing the curb appeal of the neighborhood. Understanding the demographics, likes and dislikes, interests and concerns of the neighbors is vital in creating your communications.



## Branding

You may think branding is only for Coca-Cola and Nike but branding is really just about how you want people to see you, or in our case, your neighborhood. In the 21st Century business world branding is part of what

is called positioning, and along with targeting are to many marketing experts, such as Philip Kotler, the most important aspects of marketing. Branding isn't just about look either. It is about how you present yourself in thought, word and deed. To be effective, it must be done throughout all of your communications, all of the time.



Targeting and branding are certainly not the only marketing principals, but will be the most helpful in forming a neighborhood communications and outreach plan. With targeting, you may need to do some homework. If you don't already have a good idea of who your neighbors are (demographics to interests and concerns) you'll need to do some research.

## Research

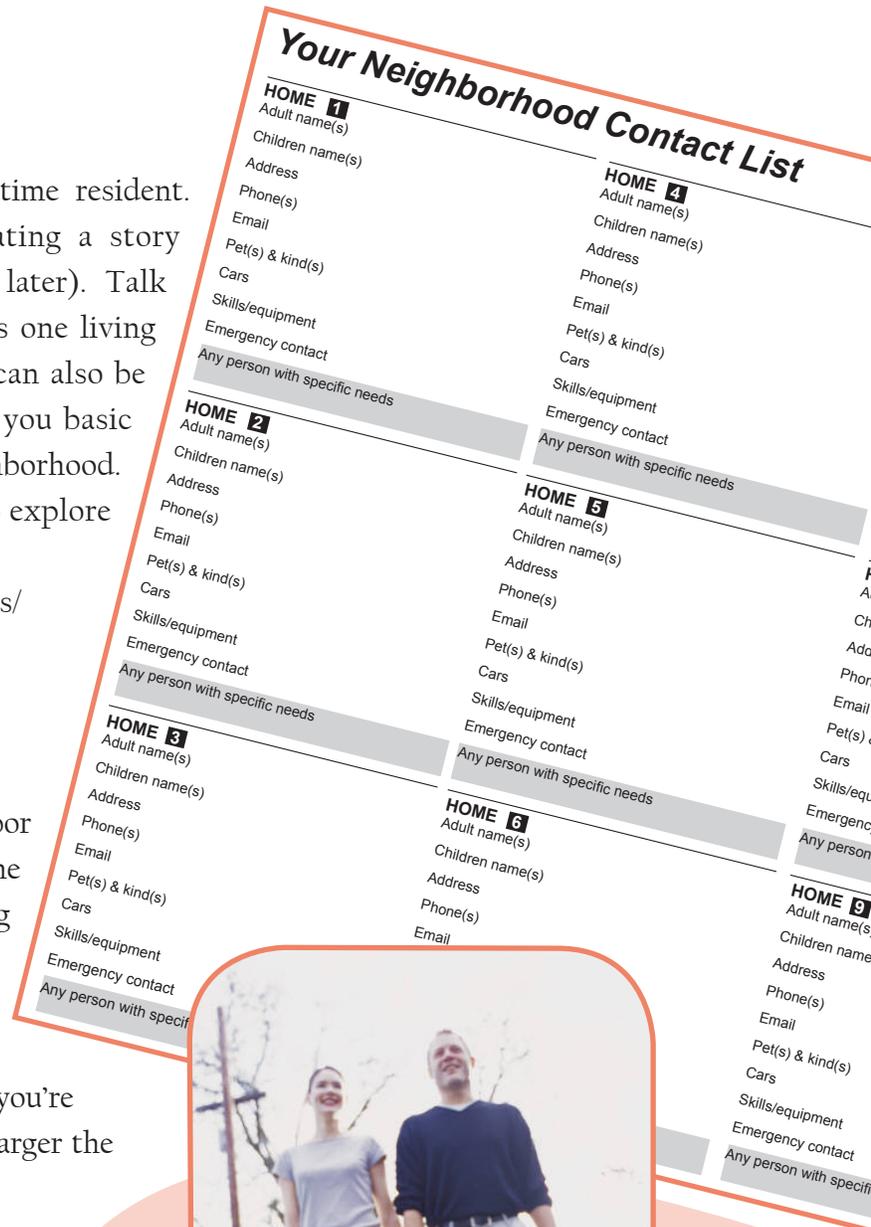
A good place to start may be finding a long time resident. Anecdotal stories can be very helpful in creating a story about your neighborhood (something addressed later). Talk to a local real estate agent, especially if there is one living in the neighborhood. The library and internet can also be instrumental. There are websites that can give you basic demographically information about your neighborhood. Many, however, do have a small fee. Free sites to explore are:

- <http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml>
- [www.norfolkdevelopment.com](http://www.norfolkdevelopment.com)
- <http://zipskinny.com/>

However, the best way to get to know your neighbor is to get out in the neighborhood. Knock on the door, recruit a neighbor you know and start taking walks during the weekend and evening hours, or organize a simple event such as a cookout. Once you have a base of folks--a handful of neighbors you have created a relationship with--you're on your way to creating a greater network. The larger the network, the more information you can obtain.

