

Start Strong: Practical Steps to Activate Your Marketing Strategy

WFF Communications Capacity-Building Seminar

January 2026 • Led by Julie C. Robbins
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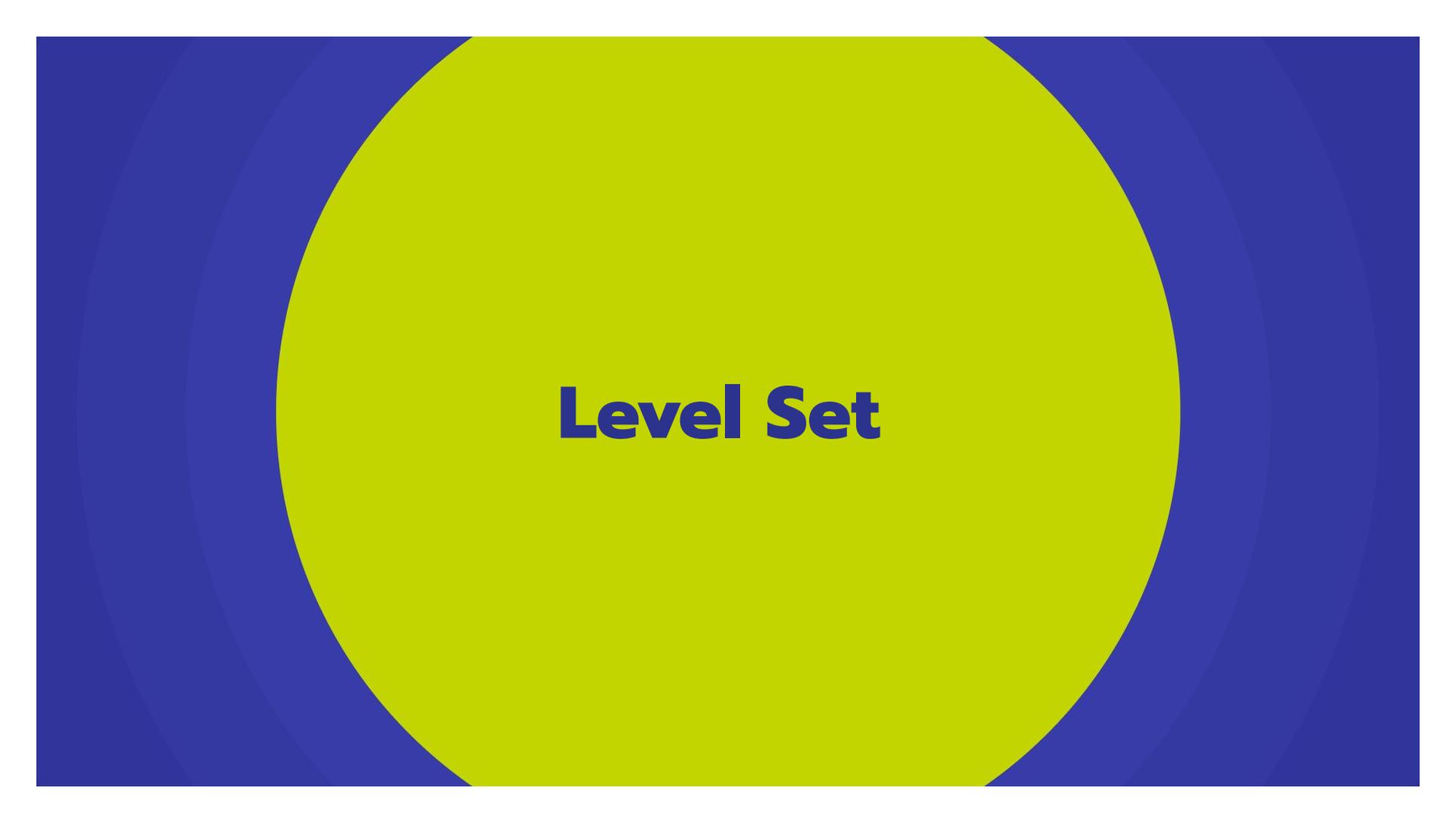


**From Strategy
to Action**

Key Concepts

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- Common challenge
- What *activation* really means
- Practical steps for immediate application



Level Set

Why Strategies Stall



**Big mission,
small teams**



**Competing
priorities**



**Failure
to launch**

What “Activation” Means

Doing

Turning decisions into action



1

Saying

Aligning people, messages and channels



2

Propelling

Creating momentum early



3



Activation Framework

Five Steps for Activating a Marketing Strategy

Anchor



Must be a clear sub-strategy of the business / organizational strategic plan

Audience



Who are we trying to move to action? What action? What will motivate them?

