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# Communications Strategy Builder

Most communication does not fail because people cannot write. It fails because there was no plan before the writing started. A post goes out because it is Tuesday. An email goes out because someone remembered it at the last minute. A flyer says one thing, a social post says another, and the person answering the phone says a third thing — not because anyone meant to confuse people, but because nobody ever sat down and decided, in one place, who this message is for, what it must say, and what happens next. The Communications Strategy Builder is the system that fixes that. It is a practical, step-by-step way to build a communication plan you can actually run, on paper or in a simple document, before you send a single message.

Think of the Builder the way you would think of building a house from a plan instead of stacking bricks and hoping. The plan does not make the house less human. It makes sure the doors line up, the roof fits, and everyone working on it is building the same house. In communication, the plan answers five plain questions every time: Who are we talking to? What do they need to understand? What do we want them to do? Where will they see it? And how will we know if it worked? The Builder walks you through those questions in order, with worksheets you fill in with real names, real dates, and real words — not slogans copied from somewhere else.

This lesson set teaches the Communications Strategy Builder as Destiny built it for Fortress: a named system with clear parts, clear steps, and a rhythm you can repeat for a small business, a nonprofit, a school program, a church or ministry, a community project, or your own professional work. You do not need a marketing degree to use it. You need honesty about who you serve, patience to write things down, and the discipline to check your plan before you publish. By the end, you will know how to map your audiences, build a message house that keeps every message consistent, choose channels on purpose, set a voice people recognize, and run a simple calendar and review so your communication gets steadier every month instead of starting from zero every time.

Who does this help most? It helps the owner who is also the receptionist, the bookkeeper, and the person posting online at midnight. It helps a small team where three people all speak for the same organization in three different styles. It helps anyone who has ever sent an important message and then thought, an hour later, “That is not what I meant to say at all.” If your communication feels scattered, rushed, or different every week, the Builder is for you. It will not write your messages for you, and it will not make a hard announcement easy. What it does is give you a place to think before you speak in public — and in business and community work, that thinking time is the difference between trust built and trust spent.

## What You Will Learn

- What the Communications Strategy Builder is, what its five parts are, and the order to use them in.
- How to build an Audience Map with real people, real needs, and what each group should hear first.

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- How to build a Message House — one core message, three supporting points, and proof for each — so every post, email, and conversation says the same true thing.
- How to choose channels on purpose instead of posting everywhere and reaching no one well.
- How to set a voice guide with words you use, words you avoid, and examples in your own sound.
- How to turn a plan into a working calendar with owners, dates, and a review step before anything goes out.
- How to run a simple check after you publish — what landed, what confused people, and what to fix next time.
- How to keep the whole Builder to a few pages you will actually use, instead of a long document nobody opens.

## Lesson 1 — The Builder Itself: Five Parts, One Order

The Communications Strategy Builder has five parts, and the order matters. Part One is the Audience Map: who you serve, in plain groups with real needs. Part Two is the Message House: what you say, built so it stays the same no matter who delivers it. Part Three is the Channel Plan: where each message travels — email, social media, a website, a printed flyer, a phone call, a meeting. Part Four is the Voice Guide: how you sound, so a reader can recognize you even without your name on the page. Part Five is the Calendar and Review: when things go out, who owns them, and how you learn from what happened. Skip the order and the system wobbles. Choose channels before you know your audience and you will shout in rooms your people never enter. Write messages before you map audiences and you will write for yourself instead of for the people who need to act.

Each part fits on about a page. That is deliberate. A strategy you cannot hold in your hands and read in five minutes is a strategy you will not use on a busy day — and busy days are exactly when you need it most. The Builder is not a binder for a shelf. It is a working sheet for a desk. When a new announcement, event, problem, or opportunity appears, you do not start from a blank page. You open the Builder, find the audience on the Map, take the message from the House, pick the channel from the Plan, check the sound against the Voice Guide, and put it on the Calendar. Five checks, in order, before anything leaves the building.

