

Communications Planning Day 17 October 2005

Objectives of Planning Day

Produce a paper for November TS Council on the communications for the Theosophical Society for their next five years.

Role of national media person

Budget for communications plan

Background

TS has been in NZ since late 1800s.

Number of branches (20 including study centres).

No of Members currently - 1000, Membership increasing/decreasing (depending on the branch).

Trend nationally, gradually decreasing.

Financial status / Assets

Head office employed staff: one fulltime; Treasurer, Education Officer, National President and Vice President all part time with honorarium.

Societies in provinces survive on members' volunteering time /funds.

Generally speaking the TS Halls under-utilized . TS libraries mainly used on one or two days a week, with the exception of Head Quarters. E.g. Lunchtime, Tuesday nights and Friday nights. Halls could be made available for other users. This would increase peoples' knowledge of the TS. However the kitchens are not really satisfactory for wider use.

Summary

Communications has been ad hoc mainly via notice board on the building, sometimes advertisement placement in local community newspapers

Flyers place on community notice boards, and other notice boards of friendly groups, word of mouth.

A communications plan would assess what we do, why we do it, and the way we do it. It would clarify the TS objectives.

Making TS messages simpler, appealing to people where they are at, and couching our messages in language they understand. Using the communication tools, (ie newsletter, flyers, library, speaker tours, advertising) that are already in use but using them smarter will help us generate more people on seat (or enlightened masters !!!).

Key messages

Our relationship to spiritual self

Our relationship to others

Our relationship to the cosmos

How we currently communicate these messages.

Figures show working group's perception of current effectiveness – 1, poor to 10, best.

What	Who	What	How often
One on one discussion (3)	To members (A) and public (B)	TS messages	Everyday

Talks/meetings Organised by HQ and Branches (5)	To members (A) and public (B)	Speaker programme, presentations, discussion, talks Facilitation TS rooms and hired rooms	Weekly Varies per branch
Workshops Organised by HQ and branches (7)	Members (A) Sometimes B	Two hour/ two days/ one week TS rooms Room hired eg Tauhara	Ad hoc and annually
Convention Organized by HQ (9)	A only usually	TS presentations Keynote speakers Social activities	Once a year
Newsletter Organised by Branches (4-7)	A and B	Branch news Programme Contacts	Occasionally Monthly When new programme comes out Varies
Magazine National (5)	A and B	TS articles Some national news Contacts Whats on Membership Library news	Quarterly
Other like-minded publications (1)	B	Rainbow News; Intouch; Healthy Options; The Emergence (n/letter) ISTTS News (n/letter); Zeiten Schrift (ex Germany, NZ contact in Wanganui)	Not using
Email (5)	A and B	Committee notification Programme	As needed
Newspaper Community National (3-7)	A and B	Whats on column Special meetings News releases advertising	Weekly As needed
TS noticeboard & other notice boards (5)	A and B	Advising of meetings, special groups	As needed
Like-minded groups (3)	B	Advise of special meetings	Varied
Radio (2)	B	Interviews advertisement	Ad hoc
Website (3)	A and B	Explains who we are programme	As needed
Libraries (3)	A and B	Books for A and B	Varies: Ak's HPB Brch: Six days.

Target Audience

Readers 15+
People seeking balance in their lives
Characterized by traditional cultural values not as important
Collect database of interests, activities, occupation.

Recommendation for improving communications

One on one

In TS magazines, newsletters and branch meetings encourage members to share theosophy with the public

Talks

Make language relevant for today
Publicise better
Improve quality, content and presenter
Make interactive

Workshops

Recommendations as for talks
Database of members interests to advise them of events

Convention

More publicity in community & daily newspapers, notice boards, billboards about convention before and after the events.

Newsletters – organized by Branches

- Provide template for branches (eg always have website, local contacts, prog.)
- Good quality printing, layout.
- Accurate grammar, consistent style in presentation
- Use post & E-mail (E-mail can be more frequent). Post to TS Website.
- Communicate/advertise mbrs' occupations, services.
- Use inspirational articles, images.
- Comment on relevant issues for today.
- Regular frequency
- Library news & book reviews.

TS Magazine

Further to National Cnl's re-evaluation:
- Make language/content relevant for today
Include newsletter type material
Accurate grammar, consistent style in presentation
See entries for Branch Newsletters.

Other Like-minded Publications

e.g. Rainbow News; Intouch; Healthy Options; The Emergence (n/letter)
ISTNS News (n/letter); Zeiten Schrift (ex Germany, NZ contact in Wanganui)
Use for articles, coming progs.
Must use Rainbow Diary (free).
Paid advts where value for money

E-mail

- See recommendations for newsletters.

Newspapers

- Publicity in community & daily newspapers, before & after events.
- Accurate grammar, consistent style in presentation
- Use What's on columns (standard notice an option) Again, relevant wording.
- Photographs where poss.
- Paid advts where value for money
- Refer News Media W/shop participants.

Radio

- Similar for newspapers; when speaker/prog has wider interest, arranged interviews. Positive approach.

Website

- TS Website address on all material produced.
- Accurate grammar, consistent style in presentation
- Improve layout – an easier, more friendly
- Use relevant wording/language, e.g. easy to read, good fonts
- Kept up-to-date
- Investigate other sites for comparison of layout (Canadian TS site; School of Philosophy Auckland site).
- Create things that are attractive to searchers (become a sticky website)
- Use 'links' to like sites.
- Collect 'usage' data.

Libraries

- Advertise specialty nature and uniqueness. Include this in all publicity where appropriate.
- Extend to electronic audio & visual material.

TS & Other Community Notice Boards

- Concentrate on quality posters.
- Timely placement.
- Use relevant wording/language.

Like-minded Groups

- Keep good contacts (from TS national and branch levels).
- Use their diaries/notice boards.
- Have presence at their fairs, open days, expos.

Other Areas & Opportunities

(Time has limited these recommendations and they can be added to)

- 'New Age' businesses – book shops, nutrition, gift/crystal shops
- Communication with and displays at retreat centres (and similar).

Budget allowances need to be considered for many of these recommendations. Time prevented this aspect for this report.

This is by no means a complete assessment and further ideas are welcomed.

***From: The Communications Working Group
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