Channel



Where are the audiences? When are they there? What platforms do they rely on?

Map



Write it down and rely on it

Check



Measure what matters to optimize the strategy and course-correct as needed



Step 1:
Anchor

Step 1: Anchor to the Business Goal



One Primary Goal

What's the *one thing* this marketing strategy has to do?



Clear Definition of Success

Be SMART: Set specific, measurable outcomes



Marketing Supports ...

Activities are aligned with and enable organizational objectives



**Step 2:
Audience**

Step 2: Define the Audience + Message

Audience Narrowed

Demographics,
Psychographics,
Motivations, Barriers



1

Message Simplified

Core Message.
Tone, Language,
Platform.



2

Action Clarified

Desired Outcome,
Sense of Urgency,
Relevancy



3



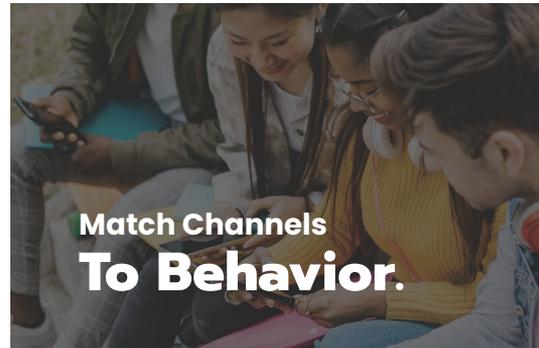
**Step 3:
Channel**

STEP 3

The Right Channels

Choose Wisely. Prioritize.

- Audience Behaviors & Preferences
- Internal Capacity
- Budget
- Timeline



Channel Options

Owned Media

Your Content,
Your Channels

Website & Social Content
Blogs
eBooks, White Papers
Thought Leadership
Commentary
Reports & Assets
E-newsletter
Board Meetings
Events
Video Storytelling

Loaned Media

Your Content,
Their Channels

Harnesses the collective reach of your employees, Board members, and their professional and organizational platforms to distribute your content. Includes speaking engagements.

Shared Media

Their Content,
Social Channels

Includes any and all content posted to social media *about* you that isn't created by you. Includes paid influencer content. Includes online word-of-mouth, such as reviews, shares, tagging, reactions, comments, and hashtagging.