The Builder also has one rule that sits above all five parts: tell the truth, in plain language, the first time. A strategy cannot fix a message that is not true, and it should never be used to dress up something misleading in nicer words. If the facts are bad — a delay, a price change, a cancellation — the Builder helps you say the bad facts clearly, early, and with what you are doing about them. People forgive clear bad news far more often than they forgive being surprised, confused, or talked around. Every example in this lesson set follows that rule, because a communication system that only works for good news is not a system at all.

Finally, understand what the Builder honestly is not. It is not software that posts for you. It is not a promise that people will agree with you, buy from you, or show up. It cannot replace knowing

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your work well or treating people well when they answer back. What it does is remove the most common, preventable cause of communication failure — deciding everything at the last minute, differently, every time. That removal, repeated week after week, is what steady trust looks like from the outside.

## The Steps

1. Start a single document or folder named “Communications Strategy Builder” and give it five sections, one for each part, in order: Audience Map, Message House, Channel Plan, Voice Guide, Calendar and Review.

2. Write the purpose of your communication at the top in one sentence: who you serve and what your communication must help them do. If you cannot write that sentence yet, write a rough one and mark it to revisit after Lesson 2.

3. Set a rule for the document: only current, true information lives here. When a price, date, name, or policy changes, the Builder changes the same day.

4. Decide who owns the Builder — one named person who keeps it current — and who else may use it to draft messages.

5. Decide where the Builder lives so everyone who speaks for the work can reach it, and so an old printed copy cannot quietly keep circulating after it is out of date.

6. Schedule your first build session: two quiet hours to work through Lessons 2 to 5, or four shorter sessions of thirty minutes each, one part at a time.

7. Before you build anything else, list your last five public messages — posts, emails, flyers — and read them side by side. Note where they disagreed with each other. That list is your starting evidence, not a reason to feel bad; almost everyone finds gaps, and finding them is the point.

## A Worked Example

Renee runs a small home-cleaning company with four cleaners and more demand than she can schedule. Her communication, by her own description, is “all in my head and all at the last minute.” A customer complains that a Facebook post promised a deep-clean special that the person answering the phone had never heard of. Renee sits down with the Builder and, before writing anything new, does the side-by-side review from Step 7. She finds three different prices for the same service across a flyer, a post, and her website, and two different phone numbers — one of them an old number that now rings a stranger. Nothing about her cleaning was wrong. Her communication had no single source of truth. She names herself owner of the Builder, creates the five sections, and writes her purpose sentence: “Our communication helps busy households in our town book a clean they understand, at a price they saw before we arrive, with no surprises.” Every fix she makes in the next four lessons hangs on that sentence. The stray phone number comes off the flyer that week — the Builder already paid for itself, because the review step caught what memory had missed for months.

## Common Mistakes

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• **Building the parts out of order.** Picking channels and writing posts before mapping audiences produces polished messages aimed at nobody in particular.

• **Making the Builder too long to use.** A twenty-page strategy that nobody opens loses to a three-page Builder that lives on the desk and gets marked up.

• **Letting the Builder go stale.** Prices, dates, staff names, and policies change. A Builder that is not updated the same day becomes a source of confident, wrong messages.

• **Using strategy to soften the truth.** Nicer wording around a misleading claim is still misleading. Fix the facts first; the Builder handles the clarity.

• **Keeping the Builder in one person's head.** If only one person knows the plan, the plan leaves when they are sick, on vacation, or gone. Write it down and share it with the people who speak for the work.

## Lesson 2 — The Audience Map: Who Hears What, First

Every message has a listener, whether you planned for one or not. The Audience Map is where you name those listeners honestly, in groups small enough to be useful. "Everyone" is not an audience. "The general public" is not an audience. Useful groups sound like this: current customers who booked in the last year; parents of children in the program; local business owners on your street; people who asked about your work but never bought; the staff and volunteers who deliver the work. Each group knows different things, needs different things, worries about different things, and should sometimes hear news in a different order. The Map records all of that in one place so you stop writing one blended message that fits nobody well.

For each group on the Map, record five things. First, who they are, in plain words a new helper could understand. Second, what they already know about you — never assume a new listener knows what a loyal one knows. Third, what they need from your communication: information, reassurance, instructions, an invitation, a warning. Fourth, their main worry or question — the thing they will ask first if you do not answer it. Fifth, where they actually pay attention: the channel they truly read, not the one you wish they read. That last point requires honesty. If your older customers never open social media but always answer the phone, the Map says phone. Your preferences do not outrank their habits.

