

Guide for the development of
A Communications Plan
For the Comboni Media of Europe

May 2019



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Introduction

“In any initiative, think carefully of where you want to arrive,” used to say Publio Siro in the ancient 100 a.C. It means that, in order to succeed, everything in life must be programmed, planned. In our case, it is communications.

To think of a Communications Plan for the European publications has fallen on the Assembly of European Provincials who, worried about the rapid drop in the number of subscriptions to the magazines, have decided to devise a Plan of communication at the continental level. A commission has been formed, made up of Giulio Albanese, Arlindo Pinto, José da Silva Vieira and Alberto Lamana. The document you are holding is the synthesis of the work done by this commission with the help of the Comboni Missionaries who took part in the continental Assemblies of Madrid in 2017 and of Krakow in 2018. This is not a full plan of communications for Europe, but a series of brief pointers that define what Communications Plan is and how it comes into being.

Therefore, this document is a tool that helps to create a vision and common actions in communications aimed at answering the challenges we face as Comboni missionaries in today’s Europe. This tool is flexible and must be adapted to the concrete realities of each country and of each publication, be it on paper or digital, or in other communication activities.

The plan is divided into six steps. The first defines the mission, the vision and the values of the publication. The second step deals with the gathering of information and describes the essential elements of the publication as related to the context in which it operates. In the third step, we identify the true audience, or the one we want to reach. In the fourth step, specific communication objectives for each segment of the public are defined. Then, actions are programmed, keeping in mind strategies, messages, channels and formats. Finally, we have an evaluation of the efficacy of the process of communications judged by the results.

The Plan must be revised and adapted to the new challenges at least every two years. The Plan itself is a valid tool during the yearly planning.

Furthermore, each editorial office must have the following documents: Style Manual, Editorial Policy, Marketing Plan and Business Plan.

Premise

From the days of Daniele Comboni to today, the means of communication have been for the Comboni Missionaries an important pillar of support at the service of mission. Today, this importance is even greater. The flow of information and the knowledge of reality, besides using analog means (magazines, books...), move mainly through the Internet. Hence the urgency to rethink and update our concepts and ways of communicating and informing.

“To communicate” comes from the Latin *communis*. It is a word made up by the prefix *cum* and by a derivative of *munus* (charge, chore, duty) so that *communis* literally means that “it carries out a task together with others.” A long series of terms derive from this root (e.g.: common,

communion, community, communality...), and among them the verb “to communicate,” indicating the dimension that several subjects interact with one another. It follows that the mission of the Church consists, first of all and above all, in communicating the Word of God in a world society where deep social, political, economic and technological transformations are taking place.

Information is a specific form of communication. The semantic meaning of “informing” is literally to “give a form,” to “shape, model according to a certain form.” Therefore, it comes naturally to ask ourselves how missionary information can give form to the international reality, and to the life of the Churches. The answer is that by informing we put order in the flow of news, both in the strict sense of eliminating disorder, but also in the wider sense of seeking the truth and reducing the complexity due to the plethora of news bits, through a healthy discernment of the sources.

This outline is meant to offer general indications for defining a “Communications Plan” *ad hoc*. By this expression we mean the formulation of a detailed method, a design, according to which the various components of the Comboni circumscriptions of Europe (mission promotion, youth pastoral, communication, immigration, etc.) plan to share (circulate transmit...) the missionary commitment *ad gentes*, according to our charism.

Therefore, this is the question we have to ask ourselves: What type of communication and information do we want to develop as Comboni circumscriptions of Europe over the following years? Fundamentally, the answer to this question will allow us to outline a “communications plan” at the European level, that will be a guide and orientation in all the activities in the field of communications, both internally and externally.

This Communications Plan must be developed together, with the cooperation of each media center (CAM), at the European level where each one, from different realities, will bring the richness of his/her own experience.