Earned Media

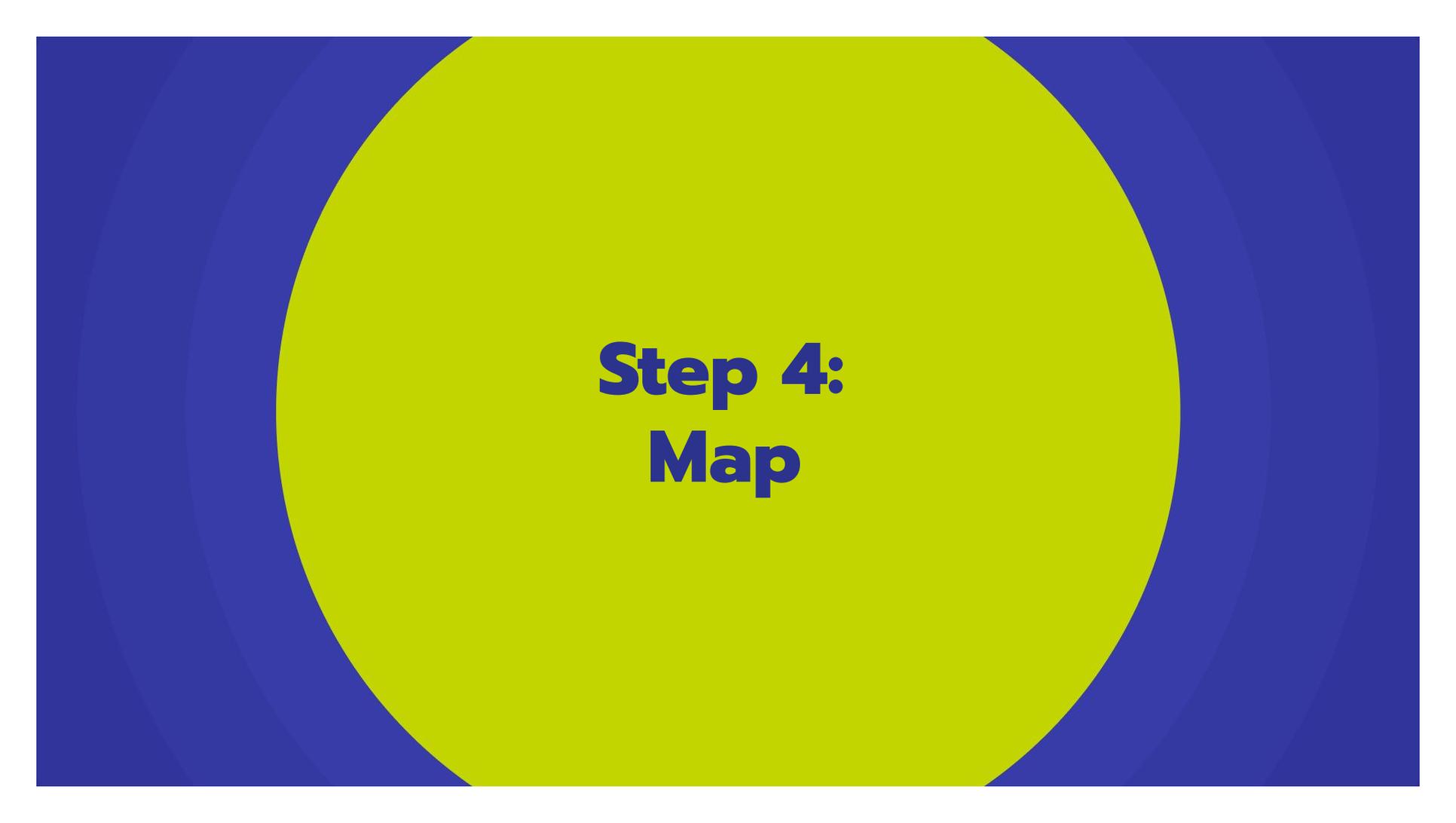
Your Story,
News Channels

Earns the attention of the news media to relay your story to audiences. Includes proactive pitching, newsjacking, backlinks and published content. Includes others' blogs and pods. Includes awards.

Paid Media

Your Story,
Ad Channels

Publishes your content in a space you've purchased. Such space can be in print, video, audio and digital spaces. Allows for controlled storytelling with precise targeting and timing.



Step 4:
Map

Before anything else,
**preparation is the key
to success.**

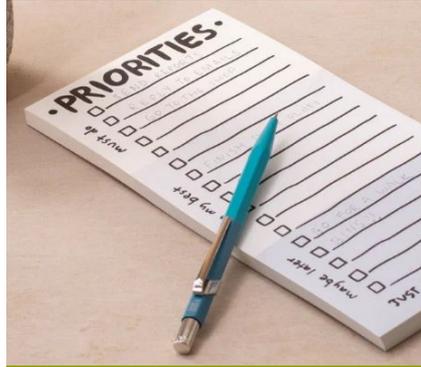
— *Alexander Graham Bell*



Step 4: Build an Actionable Plan



**Write It
Down!**



**It's a
To-Do List**



**Go For Quick
Wins First**



**Be Realistic
and Flexible**



**Step 5:
Check**

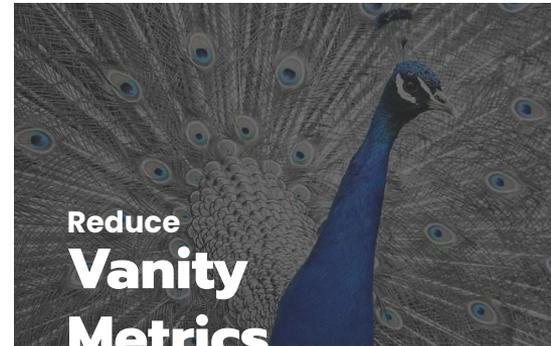
STEP 5

Measure What Matters

Learn. Adjust.

- Tie KPIs to SMART Objectives
- Avoid Vanity Metrics
- Expect Data to Inform
- Use Results to Optimize

RESULTS • PERFORMANCE • STRATEGY





Key Takeaways

Key Takeaways

Anchor



Step 1: Clarity and focus! Every tactic should ladder-up to the single, clearly defined organizational goal.

Audience



Step 2: Activation fails when the audience or message is fuzzy.

Channel



Step 3: Focus beats frequency; consistency beats complexity.

Map



A plan only works if it fits how your team actually operates.