Order matters as much as content. Some news must reach one group before another group hears it publicly. Staff should never learn about a schedule change from a public post. Current members should not learn about a price change from a flyer meant for strangers. The Map includes a simple column: "Hears it first, second, or public." Filling that column in calm times prevents one of the most damaging and most common communication injuries — the people closest to the work feeling like they were told last. When a hard announcement comes, you will not have time to invent the order. The Map already holds it.

Keep the Map small enough to stay true. Most small organizations have three to six real audiences. If your Map lists fourteen groups, most of them are the same people wearing different hats, and the Map will collapse under its own weight. Merge groups that need the same information in the same order through the same channel. Split a group only when its need,

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worry, or channel genuinely differs. And review the Map whenever your work changes — a new service, a new location, a new kind of customer — because a new audience that is not on the Map will be communicated with by accident, which is to say, badly.

## The Steps

1. List every group that hears from you or should hear from you: customers or clients, staff or volunteers, partners, community members, and people considering your work.
2. Merge the list down to three to six groups. Combine any groups that need the same information, in the same order, through the same channel.
3. For each group, write the five Map entries: who they are, what they already know, what they need, their main worry or question, and the channel they actually pay attention to.
4. Add the order column: for important news, mark whether this group hears it first, second, or at the public announcement.
5. Check the Map against reality: ask two or three real people from your biggest groups how they prefer to hear news from you, and correct the Map where their answers surprise you.
6. Write one sentence at the bottom of the Map: “We never let [group] learn important news from a public post.” Fill in the groups that deserve to hear directly — usually staff first, then current members or customers.
7. Date the Map. Review it every three months, and immediately whenever your work, team, or customers change in a real way.

## A Worked Example

Marcus coordinates a neighborhood tutoring program run from a community center. His audiences, once he maps them, are four: the tutors, the parents, the children’s schools, and families on the waiting list. The Map surfaces a problem he had felt but never named. Parents’ main worry is not cost — the program is free — it is safety and pickup: who will be with their child, and exactly when and where pickup happens. His old messages led with curriculum and celebration photos, and buried pickup details at the bottom, which is why parents kept calling the center with the same anxious questions. He rewrites the Map so every parent message must answer pickup and supervision in the first three lines. He also sets the order column after a painful memory: the previous spring, tutors learned the program was moving rooms from a parent’s social post. The Map now states plainly that tutors hear operational news first, by direct message from Marcus, at least a day before any public word. The next term, parent calls about pickup drop sharply — not because parents changed, but because the Map finally recorded what they had needed all along, and every message was built from it.

## Common Mistakes

- **Writing “everyone” as an audience.** A message aimed at everyone is shaped for no one, and each real group hears the parts meant for others as noise.
- **Guessing channels instead of checking habits.** Posting where you enjoy posting, while your audience lives somewhere else, is talking to an empty room in a confident voice.

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- **Forgetting internal audiences.** Staff and volunteers are an audience. Leaving them off the Map is how the people delivering the work end up uninformed in front of the public.
- **Letting the closest people hear news last.** When loyal customers or staff learn your news from a public post, the damage is to trust, not just to information — and trust damage lasts longer.
- **Building a Map with a dozen groups.** Too many groups means the Map never gets used. Three to six honest groups beat fourteen precise ones that nobody maintains.

## Lesson 3 — The Message House: One Roof, Three Pillars, Proof Under Each

If the Audience Map is who you talk to, the Message House is what you say — built once, carefully, so that a hundred future messages can be assembled from it without drifting. Picture a simple house. The roof is your core message: one sentence that says what your work is, who it is for, and why it matters, in words a stranger could repeat back to a friend. Under the roof stand three pillars: the three supporting points that make the core message believable and useful. Under each pillar sits its foundation: the proof — a fact, a number, a story with permission, a credential stated accurately, a date — that shows the point is true and not just claimed. A message built from the House can be long or short, spoken or posted, but it always stands on the same structure, so your flyer, your website, and your own mouth at a community event all describe the same work in the same terms.