Justification

In this context, missionary publications (and therefore Comboni ones as well) are called to perform a prophetic role, not only in relation to strictly theological themes, but also in the context of burning issues related to the understanding of Mission and of the *Res publica* (common good) of peoples, such as peace, justice, solidarity, human promotion and ecology.

Planning is the activity whereby objectives are defined, strategies are developed and actions are performed, using human resources and material, in order to reach an established goal. The starting point of planning is an analysis of internal and external reality. Adequate planning helps to:

- Clarify the objectives
- Maximize available resources
- Improve cooperation and team work
- Foresee future challenges



Planning

Activity

There must be a constant flux between planning and action. In fact, planning without action becomes utopia, but action without planning leads to failure, waste of resources and a long-term lack of vision.

Elements of Planning

Planning must show the mission, the vision and the values of the Institute with a terminology that will help to determine the objectives, the strategies and the tactics.

Vision: general ideas that define the dream of what the communications-information of the European circumscriptions want to be in the future.

Mission: definition of the purpose of the European circumscriptions, namely, what makes the institution unique: its *raison d'être*. Why do we exist? For whom?

Values: Ethical principles shared by all, that regulate the life of the Institute and its circumscriptions.

General objective: What the Comboni circumscriptions of Europe want to achieve through communications.

Specific objectives: they come from the general objective and must be revisited at least every three years. The objectives must be SMART, namely, Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Time-framed.

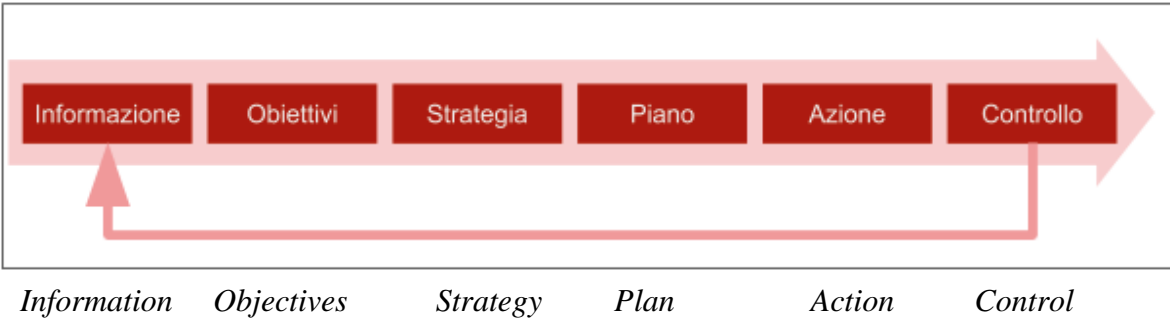
The audience (Target): the people to whom the communication is addressed.

Strategy: The selection of available resources is the way to follow in order to reach the objectives. This is a stage in planning.

Plan of action: pinpointing the activities and description of how to realize them (who will do what, when how and why).

Means: the tools that allow us to reach the objectives (publications, digital platforms...)

Evaluation: Defining the criteria to be used in order to verify the results of the Plan.



Communications Plan

First Step

Definition of vision, mission and values

Starting from the Rule of Life, from the documents of the Institute and from our experience, we try in a few words to define the idea (Vision) we want to achieve with our communication-information and what we do (Mission) to this effect. We then outline the ethical and deontological principles (Values) that enlighten our actualization. These three elements inspire the entire Plan and are also present during the process of elaboration of the Plan itself.