How many neighbors do you know by name on your block?

How many neighbors do you know by name in your neighborhood overall?



# Communication Tools

Now it is time to get right into things! Since many people don't have the time to be out in the community doing grassroots recruitment consistently, it is important to use 21st Century tools. A website still is the best tool among the group and will act as the hub for any additional outreach. Why? Even though you may not believe it, creating a website is fairly easy and the least time consuming to maintain, and studies show that most people when looking for information will still turn to the web first.

Keep in mind that with any electronic media, you need to have someone who is committed to the task of its upkeep and maintenance. The worst thing is to have a site with out-dated, irrelevant material. Most times, if a visitor comes to your site and sees that it has out-dated information, it is unlikely they will return to it.

There are several free, yes free, sites you can use to create a site or ones that are very inexpensive. Two sites to check out are:

- Google Sites  
(<http://www.google.com/sites/help/intl/en/overview.html>)
- [www.ning.com](http://www.ning.com)

So the buzz is all about social media. The best known at the moment is Facebook, and there are plenty of people who would say it is better than having a website. It allows for instant interaction with your members (friends). It is a two-way communication site people can post a message, image, video etc.

that all those who are signed up as a friend can see. If you are unfamiliar with Facebook, there are many tutorials on YouTube.com. By searching "how to use Facebook," a list of videos will come up explaining how to get started. As with a website and probably more so with Facebook, you'll need to have a committed person who manages the site. Users expect prompt responses and check their Facebook pages on a daily basis. It is being used not just by individuals but as businesses to generate new customers and increase brand loyalty.

**i-Neighbors**  
Bringing your neighbors together.

Existing users sign-in here:  
Email address  Password  **Login**  
[Forgot your password?](#)

New users create account:  
Always free for you and your community

First Name   
Your Email   
Password   
Your Zip Code   
How did you hear of us?

**Sign Up** ?  
By clicking Sign Up you are indicating that you have read and agree with the [Terms of Use](#) and [Privacy Policy](#)

Your Zip Code  **Neighborhood Search** Or create a neighborhood group for free.

Map | Satellite | Hybrid

**Where neighbors come to meet, plan, and stay informed**  
Hosting neighborhoods for over 7 years — and more than 100,000 users

<b>Discussion Forums</b> Send alerts, share information on crime, events, lost pets, or HOA.	<b>Neighborhood Directory</b> Individual profiles and printable directory. Send messages to individual members.	<b>Share Links &amp; Files</b> Documents and links for community events, petitions, or HOA docs.	<b>Photo Galleries</b> Individual galleries, or add to the neighborhood homepage.
<b>Polls</b> Have members vote on any topic. — Includes neighborhood homepage. — Private and public groups. — Administrator control over membership and content. — New content and discussion alerts. — Control frequency of messages.	<b>Maps</b> Visualize crime and other local data.	<b>Local Reviews</b> Share opinions on stores and services. — Reply to discussion forums by email. — Access content by email, Web, mobile, or RSS. — Searchable discussion archives. — Light version for mobile phones.	<b>Calendar</b> Community events and meetings.

[User Guides and Frequent Questions](#)

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SHARE

Another good and easy social media tool to set up is a Google Group. Like Facebook, members have to be invited or approved to be in the group and can post and see the information. There are also other social media site that cater to neighborhoods. A few to take a look at are:

- [www.i-neighbors.org](http://www.i-neighbors.org)
- [www.neighborhoodtree.com](http://www.neighborhoodtree.com)
- [www.neighborhoodlink.com](http://www.neighborhoodlink.com)

If websites or social media is too daunting there are of course less technical ways to communicate with your neighbors. It is important to include traditional methods even if you do use a website or social media since there are likely to be those in your neighborhood that do not use the internet. Create a phone and email list, print and distribute. Start a newsletter and ask for neighbors to submit articles. When feasible or in situations where you know the neighbor does not use a computer, use mailings and distribute flyers. Note: Where there is a community center in or near the neighborhood that has public computers, promote and encourage this asset to those neighbors that do not have computers. Share tips on how to set up a free email account using sites such as Google (gmail), Yahoo or Hot Mail.

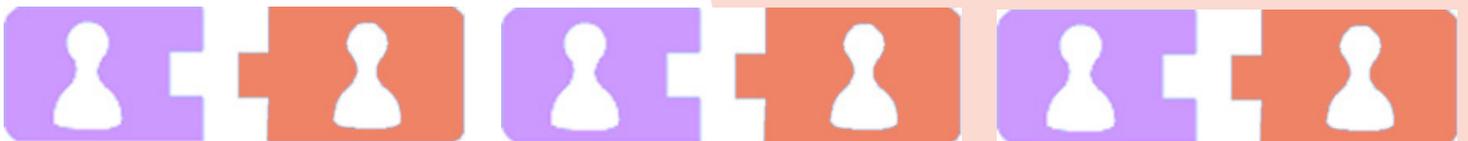
twitter



Google groups



Make a quick list of the ways you (your neighbors) currently communicate with one another to announce meetings, events, and inform each other of important issues.



