

Global Scripture Ministries Briefing

Topic: Stakeholder Communications Strategy
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Creating a standard organizing principle for stakeholder communications

Before outlining the standard organizing principle for GSM stakeholder communications, it is worthwhile noting the journey ABS has taken in reforming its structure, organization and strategic thinking since these factors provide the context to our thinking.

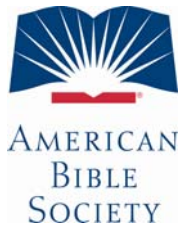
A brief history

In the early 1990s the American Bible Society (ABS) began laying down the groundwork for organizational change that involved transformations to its governance, management and support staff structure. In January 2001 the Board of Trustees approved *The Mission and Vision Statement* (which was revised in February 2005 to include the concluding phrase “so all people may experience its life-changing message.”¹) The intended purpose and audience for *The Mission and Vision Statement* was not only to better inform and motivate ABS staff but also to better inform and motivate the public at large, many of whom who would be later be invited to become ABS donors. In January 2003 the social, economic and national security issues that influenced the prevailing zeitgeist within the U.S. also affected the American Bible Society to the extent that ABS leadership abandoned incremental reform to embrace a “massive transformational change initiative.”² By May 2003 the thinking behind these organizational changes were distilled into a document named *Strategic Foundations*. The language in this document shows a paradigm shift in leadership thinking and decision-making with the emphasis being on disciplined execution of a well-reasoned plan that takes into account four specific transformations as part of the newly sharpened focus as outlined below:

Newly sharpened focus

A. From an emphasis on Scripture distribution ... to Scripture engagement

This involves moving beyond just building distribution programs that invite Scripture engagement. Instead the emphasis is on designing engagement programs that use distribution as a means to an end. The difference in focus is at the program planning stage and may seem subtle at first, however, the improvements in measurable life impact will always be significant. Before ABS funds or implements a program, the implementors need to be able to answer “yes” to the following questions:



- Can this program comfortably fit within one of ABS' MOST ministry portfolios?
- Does the target audience include one or more of the seven priority people groups?
- Does this program move beyond mere distribution to measuring the willingness, understanding and action taken by its recipient audience?

B. From measuring the number of products ... to demonstrating sustainable impact through changed lives

This means moving from a mere quantitative measurement to carrying out extensive groundwork that enables us to measure life impact on a “qualitative” scale, i.e..

- What are the specific metrics that have we put in place to enable us to effectively measure the impact of this program on the recipient audience?
- Is our system of gathering and disseminating life-change stories airtight?
- Where are the gaps and what are we doing to close them?
- What follow-up plans do we have in place to ensure that the impact of this program is sustainable?

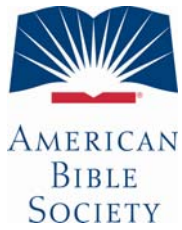
C. From a subsidy mindset ... to more of a business model

Successful, sustainable Scripture engagement cannot be carried out without the firm and well-grounded business model that undergirds it. This means having processes in place that streamline our current mode of operation and hone our existing skills so that we can be said to be operating at optimum “best practice” levels.

Collaborative Programs

It would be difficult to identify the holes in the internal/stakeholder communications without also mentioning that there currently exists a programmatic disconnect. Until recently, ABS' programs have been categorized by an array of well-intentioned yet siloed activities, e.g. Hispanic-Latino Ministries carrying out a publicity campaign for its programs on MySpace and YouTube but with no link to ShareYour StoryNow.org. Admittedly, GSM departments began to address this disconnect in January 2008 when they pooled their talents and other resources to hold the Rock 2008 event, Ocean City, MD, where ABS' Church Partner, NextGen and Digital Ministries teams jointly implemented an event that also enjoyed co-funding by the Maryland Bible Society and the Baptist Convention. To understand the extent to which a program is collaborative in nature, we need to ask the following key questions:

- What is the scope of this project: is it a one-off, stand-alone event or part of a comprehensive long-term ministry program?



- How many ABS departments are involved in its planning, implementation and follow-up?
- Which non-ABS ministry partners have we invited to help us implement and measure the impact of this program?