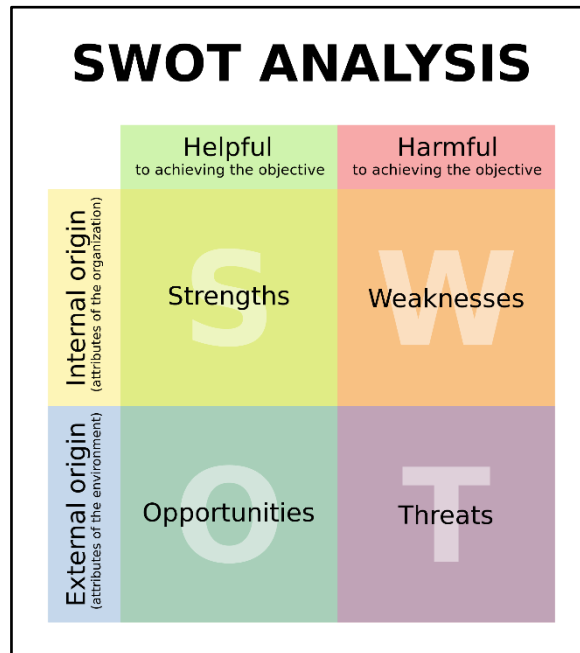
Vision: The Comboni circumscriptions of Europe see communications and information as a human service to society and to the Church which is human, spiritual and missionary in view of the realization of the Kingdom of God and of the consolidation of the common good in today's world. The information spread by the Comboni media is such as to be recognized for its quality, credibility and relevancy as a means of information and a point of reference both nationally and internationally.

Mission: Guided by human and Christian values, the communication carried out by the Comboni Missionaries aims at promoting and serving mission, namely, the evangelization of peoples, giving life to and sustaining a society which is free, just, peace-loving, fraternal, respectful of creation, and of the transcendental and inalienable dignity of the person and of human rights, especially among the poor and most abandoned.

Values: Truth, freedom, justice, peace, rights and dignity of the individual and of peoples, dialogue between cultures and religions, respect for different cultures, reconciliation, beauty of life and of Creation, subsidiarity at all levels, networking.

Second step Gathering of information

At this point in planning an analysis must take place to get to know our internal and external reality. To perform this analysis the SWOT method can be used. This is technique that helps to identify our strong and weak points, and detect possibilities that are opening up, but also threats that may impact the Institute in the field of communications.



Then follows the synthesis of the results of the work done by those responsible of all our publications:

Internal Strengths (ability, resources processes)

Identity

- Dependability, credibility and relevance of the information;
- Insertion in the peripheries, among the poorest and most abandoned worldwide;
- Identified with the publications: Mundo Negro, Além-Mar, Nigrizia, Ahiluchos, PM, Audácia, Comboni Missions, etc.;

Information

- Alternative information referred to Africa and to the countries in the South of the world, on people, politics, society and the Church;
- Exclusive information on the real and concrete life of people on a daily basis;
- The information is elaborated with quality.

Network

- Networking between Comboni publications: sharing of resources between the various publications of the Comboni circumscriptions;
- The cooperators must be in direct contact with social realities, people and cultures;
- Needed is an up-to-date database and network of addresses and contacts – always respecting privacy – of the communities, benefactors, parishes, subscribers, etc. who are a stable basis of support, sympathy and financial help;
- Cooperation with the Church and other local organizations (parishes, Pontifical Missionary Works, ecclesial groups and civil society groups);

Internal Weaknesses

Audience

- Our audience is aging and there is no renewal;
- Lack of a precise audience target;
- It is difficult to reach the young with magazines;
- A specialized style necessarily limits the audience;
- It is difficult to reach areas that are not religious.

Human resources

- There are only a few Comboni Missionaries available to work in media;
- Too many Comboni Missionaries are not in the habit of writing about their lives;
- A lack of strategy on the distribution of our publications.

Internet

- Our presence in the digital world is still limited;
- The missionary message does not reach those born in the digital age.

External Opportunities

Credibility

- Networking with ecclesial and social movements and with NGOs working in the field of justice, peace, and the integrity of creation;
- The users want to do good and they search for safe channels, because they often fear that help may not reach where it should. Comboni Missionaries can ensure that.

Message

- The readers, especially the young, are very sensitive to social and environmental injustices, so they expect from us concrete indications and proposals for action on peace, dialogue, reconciliation, care of the environment, etc.

- The challenges of migration in Europe and worldwide;
- There is a new awareness of social questions and of solidarity (requests for cooperation to social and development projects are accepted favorably);

Internet

- The Internet can reach a vast public through various inter-medial channels, and information can always be renewed and updated at any time while interacting with the public.