# Creating the Message

Once you have the way(s) in which you are going to communicate determined and you know something about who your neighbors are, it is time to look at the messages you will be sending. As mentioned, we receive messages constantly from the moment we wake up and turn on the television to the moment we walk in the

Write down 2-3 positive things you think the outside community would say about your neighborhood? List 2-3 negative things they would say.

Write down 3 things that you like about your neighborhood or that you think makes your neighborhood unique.

In a few sentences write a description about your neighbors (i.e. demographical info, family status) in order of majority to minority.

door and deal with the junk mail. A “call to action” that is clear and simple (and targeted) will help break through the clutter.

Although it may be easy to lean towards all the bad things in a neighborhood, you don’t want to be delivering messages of just gloom and doom. Be positive even when dealing with a problem. Do not single people or groups of people out (i.e. “The youth in this neighborhood are causing all kinds of trouble!”). The message should always be pointing towards a solution and not be inflammatory.

Going back to the need to brand your neighborhood, there are strategies that can help to drive your communication plan. Start by creating a story for your neighborhood. Use your website to promote your neighborhood and all of its wonderful attributes. Is it close to attractions, friendly, unique in some way? Is there some interesting history you can call out? Defining or collecting this type of information will be very helpful in creating a vision for your group and keep you focused.

Find someone in the neighborhood who can act as the ambassador or spokesperson. This person can be the contact person who will speak on behalf of the neighborhood to media, real estate agents, potential neighbors and current neighbors who may have questions.



## Putting it all Together

There is no magic bullet or set format for a communications plan. In fact, plans can be very different in format. Provided is an example, but it is just that.

## Strategic Communications Plan: [Title of Initiative]

### 1. Background

Context -- Start out with setting the scene and explaining what the initiative is about. Answer questions such as:

- What's the history or what has happened before?
- Who is involved?
- Who are the partners? (Although this is not a stakeholder list, which comes later.)
- What are the timelines?

External Analysis -- Where context is looking internal, here you look externally at what others are doing.

- What does the media say?
- What have other neighborhoods done in relation to your initiative?
- What economic factors play a part?
- Are there upcoming events or special dates that should be considered?

### 2. Stakeholders

Here you want to identify the people and organizations that have a stake in your initiative. Questions to consider:

- What are the positions of each stakeholder and how do you expect them to react on this initiative?
- If there are those you expect to react negatively, is there a way you can brief them in advance of announcing the initiative?
- Who may react positively and how may they play a supportive role?

It is important to identify potential negative reactions and realize that you most likely will not be able to make everyone happy. It is much better to recognize and anticipate negative reactions rather than ignore them.

### 3. Objectives

In this section, you want to clearly and precisely lay out what you are trying to achieve with this communication plan. Do you want to educate, defuse a situation, improve your neighborhood's reputation? Do you want to build support or get people to do something differently?

Define your objectives. You can use business practices such as SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time-Focused) to guide you. Just ensure your objectives are not vague. Ensuring that you can measure them will help keep them specific. Ask yourself if there was one thing you want people to remember about this initiative, what would it be?

## Sample Communication Plan

### 4. Strategy

The strategy is where you define how you will achieve the objectives. It is like a top-level map of where you want to go. Look at:

- Do you want the initiative to be high or low profile?
- Is this to be proactive or reactive?
- How are you going to reach and communicate with your stakeholder? Is it necessary to reach out to all or just the key ones?

### 5. Audience

Here you want to identify the key groups and people you want to reach. These may be targeted stakeholders, but also different demographical groups of neighbors, local business owners, community leaders etc. Clearly knowing your audience is important to be able to identify what tactics you should use.

### 6. Announcement & Messages

In this section, you want to plan how you are going to let your audience know what and why you are doing the initiative. You'll be able to pull most of what you need to plan this by pulling content from earlier parts in the plan especially from the background section. You can treat it as an executive summary of what you've already done.

Message should permeate throughout all of your communications and should:

- Communicate what you're doing and why (reflect your objectives)
- Communicate what will be different
- Fit with your objectives
- Speak to all of your audiences

When crafting your messages focus on the main points:

- Be brief
- Write in a humanly fashion (verses text book or institutional)
- Highlight the positive but don't mislead
- Use your neighborhood story to guide you

### 7. Tactics

Here you'll want to provide details of how you are going to deliver the announcement and messages. These will include outreach tools such as creating a website, Facebook page, flyers, events, newsletters etc. It is unlikely that each of your audiences will be reached using the same tactics so it may be helpful to create a matrix.

	Tactic #1	Tactic #2	Tactic #3	Tactic #4
Audience #1				
Audience #2				
Audience #3				
Audience #4				



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