Build the roof sentence with discipline. It must be true on your worst week, not just your best one. If your roof says “same-day service,” it must survive the day the van breaks down — or it must be rewritten to what is always true, such as “booked within two days, and we tell you the exact window before we come.” It must name the audience, because a message for everyone persuades no one. And it must be short enough to say out loud without notes: if you cannot say your roof sentence in one breath, it is not a roof yet, it is a paragraph wearing a costume. Test it on a real person outside your work. If they can repeat the sense of it back to you after hearing it once, the roof holds.

The three pillars are chosen by asking what a sensible listener needs in order to believe the roof and act on it. For most small organizations the pillars fall into natural families: what you offer and how it works; why people can trust it; and what it costs, what it does not include, and how someone starts. Resist the urge to make all three pillars praise. One pillar should almost always be the honest, practical one — price range, limits, eligibility, what you do not do — because that pillar does more for trust than any amount of enthusiasm. Under each pillar, write two or three proofs. Proof means checkable: years operating, number of households served, a named process, a real review quoted with permission. If a pillar has no proof, the pillar is a wish. Either find the proof, shrink the claim until the proof you have supports it, or drop the pillar.

The House also holds a small room people forget: the answers to hard questions. Write down the five questions you most dread — about price, about a past mistake, about who is qualified, about what happens when something goes wrong — and draft a calm, true answer for each,

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using the pillars and their proof. This is not negativity; it is preparation. The person who has already written the answer to the hard question answers it steadily in public. The person who has not, improvises — and improvised answers to hard questions are where inconsistency, overpromising, and accidental untruth creep in.

## The Steps

1. Draft your roof sentence: what the work is, who it is for, and why it matters, in one breath. Read it aloud and cut any word that does no work.
2. Test the roof on someone outside your work. Ask them to say it back in their own words. Rewrite until their version matches your meaning.
3. Choose three pillars that a listener needs in order to believe the roof and act: usually the offer and how it works, the trust point, and the practical point covering cost, limits, and how to start.
4. Under each pillar, list two or three proofs — facts, numbers, named processes, or permitted stories — that a listener could check.
5. Shrink any claim its proof cannot carry. If you cannot prove “best,” write what you can prove, such as how long you have served and what your customers say with permission.
6. Write the five hard questions your audience asks, and draft a calm, true answer to each from your pillars and proof.
7. Put the finished House on one page in the Builder. From now on, every public message must be traceable to the roof, at least one pillar, and its proof — if a draft cannot be traced, it does not go out.

## A Worked Example

Denise owns a small bookkeeping service for food businesses — bakeries, food trucks, small cafes. Her old pitch was “we handle all your financial needs,” which was broad, unprovable, and, as she admits, not quite true: she does not do taxes. Her House, built over two evenings, stands like this. Roof: “Bookkeeping for food businesses that keeps your books clean every month, so tax time holds no surprises.” Pillar One, how it works: monthly close by the tenth, receipts collected through one simple upload habit, a plain-language summary she reviews with each client. Proof: her written monthly checklist and the close date she has kept for two years. Pillar Two, trust: she works only with food businesses, so she knows their costs, waste, and seasonal swings. Proof: her client list by type, with permission, and years in restaurant work before bookkeeping. Pillar Three, the practical pillar: a flat monthly price by business size, stated on her site; taxes are not included and she says so in the first conversation, with referrals to two accountants she trusts. Proof: the published price table itself. The hard-questions room holds her answer to “Can you fix my last three years?” — a truthful “sometimes, here is how we would look, and here is what it would cost to find out.” Denise’s messages did not become flashier. They became identical in substance everywhere, and her sales conversations got shorter, because prospects arrived already understanding what she does, what it costs, and what it is not.

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### Common Mistakes

- **A roof that is only true on your best week.** Claims like “always,” “same-day,” and “for everyone” collapse in public the first time reality disagrees, and the collapse is what people remember.
- **Pillars made of praise instead of information.** Three pillars that all say you are wonderful give a listener nothing to act on. At least one pillar must carry the practical facts: cost, limits, and how to start.
- **Claims with no proof underneath.** “Trusted,” “leading,” and “expert” without a checkable fact are decoration. Either supply the proof or shrink the claim to what the proof supports.
- **Hiding what you do not do.** Leaving limits out of the House does not remove them from the work; it only ensures customers discover them at the worst moment, from experience instead of from you.
- **Skipping the hard questions.** The questions you dread will be asked in public eventually. A written, calm answer prepared in advance is the difference between steadiness and improvisation.