Human resources

- A selection of journalists and technical personnel with adequate preparation who will allow us to reach the younger sector (native digital) through the Internet and the social media;
- The presence of young Afro-Europeans: they could be our ‘allies’ and direct intermediaries.

External Threats

Cultural dimension

- Superficiality and lack of depth of information;
- Secularization and the loss of a sense of God;
- The dominant culture of “post-truth;”
- Beside the tendency to exclude and to fear those who are different – migrant, Muslim, etc. even in Church circles – the increase in racism and xenophobia in Europe.

Audience

- The progressive decrease in interest in paper information.

Internet

- The sheer size of information which is always faster and harder to verify;
- Security, such as Malware, Viruses, etc.

Affordability

- Increase of expenses associated to paper publications.

Reading of the SWOT analysis

From the reading of the SWOT analysis we can underline the following points:

On the basis of a confrontation of the **points of strengths and weaknesses** we propose some ideas that can help to develop some objectives:

- Improving our digital presence, especially in the RRSS;
- Following carefully the demand for paper production and digital;
- Motivating and consolidating the cooperation of Comboni Missionaries across the world, creating networks, to show that mission is also communication;
- Initiating a study to help us understand what our audience expects from us;
- Developing distribution strategies.

In the confrontation between **strengths and opportunities** we suggest:

- Continuing the journalistic 2.0 formation of our staff and confreres;
- Capitalize on the public of Web 2.0 for our missionary message;
- Developing communications through internal and external networking;
- Strengthening the information in the field of JPIC: denunciation, proclamation;
- Answering the desire for spirituality and the meaning of life with a clear and concrete message.

Joining the **strengths and the threats**, it is evident that, in as much as possible, we must start to produce more video messages.

Third Step

Definition of the Audience

Our Communications reaches many and diverse groups with internal and external interests that can influence our actions in either a positive or a negative way. Therefore, we must identify them in detail according to their power to influence society. For example, opinion makers, clerics, pastoral agents, NGOs, politicians, benefactors, confreres, employees, etc.

Next, there must be a detailed description of each of our real and potential targets, defined among other things by socio-democratic variables. This definition of the audience or audiences must be matched with the definition of objectives.

Even though it is not easy to make a synthesis of the European audience of the Comboni media, the results of questionnaires sent out by our publications in Europe have brought to the surface the following characteristics:

- The recipients are divided into two groups: those who receive paper products and the digital crowd;
- There is no competition between the two groups. Namely, the diffusion of a digital publication does not take away subscribers from the paper product;
- The digital audience is between 30-45 years of age, or 23-55 according to other data;
- The paper readership is looking for a content identified as religious;

- A good percentage of subscribers really read the publication;
- For the subscribers, to pay the subscription is a way to cooperate with the work of the Comboni Missionaries;
- The subscribers are faithful and last a long time;
- The response to financing projects presented by the magazines is good;
- The paper readership came to know the publication mainly through mission promotion;
- There is no generational continuity: the children of subscribers do not keep it up;
- Youngsters between 7 and 13 years of age get to know the publications in school and in the parish.

Once the audience we want to reach or avoid is identified, the objectives are developed.

Fourth Step

Definition of the Objectives

We must determine the objectives we want to achieve, starting from the vision and mission and keeping in mind the target.

General objective

In order to define the general objective, namely in order to reach our vision and be faithful to our mission, we must think of how and where we want to be in the future.

Objective

Communicating mission through the media (both on paper and digitally) within a global missionary perspective – proclamation, prophecy and witness at the service of any reader, of society, of the Church and the Institute – becoming a point of reference in information about the South of the world.

Specific Objectives

They must be in line with the general objective, be measurable, reachable, realistic and have a deadline. For each objective a Key Performance Indicator (KPI) must be defined, namely measurable parameters needed in order to understand if the objective was reached (e.g. the number of visits on the webpage, subscriptions, likes, comments). These indicators can be related to quality or quantity.