D. From a “build it and they will come” mentality ... to a “Solutions” Approach

Audience Research

Since 2003 ABS has been doing a better job of listening to its audience *before* building a product or program rather than creating a product and then *afterwards* finding out if an audience exists who would “buy” it. However, more work needs to be done here such as conducting preliminary market research studies or referring to existing studies. We need to look at the bigger picture, reacquaint ourselves with our key audiences and then see if our current core competencies are good enough to reach out to those people.

Donor Research

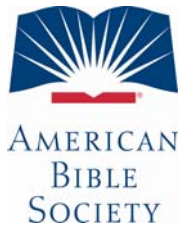
Research on the program audience is only one part of the equation: it is also vital to know whether our programs are likely to have donor appeal. Here is where the project research skills and insights on donor psychology provided by our colleagues in Direct Response and Development Marketing and Research come into their own.

Partner Alignment

GSM is moving away from the old model where it poured increasing quantities of funding into stand-alone programs. We have moved from, “How can we find more money for ABS to carry out its programs alone,” to “How can we better leverage program investments made by our ministry partners to improve how we jointly implement, measure and sustain the effectiveness of our programs?” We should celebrate and build on the areas where we excel in mission and ministry while at the same time admitting the areas where our partners are better-equipped to implement, follow up and measure programmatic results. We also need to recognize where the areas of competency overlap.

This involves “moving from a products-based mentality to a Partners on the frontline approach.”³ At the macro level this involves asking the following:

- Does what ABS wants to offer align with what partners want to receive from us? If not, recalibrate our offer or say “no”
- Can ABS execute what its wants to offer? If not, build our capacity or say “no.”
- Does what ABS wants to receive from partners align with what they want to give ABS? If not, recalibrate our offer or say “no”.



- Can partners execute what ABS wants to receive? If not, build their capacity or say “no.”³

ABS should only proceed with a program when the answer to all the above four questions is “yes” and the way ahead “is clearly scaleable, replicable and sustainable with external funds.”³ At the practical level this involves ABS and its partners investing in co-designed resources for engagement, for example, re-skinned Pastor’s Caring Ministry Packets for military chaplains.

Common design template

Before embarking on the journey of naming, categorizing and disseminating our stakeholder communications we need to address the basic question: who are GSM’s stakeholders? The basic “textbook answer” is that they are persons both internal and external who have a vested interest in the continued success of ABS in fulfilling its mission mandate. On this basis, the main stakeholders are the ABS Board of Trustees, leadership and staff, partners and donors. It is only with the donors that GSM looks to the Direct Response and Development Marketing and Research (DMR) teams to carry out direct communications.

When communicating with our stakeholders we need to convey a strong sense of branding because, “a brand is a promise, it is a mark of trust”⁴ Moreover, “A brand is not a product. It is the sum total of everything a company does — the good, the bad and even the off strategy — that creates a large context or an identity in the consumer’s mind.”⁵ In this context, the term “consumer” refers to GSM stakeholders. Therefore, in February 2008, the senior leadership team of ABS’ Global Scripture Ministries area, are considering the adoption of a common design template to provide unified branding across all GSM’s stakeholder communications. The rationale behind this move is that such communications would be part of an instantly-recognizable family of documents within a unified, internal branding system, and the repeated use of specific motifs, fonts and colors across GSM’s print and electronic media will accomplish several things:

- Assure visual consistency to all our internal communications.
- Provide assurance to staff that the source of the communication is to be trusted.
- Reinforce our messaging by providing an authoritative format that confers authority to the statements or instructions contained therein.

1 *The Mission and Vision Statement*, February 2005

2 *Strategic Foundations, Preface*, May 2003

3 *BOT 2008-02 - FINAL - presented notes.ppt*, February 2008

4 *Intelligent Marketing Solutions for Education*, http://www.cic.edu/conferences_events/presidents/previouspres/PI2004Resources/Lawlor%20presentation.pdf, January 2004

5 *Scott Bedbury, formerly of Nike and Starbucks*, *The Lawlor Review*, Winter 2000