## Lesson 4 — Channels and Voice: Where It Travels, How It Sounds

A channel is simply a road a message travels: an email, a text, a social post, a website page, a printed notice, a phone call, a spoken announcement. Each road has its own weather. Email suits detail and a record people can search later. Text suits short, urgent, practical news. Social media suits visibility and conversation but buries detail and moves fast. Print suits places — a counter, a bulletin board, a door — and people who are not online. A phone call suits anything sensitive, because tone travels with the words and questions can be answered in the moment. The Channel Plan in the Builder matches each kind of message to its road on purpose, in advance, so that on a busy day nobody has to invent the decision — and so that an urgent schedule change never goes out as a cheerful social post that half the audience will see tomorrow.

Build the Plan as a small table: kinds of messages down one side, channels across the top, and a mark where each kind belongs — plus one channel named as the single source of truth. That last idea matters more than it sounds. When details live in five places, they will eventually disagree in five places. Choose one home — usually a page on your website or a pinned, dated notice — where the full, current facts live, and let every other channel point to it in one line: “Full details and any updates: [the one place].” Then, when a time changes, you correct one page and post one short pointer, instead of hunting down every copy of the old time across the internet while screenshots of the wrong version keep traveling.

Voice is the other half of this lesson, and it is not decoration. Your voice is the recognizable way your work sounds in words: calm or lively, formal or neighborly, brief or thorough. The Voice Guide in the Builder fixes that sound with three tools. First, three voice words that describe you — for example, “plain, warm, steady” — chosen from how your best real messages already sound, not from how you wish you sounded. Second, two short lists: words and phrases you

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use, and words and phrases you avoid, including jargon your audience does not share and hype words you have decided never to claim. Third, three example passages in your true voice — a welcome, an update, and a hard-news message — each a few lines long, that anyone drafting for you can imitate. With those three tools, a new helper can write in your voice on their first day, and your audience hears one steady speaker instead of a different personality with every post.

Voice and channel work together. The same news is written differently for a text, an email, and a spoken announcement, but the voice stays constant underneath: the same plain words, the same honesty about limits, the same roof sentence from the Message House appearing word for word wherever the core message is stated. Consistency of facts with flexibility of format — that is the whole craft of this lesson, and it is learnable by anyone willing to write the Plan and the Guide down instead of re-deciding them per message.

## The Steps

1. List the channels you actually have and can maintain: email list, phone or text, each social account, website, print locations, in-person announcements. Cross off any channel you cannot keep current — a neglected channel does more harm than an absent one.

2. Build the Channel Plan table: message kinds (routine news, schedule changes, urgent news, invitations, hard news) against channels, marking the primary channel for each kind.

3. Name the single source of truth for full details — one page or pinned notice — and write the pointer line every other channel will use.

4. Decide, in the Plan, which kinds of news are never social-first: hard news and sensitive changes go direct to the affected audience first, by the channel on the Audience Map, before any public post.

5. Write your three voice words, drawn from your best existing messages. Ask a customer or colleague if the words match how you sound to them.

6. Write the two lists: words and phrases you use, and words you avoid — jargon, hype claims, and any wording you have decided misrepresents your work.

7. Draft the three example passages — welcome, routine update, hard news — in your true voice, each under six lines, and file them in the Voice Guide for anyone who drafts for you.

8. Add a channel check to your routine: once a month, open every channel and confirm the facts on it still match the Builder — prices, times, names, contact details — and fix or close anything that does not.

