

# Communication Audits

## *A Valuable Tool for Savvy Communicators*

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If you find the word audit intimidating, you're not alone. Audits are typically associated with a review of your financial statements and accounts, like the examination of tax records by the Internal Revenue Service. Here's a suggestion: Think of the word audit as an assessment, and consider it an opportunity to learn whether your communication tools and team are meeting your internal and external clients' expectations. It's basically a performance review of your communication program.

As you consider doing a communications audit/assessment, first take a look at your key audiences -- employees, media, customers, partners, etc. Do you know what they would say are your strengths and weaknesses? Do they consider your communications tools, from print to digital to face-to-face, as a must-have or a throw-away? Do your efforts and priorities line up with your organization's and department's goals?

If you can't definitively answer these questions, then an audit can be an invaluable tool. It will help you step back from the day-to-day tasks and take a big picture look at your communication program. An audit can help "take your temperature" and give you the necessary data to build a plan that addresses key weaknesses and clarifies priorities.

Here are some common myths associated with communication audits.

- Myth: Audits make sense only for big communication departments.  
Reality: Even a one-person department can benefit from conducting an audit and taking steps that address the important findings.
- Myth: You need to hire an outside firm to do an audit.  
Reality: Not necessarily. If your organization can't afford to spend the money on an outside firm, a self-assessment can still be valuable.
- Myth: Audits are expensive.  
Reality: They don't have to be. For example, a do-it-yourself audit costs nothing except for time. If you decide to use an outside consultant or firm to provide research or conduct the full audit, that doesn't have to be expensive either. If you're clear about your needs, a firm should be able to structure an audit that can meet your budget guidelines.

In short, communication assessments can deliver bottom-line results. By making that initial investment (time or dollars), audits can make a communication department even more effective. An audit can result in changes that build audience engagement, clarify team responsibilities, change the mix of communications tools, or reprioritize spending.

The September/October timeframe is a prime time for budgeting; even the federal government marks October 1 as the beginning of the new fiscal year. What better way to precede your budget and planning process than performing an audit?