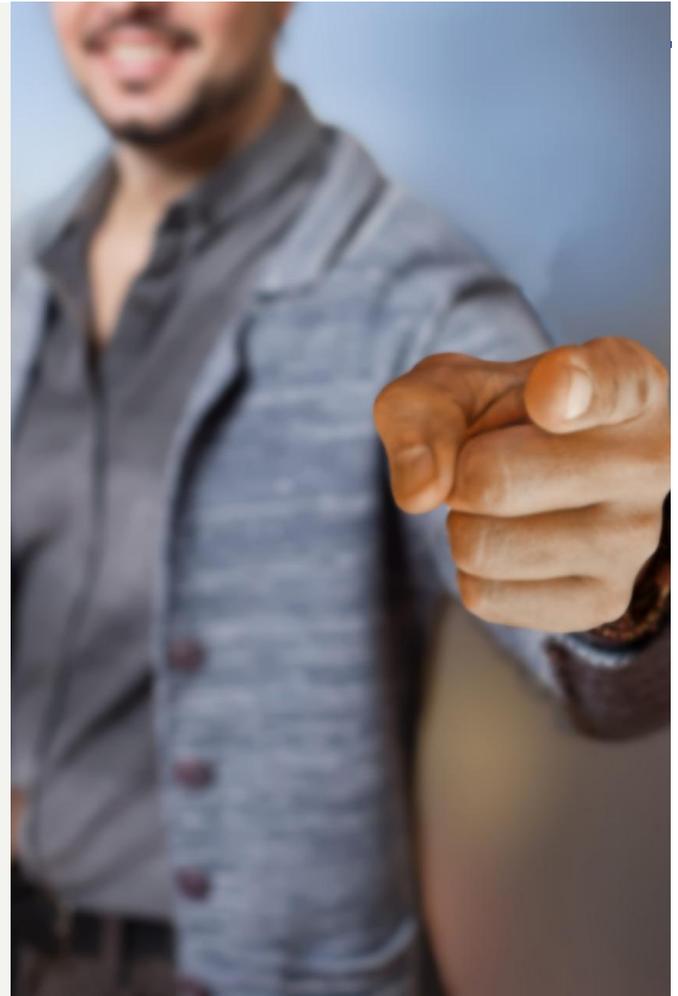
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Metrics should help you make better decisions – not just satisfy a report.

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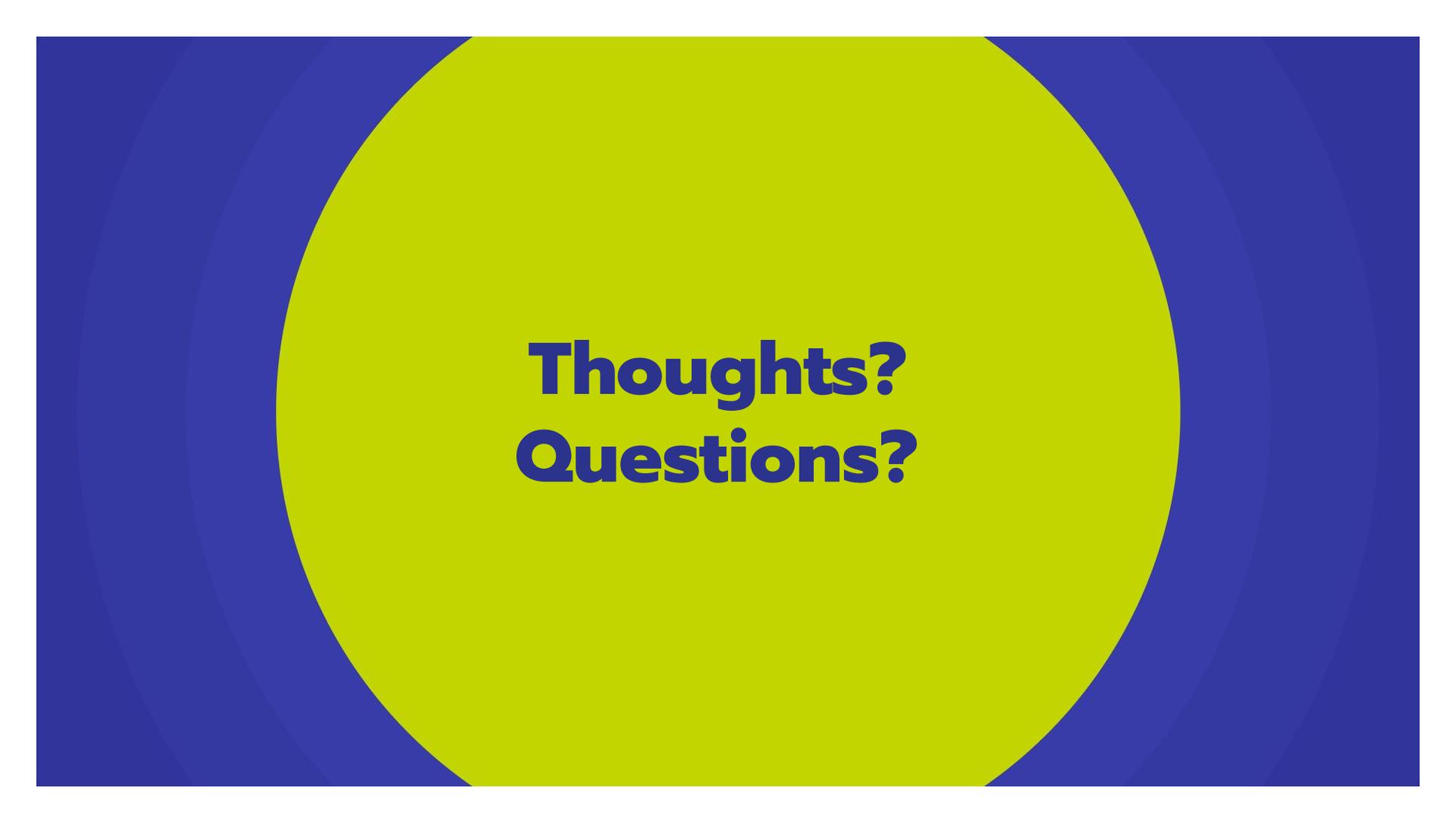
**What is one action
you can take this
week to keep your
marketing
strategy
activated?**