## A Worked Example

James runs a community music school with lessons for children and adults. His channels had grown wild: a website last updated two years ago, two social accounts, a paper noticeboard at the school, and teachers each texting their own students their own way. A room change for Saturday classes was posted on one social account only. Half the families went to the old building; one teacher, who did not use that platform, also went to the old building — with the keys to the new one in her bag, unneeded, while families waited outside the wrong door. James builds his Channel Plan in one sitting. Source of truth: one page on the school website, “This

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Week at the School," updated every Monday and whenever anything changes. Schedule changes: direct text to affected families first, then the page, then a social pointer. Hard news: phone call to affected families, never social-first. He closes the second social account he could not maintain and says so plainly in a final post pointing to the one that remains. For voice, his three words are "clear, kind, unhurried." His avoid list bans the jargon that confused parents — "modality," "cohort," "enrichment pathway" — in favor of "lessons," "group," and "extra practice class." His hard-news example passage, written in calm times, is the one he reaches for the following winter when a burst pipe cancels a week of lessons: families get a call or text in his own steady wording before anything appears in public, the page carries the full plan for make-up lessons, and not one family reports learning the news from a stranger's post. The system did not prevent the pipe from bursting. It prevented the second problem — the communication mess — entirely.

### Common Mistakes

- **Posting everywhere, maintaining nowhere.** Five stale channels contradict each other and erode trust faster than one good channel builds it. Keep only the channels you can keep current.
- **Letting details live in many places at once.** When a time or price changes and five copies exist, at least one copy stays wrong and keeps traveling. One source of truth, everything else points to it.
- **Sending hard news social-first because it is fastest.** Fastest for you is worst for the people affected. Direct first, public second — the Audience Map's order column exists for exactly this.
- **A voice that changes with the writer.** Without a written Voice Guide, your organization sounds like whoever had the keyboard that day. Three voice words, two word lists, and three examples fix it.
- **Jargon your audience has to translate.** Words from inside your field signal expertise to colleagues and confusion to everyone else. The avoid list is where jargon goes to be replaced by plain words.

## Lesson 5 — The Calendar and the Review: Running the Builder Week After Week

A strategy that is built once and never run is a poster, not a system. The fifth part of the Builder — the Calendar and Review — is what turns four good pages into a living habit. The Calendar is deliberately plain: what goes out, to which audience, through which channel, on what date, owned by which named person, and checked by whom before it goes. Six columns. Anything fancier will be abandoned by February. Plan in a rhythm you can keep: many small organizations plan one month at a time, in one sitting of under an hour, drawing every item from the Message House so the month's messages agree with each other by construction. Batch the drafting where you can — write the month's routine posts and emails in one or two sessions, in your Voice Guide's sound — while leaving clear space in the Calendar for the unplanned: the

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announcement you cannot foresee still gets built from the House, checked against the Map, and entered on the Calendar before it goes out, even if “before” is only by an hour.

The review step before publishing is small and non-negotiable. Every message, however routine, gets a second pair of eyes or, if you work alone, a second reading after a pause, against a short checklist drawn from the Builder itself. Does it name the right audience? Does it match the roof and a pillar, with proof where a claim is made? Are the facts — dates, times, prices, names, places — checked against the source of truth, not against memory? Does it say what the reader should do next, plainly, once? Does it sound like the Voice Guide? Does anything in it promise what the work cannot deliver? Five minutes with that checklist catches the wrong date, the old price, and the overclaim — the three errors that cause most public corrections. Corrections will still happen occasionally; the checklist is what makes them occasional instead of routine, and the Builder includes a calm correction habit too: correct quickly, in the same channel, without blaming, and note the error in the Review log so the pattern can be fixed at its root.

The Review after publishing is where the Builder learns. Once a month, look at what actually happened, in plain measures suited to your work: Which messages got replies, calls, bookings, or attendance? Which ones drew confused questions — and what exact wording confused people? Which channel quietly did the heavy lifting, and which one produced nothing but effort? Write three lines in the Review log: what landed, what confused, what changes next month. That is all. A Builder reviewed monthly in three honest lines will outperform, within a season, a grand strategy reviewed never. Over time the Review log becomes the most valuable page you own, because it is the record of your own audience teaching you how they hear — if you are willing to be taught.

Close the loop by maintaining the Builder itself. Each monthly review ends with five minutes on the document: Is the Map still true? Has a price, a date pattern, a staff name, or a policy changed that the House or Plan must reflect? Is there a new hard question to draft an answer for, from something a real person asked this month? Update, date the change, and remove or archive the old version so two Builders never circulate at once. Run this way, the Builder stays small, current, and trusted by the very people who use it — because they have watched it catch errors, absorb lessons, and make busy weeks calmer, month after month.