In the context of a missionary Institute we can think of:

- “Notoriety:” how to make ourselves known;
- “Image:” how to be loved;
- “Behavior:” how to stimulate the readers to take actions;
- “Support:” how to finance our activity.

Each magazine must develop its objectives according to its readership.

Examples of communication objectives:

- *To create an awareness among our readers of the reasons why migrants come to Europe.*
- *To ensure the commitment of our benefactors through actions that will make it possible for them to contribute (taking part in workshops, book fairs, projects, etc.)*
- *To influence environmental politics and politicians themselves on the consequences of global warming.*

Fifth Step

Definition of activities

This fifth step defines the activities needed in order to reach the objectives: strategies, messages, channels (means), formats, timeline/outline.

Strategies

A strategy is the best way to reach the objectives for each concrete audience. It defines the factors (tasks, competencies, choices, networking, evaluation) that will help us to successfully reach the objectives. These strategies are defined and specified through an Organization Chart and a Map within the Communications Office.

Messages

The message (theme, content) to be communicated must consider the public we are addressing. This can be obtained by content mapping, which picks specific contents for each readership (e.g. vocational messages, fundraising, JPIC advocacy...)

Before elaborating a message, it is important to know the trending content of the topic, the format it must have and the channels to be used. Basically, it means that the Institute must be able to articulate a uniform image of its brand and of its communication base.

It will be important also to take into consideration the messages coming to us from the different types of audiences, because they are a source of information for us, in order to know who makes up these audiences that are the multipliers and sharers of our messages.

This type of table could be set up:

Target	What they need to know	Key information messages
.....

Channels

In line with the objectives, the target and the type of information we need to communicate, we must then choose the channel that fits the specific target (see table below).

Analog	Digital
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Magazine • Newspaper • Radio • Bulletins 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Magazine online • Blog • Web • RRSS • Email • Newsletter

Formats

Each channel allows for the use of different formats (multi-text and multi-media). Therefore, we must choose formats that fit our message and our public.

In the choice of the format and the channel we must consider the human and economic resources at our disposal.

The following table is an example of formats available according to the channels chosen.

Magazines	Text Image Infographic Illustration
Web	Post Image Infographic Illustration Video News Games App Presentation Animation Podcast Webinar Research document
Email	News Publicity
E-book	Text Annual report
Blog	News

	Opinion Image Video
Social Networks	Post Video Image

Definition of the activity in a table

When programming an activity, it is possible to create a table indicating the timeline of the publications: message, channel, format, human and/or economic resources, times. For instance, in order to influence public opinion on the matter of climate change, it may be good to regularly post videos and the name of who is in charge of them.

Messages	Channels	Formats	Resources (human/economic)	Schedule

Sixth Step Monitoring

Periodically (e.g. weekly, monthly, quarterly, yearly) the results obtained according to the defined KPI for each objective must be checked and the necessary changes to the Plan of action must be made.

Appendix

Stylebook

The Communications Plan should be supported and complemented by a small Stylebook, namely a brief but detailed guide of the rules that all our publications should follow, where to find the fundamental organizational parameters (Rules of the Editorial Board and of the Administrative Council), juridical ethical and deontological requirements (editorial statute, principles and norms of professional conduct, norms for texts, pictures, videos and publicity) and more formal items (layout, general criteria for texts, pictures and videos). Naturally, the juridical norms of each country where a circumscription is located, must be respected.

The General Administration has the right to publish specific norms concerning information about the Institute. This is so as to safeguard the interests of the Institute and of the individual confreres in matters of privacy (sensitive data) and the strategic choices of the Institute.

Editorial policy of each publication

The editorial policy determines how to communicate in the various media. It must show the tone which is being adopted, the desired target, and also the choice of themes and subjects. It should reflect our identity. It is important not to lose sight of what we know and of our experiences. The editorial policy reflects our image, reinforces our argumentation and guarantees our credibility.