**“Perfection is the
enemy of progress”**

**- Sir Winston Churchill
Prime Minister of the United Kingdom
1940-45 and 1951-55**





Thoughts?
Questions?



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LITTLE ROCK • BENTONVILLE

A. RESEARCH

Communications Considerations (Situation Analysis)

- A. Opportunity
What will this marketing strategy support? Why do you need it?
- B. Industry and Market Insights
Demonstrate need and opportunity from a broader perspective
- C. Competitive Set
Identify competing / similar organizations to understand landscape
- D. SHOC: Internal Strengths, Internal Hurdles, External Opportunities, External Challenges
Factors that would impact the effectiveness of your organization and/or the ability to activate and maintain momentum of the marketing strategy

Desired Organizational / Mission Outcomes

- A. What is the organization trying to accomplish overall?
These are goals. Example: More Donors
- B. How will the organization measure its success?
These are SMART Objectives tied to the Goals. Example: Increase donor base by 10% in three months

Desired Marketing Communications Outcomes

- A. What should the marketing achieve?
Example: Build Awareness
- B. Key Performance Indicators: How will these achievements be measured for success?
Example: Garner 15 positive headlines / news coverage about the organization over the next six months.

B. ACTION PLANNING

Prioritized Stakeholder Groups and Target Audiences

- Who, specifically, does the organization intend to reach in priority order?
If broad categorizations, such as "Community Organizations," are used, further define with examples of which "community organizations" are included.

Pro Tip: The "public" is typically the last prioritized audience, if the "public" (as in "everyone") even makes the priority list.

Pro Tip: This is the place in the marketing strategy to include Personas, such as the demographics, psychographics, motivations and barriers of each prioritized target audience.

Core Message

What is the No. 1 thing all audiences need to know?

Message Modifications by Audience

Pro Tip: Carl Jung's 12 Archetypes can be very helpful when modifying a core message (and developing the channel mix), as it outlines personality traits that can be helpful in understanding *how* to best communicate with someone and *what* will motivate them.

Channel Mix

A list of the priority channels you'll be using to reach each target audience.

Timeline

- A. Launch Date
- B. Lead Up To Launch Date
- C. Designated Phases, if appropriate (Waterfall Approach vs. Agile Approach)

Overall Budget

C. COMMUNICATIONS APPROACH

Recommended Marketing Communications Approach

A. Tactics and Activities

For each tactic, address the following:

- What are we doing?
- Why are we doing it? How does it specifically support marketing objectives and ladder up to organizational goals?
- Who is the target audience(s) for this tactic?
- Who is responsible for leading and/or completing the tactic?
- By when will it be accomplished? What are the touchpoints leading up to the due date?
- Is this an ongoing / repetitive tactic? If so, how often is it repeated?
- What is the budget?
- What do we expect this tactic to accomplish?
- How will we measure it?
- What would trigger a course-correction?

D. EVALUATION

Results of Each Tactic *and how it supported each marketing objective*

Lessons Learned

Future Considerations

