

T. F. D...

Communications Guide for Startups

Best practice tips and insights
to help early-stage companies

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The TFD Communications Guide for Startups focuses on best practice tips and insights to help early-stage companies drive greater investment, customer engagement, and awareness. The Guide includes learnings from interviews conducted with a broad mix of B2B communications experts, in addition to experience from client work. The advice is centred around what you should: Think (insights), Feel (how to engage), and Do (activity).

We will cover the following topics:



Engage the media



Think like an editor



Leverage social media



Success metrics



Build a brand

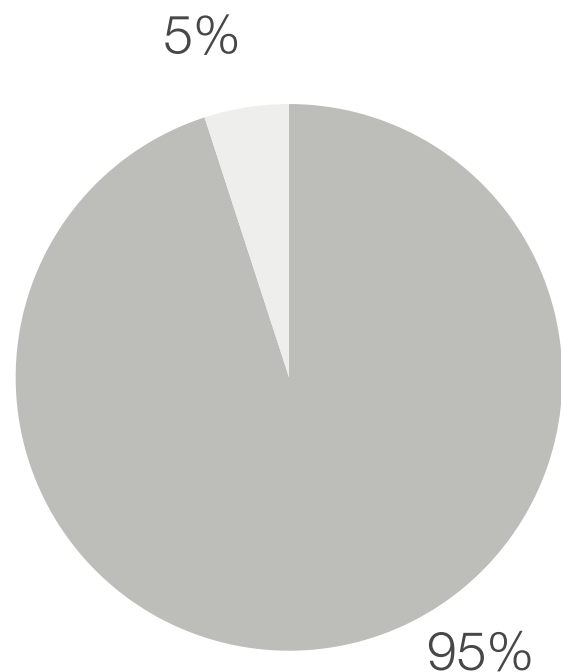


Deliver successful
events

Build a Brand

Think

Only 5% of B2B buyers are in the market to purchase a product at any given moment. Ensuring you stay top of mind for the other 95% means maintaining and cultivating their attention until they are in a position to buy. Building brand awareness involves developing consistency and clarity of message, and a brand identity that acts as both a differentiator and a trust-building mechanism.



Feel

For startups, what this means is that you need to develop a compelling story that clearly articulates what makes you unique and the challenges you solve, that will captivate your target audience and be authentic. Messaging should describe what you do and how you do it, but also how it will create impact, solve a problem or improve people's lives.




Do

Storytelling requires time to develop and buy-in to be successful. When creating a narrative, allow time to interview key stakeholders internally and externally, including customers, investors, or partners, to gather input from all your target audiences.

In addition, carry out research to understand how competitors talk about what they do, so you can articulate what sets you apart. Having a clear understanding of your company's mission and vision, target audiences, customer challenges, and product roadmap is important input to the messaging process. This will help you to create a single source of truth for all communications. And make sure your story is memorable - think big!

When you have agreed on your narrative and key messages, ensure everyone on your team is briefed and can deliver the story. This consistency reinforces your brand identity whether someone encounters you on social media, your website, in media articles, or through in-person interactions.



When communicating with investors, start with the problem and not the solution.

– Jimmy Fussing Nielsen, Co-Founder and CEO, Heartcore Capital



Think Like a Editor

With your company narrative and messaging in place, the next step is to articulate your story across your owned channels.

Think

Large language models favour insightful thought leadership content. Retrieval-augmented models (like Perplexity) rank sources based on authority, engagement, and coherence - meaning content such as generic press releases, short form news and listicles often get buried. Make sure the content you develop is authoritative editorial content: accurate, relevant, and trustworthy.


Feel

When creating content, consider who you're writing for. Think about what interests your audience, what problems they face, and how much they already know about the topic. Also consider which platform you're using, eg email, LinkedIn, blog. Think about how you make the technology, product, or news relatable and meaningful to your audience, and then add proof points to build credibility or strengthen your argument. Different forms of content work better on different platforms, so when repurposing content, consider each channel and what works and what doesn't, to ensure what you've drafted is engaging and will ultimately drive impact. This may include developing video assets, which can be especially relevant when explaining complex technology.



Do

Research examples of similar content that's out there and ask yourself: why is this content engaging, what do I like about it, and would it resonate with my target audience? Look at competitors to understand what they're doing. Also, make sure that you are maximising interesting stories by repurposing the content across channels, in different formats. Finally, track what content drives the most engagement to understand what is the most interesting for your target audiences and how this might differ across channels.



B2B comms must balance platform-specific tone with a consistent message that reflects long-term strategy and mission.

– Amalia Kontesi, Chief Marketing and Communications Officer at the NATO Innovation Fund



Sifted 250

The fastest-growing European
(ranked by a 2011 survey)

1	FINN
2	Yazen
3	tl;dv
4	Vertice
5	Electra
6	REVER
7	Robin AI
8	finmid
9	1000 Payments

33 Healthtech-1
34 HIVED
35 Zelt
36 Frontnow
37 Abound
38 sheerME
39 Flo Health
40 Cargoplot
41 Scan.com

63	Colossyan	97	Xapes
66	Serenis	98	Chip
67	ZWATCH	99	emna
68	Wefox	100	Dits
69	Greenely	101	Pingpre
70	CleverCards	102	Formalize
71	Neura Robotics	103	Just Russel
72	Reflect	104	GeyrasaLA
73	Health-AI	105	Wibo
74	Unifit	106	Wolframr


129 Tardus	131 Ophichthys	133 Tetraodon	135 Tetraodon
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Engage the Media

Journalist-written articles about your company are more powerful than ads for building trust. Also, research shows that media coverage helps when you're raising money or hiring people. So it's important to understand what journalists want and how to work with them

Think

The media landscape has become more complex, fragmented and increasingly difficult to navigate with the rise of AI-driven content. In addition, communications strategies need to factor in more channels than ever before because of how people consume information, from social media to the media to newsletters and platforms such as Substack. There's also owned, earned and paid content. Owned content is content that you publish on your own channels; earned is coverage that is written about you by a publication or other influencer, and paid is content that you've paid for through sponsorship or advertising.