## The Steps

1. Set up the Calendar with six columns: message, audience, channel, date, owner, and checked-by. Keep the tool simple — a shared document or a wall calendar beats a complex app nobody updates.

2. Plan one month at a time in a single sitting. Fill routine items first from the Message House, then leave visible open space for unplanned announcements.

3. Draft routine messages in batches, in the Voice Guide’s sound, and mark each draft with the pillar and proof it stands on.

4. Before anything is published, run the review checklist: right audience, matches the House, facts checked against the source of truth, one clear next step for the reader, voice matches,

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no undeliverable promise.

5. If you work alone, enforce the pause: draft, step away for at least thirty minutes, then review your own work with the checklist as if it were someone else's.

6. When a correction is needed, publish it quickly in the same channel, plainly and without blame, and log the error and its cause in the Review log.

7. Hold a monthly review of thirty minutes: what landed, what confused people, what changes next month — three honest lines in the Review log.

8. End each monthly review by updating the Builder itself — Map, House, Plan, Guide — dating every change and archiving the old version so only one current Builder exists.

## A Worked Example

Alicia manages communications for a small animal shelter, alongside her actual job of managing the shelter. Her first Builder calendar is for one month: two adoption features a week drawn from Pillar One, one "how adoption works and what it costs" post a week from the practical pillar — the one her predecessor never posted because it felt unglamorous — and one volunteer invitation. The pre-publish checklist catches, in week one, an adoption post naming the wrong fee; the source-of-truth page is right, the draft was written from memory, and the error dies in review instead of living on a shareable post. Her first monthly review holds a surprise: the practical cost-and-process posts, the ones she expected nobody to enjoy, produced the most completed adoption applications, and the comments show why — people had quietly assumed adoption was expensive and complicated, and the honest pillar corrected them. Three lines go in the log: practical posts landed hardest; two people were confused by the phrase "foster-to-adopt pathway," which joins the Voice Guide's avoid list; next month, one more practical post per week, written plainer. By the third month, Alicia's director asks why public questions have gotten so much easier to answer. Nothing mysterious happened. The Calendar made the messages regular, the checklist kept them accurate, and the Review let the audience's real behavior — not anyone's guess — steer the plan.

## Common Mistakes

- **A calendar too fancy to maintain.** If updating the Calendar takes longer than writing the message, the Calendar will be abandoned. Six plain columns, kept current, win.
- **Skipping the pre-publish check for "routine" messages.** Routine messages are where wrong dates and old prices hide, precisely because nobody looks twice. The checklist is five minutes; a public correction costs more.
- **Reviewing only the numbers that flatter you.** Likes feel good and teach little. Confused questions, unanswered messages, and the channel that produced nothing are the Review's real teachers.
- **Never updating the Builder after building it.** A Builder that still shows last year's prices is worse than no Builder, because people trust it. Monthly maintenance is part of the system, not an extra.

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- **Treating a correction as a disgrace instead of a step.** Errors corrected quickly and plainly build trust. Errors hidden, blamed on others, or quietly edited teach your audience to screenshot everything you say.

## Try It

Set aside two hours this week, or four half-hours, and build your first working Builder. Session one: write your purpose sentence and complete the Audience Map for your three to six groups, including the order column and the channels each group actually uses. Session two: build your Message House — roof sentence tested aloud on one real person, three pillars, proof under each, and your five hard questions with drafted answers. Session three: complete the Channel Plan table, name your single source of truth, write your three voice words, your two word lists, and your three example passages. Session four: lay out next month's Calendar with six columns, draft the first week's messages from the House, and run each one through the pre-publish checklist before it goes out. Then book your first monthly review in the Calendar itself, thirty minutes, before the month begins — and at that review, write your three honest lines and update the Builder. You will not have a perfect system at the end of the week. You will have a real one: a few true pages that every future message can be checked against, and a habit that makes each month steadier than the last. That is the Communications Strategy Builder doing its work.

Fortress shares what I learned, not professional advice. General info only, not legal / HR / financial advice.

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