Additionally, engaging with relevant influencers, industry analysts or other third parties such as academics to develop communications programmes or news can also add credibility. Earned coverage has an important role to play in the age of AI to ensure greater discoverability, as it is viewed as expert content that AI algorithms rank higher.

Feel

The most important consideration when engaging the media is putting yourself in the journalist's shoes. Before undertaking any engagement, you should ask yourself if the story you're proposing is going to be interesting, educational, or informative for a journalist. At the heart of this is understanding who their readers are, and tailoring your pitch and your content accordingly. One of the biggest mistakes that organisations make is assuming that everyone will be as interested in their product as they are.

The reality is that journalists are time-poor and saturated with requests and technology content. If you want to get their attention, you need to ensure that you have both the technology stories, media landscape knowledge and practical skills with which to do so. This is where a PR agency can help advise you to frame the news in a way that will appeal to the press or give you honest feedback if something isn't newsworthy.






Do

In the age of AI, securing coverage in credible publications is becoming more important since, unlike paid advertising campaigns, organic editorial coverage helps position you and your organisation as an expert; it provides third-party validation, and places you at the heart of the business or technology story that is being written. If this is a story about your own organisation, even better. The resulting coverage can then be amplified across social media, internal channels, on your website, in presentations, and as part of sales enablement campaigns.

Just don't forget that for a story to be interesting, you need to consider: is this topical, relevant to readers, interesting or unique, and ultimately does it have a human impact?



A good startup story has to be interesting. Ask yourself: Why would anyone care about the news? Why is now the time to tell it? What's different? And is this journalist at this publication the right person to tell it to?

– Amy Lewin, Editor, Sifted

11/11/2016

Think

[illegible]

Feel


11/11/2016



Do

Before setting up channels, consider where your stakeholders and customers are, and make sure you have a plan for posts and engagement. For your social media programme to be successful, you need to understand your target audience and develop a content programme that drives consistent engagement.

More often than not, content that features your team, or comes from people within your business, is more effective - people engage with people. Finally, testing what works is an important part of any social media programme. Building engaged followers doesn't happen overnight, as algorithms favour consistency in addition to engagement.



Social media and content from within the company, with the people in the company, is what will bring viewers along to experience who you are, and will help them decide how they feel about you.

– Matthew Byrd, Influencer, Podcaster, Event Host, and Founder of Reality Capture Network

Maximise Event Impact




Think

Events have gained increased importance in recent months compared to the pre-COVID era, driven by people's renewed appreciation for human interaction and direct engagement. Still, they are one of the biggest line items in any marketing budget, so being clear on event objectives, success criteria, and detailed budget tracking is crucial. When creating an event plan, think about how you make the most out of the event in the run up to, during and after, to achieve maximum value with, for example, press announcements, blogs; or social media.

Feel

Companies need to be creative in how they maximise events to engage with customers, journalists, partners, and other stakeholders to create meaningful touch points and conversations. Setting up invitation-only discussions at events or exclusive dinners, one-to-one briefings, or a networking reception are a few ideas that can work.




Having interesting speakers and or insights is important to provide added value to attendees who may have to choose between invitations during a busy industry event, especially when activities and headlines are dominated by the big, established players.

Do

Questions to consider when event planning include: who are the target audiences that you can reach at the event, how do you best engage with them; how can you reach prospects who can't attend in person but who would be interested to hear what you'll be doing; what other audiences would support you in driving awareness and engagement, and is there anything new about the event this year that you can leverage? Allow enough time to build momentum going into a show to drive excitement.

And don't forget to follow up. By capturing content such as demos or talking head videos on the ground, you can extend the messaging post-event and amplify your event messaging to a wider audience. It's also worth asking your team to help share what you're doing in advance, so that they're aware of the focus and strategy for a particular event and can share the information with their network.



Community-style events [were] a leading source of revenue generation for us. We weren't pitching them to come listen to us talk about our product, and we'll give you a demo, and then maybe you'll buy from us. It was very much us bringing together the top 30 CISOs in New York working at financial services institutions, and we're going to talk about these relevant topics for this industry, share best practices, and share insights. We would just make sure we had at least one Darktrace advocate in the room.

– MK Beck, Head of Marketing, Oxford Ionics (ex-Darktrace)

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Summary

If done well, effective communications serves as a strategic business driver, enabling startups to engage key stakeholders, build awareness, and drive meaningful connections. For emerging companies, communication becomes an essential tool for attracting investment, recruiting top talent, acquiring customers, and ultimately scaling the business.

Connect_

We love technology. Let's help people fall in love with yours.

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