LASTING
POWERED BY WATERBORNE

Your Communications Playbook for Making a LASTING Impression

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Introduction

With the **LASTING** Communications Playbook, we hope to help you unlock the full potential of your organisation's external communication efforts and make a meaningful impact on the future of the European waterborne transport sector.

The Playbook can be used to develop long-term communications strategies or develop specific campaigns. It will cover the main components that comprise a communications strategy, including:

Defining
your audience

Developing
your messaging

Identifying
goals and objectives

Exploring
communications
channels

Looking
at tactics and tools and
how to best utilise them

The **LASTING** Communications Playbook is a comprehensive guide crafted by LASTING to help members of the European waterborne transport community enhance the impact of their organisation's activities through strategic communications. Our goal is to raise awareness among key stakeholders and the broader European public of the sector's strategic value by enhancing external communications across the sector, with a particular focus on RD&I projects.

Disclaimer: While producing and before publishing any typeof content, you need to ensure that it is compliant with any regulations and that you have the required authorisation to distribute the content.

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Strong foundations: Key components for effective communication

Before starting, it is essential that your organisation has key components in place. A clearly defined identity that encompasses your philosophy and brand is the foundation of successful communications campaigns.

Do you have a well-defined organisational philosophy?

A clearly defined purpose, objectives and key messages will guide and inform your communications strategy. These can be expressed through your organisation's mission, vision, and values statements.

A mission statement should

- Define your organisation's purpose by explaining who you are, what you do, and what is your ambition.
- Communicate what solutions your organisation offers.
- Provide the intention behind your day-to-day activities.

A vision statement should

- Describe how your organisation sees the future of your sector.
- Establish your long-term objectives in a realistic and credible way.
- Give direction to the path your organisation wishes to take.

A vision statement should

- Establish your organisation's core principles.
- Inform your organisation's culture.

Do you have an established brand identity?

When a company has strong brand recognition, the logo alone can elicit reactions. Even if you're not in the business of selling consumer goods, there are important reasons why your organisation should establish a strong brand identity.

Visual Identity shapes how others perceive your brand

Logos, colours, and motifs all contribute to illustrating your organisation's character. For example, a modern and sleek logo can communicate innovation so aligning your visual identity with your organisation's philosophy is key.

Consistency helps to achieve brand recognition, so use the same visual elements across all communications platforms, content, and materials. Repetition helps with recall and your identity will be memorable for your stakeholders.

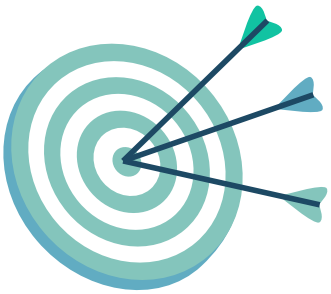
The art of strategy: Creating a winning communications plan

Did you set impactful goals and objectives?

Now it's time to begin planning your organisation's communications strategy and plan. The initial step you should take is to establish goals and objectives to define what your organisation aims to achieve and how you intend to accomplish it.

A goal is a broad statement of your long-term aspirations - the overarching aim of your strategy. Objectives, on the other hand, are the short or medium-term steps that you would take to achieve your goal. We recommend you follow the **SMART** principles - **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**elevant, and **T**ime-bound when setting objectives.

Examples of goals and objectives



Goal: Increasing brand awareness
Objective: Identify 5 paid media opportunities in relevant media outlets to increase brand awareness in Q3

Goal: Enhancing stakeholder engagement
Objective: Identify 6 events to attend next year to engage with stakeholders

Goal: Influencing policy outcomes
Objective: Identify 5 stakeholders to engage with by the end of Q1

How well do you know your audience?

A deep understanding of who you are trying to connect with (your audience) will help your organisation define a successful communications strategy. It enables you to create content and craft messages that are tailored to their needs and resonate with them.

Put yourself in your audiences' shoes, how would you answer the following questions?

- What are their interests?
- What are their psychographic traits?
- What are their demographical attributes?
- What are their pain points?
- How do they spend their time online and offline?
- What are their preferred communications channels?

Consider using a persona template to delve into your target audience further by developing detailed fictional representations of different profiles that exist within the group. Example of persona template.

Did you translate your key messages into public-ready messaging?

Your next step is to translate your statements into public-ready key messages. These key messages are the base of any communication strategy as they provide clarity for your audience about your brand or initiative. They also make sure that your communication is consistent across different platforms and mediums.

Starting with strong messages is the best way to guide communications across platforms with consistency and to stay aligned with your goals and objectives. Well-crafted key messages provoke engagement from your audience and sets you apart from your competitors, allowing you to create a unique position.

Take your messages to the next level: tell a story!

The art of storytelling requires having a great understanding of the broader picture while having a granular view of your content. A deep understanding of what your audience wants will help you tailor your content to their interests.

Storytelling checklist before producing the content

- What do you want to say?
- What is the purpose of your story? (to educate, to entertain, both)
- What is your angle?
- How do you want your audience to feel after seeing your story?
- How do you want your audience to act after seeing your story?
- Which format works best for this story?

Did you plan your year?

Take the time to plan your year around the key activations of your communication strategy. This will also help your organisation to have a consistent flow of content and to communicate regularly, which is crucial to boost your brand awareness.

Use hooks! All year round there are calendar hooks such as national/international days or more specific events related to your activities to link your content to broader messages (World Water Day is March 22!).

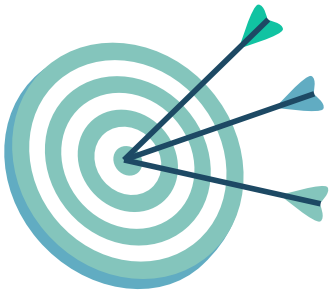
Once your calendar is defined (see below), share it with your colleagues so you all know what's coming next, it should be a living document that you can adapt along the way.

Phases	PHASE 1				PHASE 2			
Timing	Timing		Timing		Timing		Timing	
Activity/event	Activity/event		Activity/event		Activity/event		Activity/event	
Channel activation	Specific channel for above event	Specific channel for above event	Specific channel for above event	Specific channel for above event	Specific channel for above event	Specific channel for above event	Specific channel for above event	Specific channel for above event
Continuous activity	Continuous activity							
Continuous activity	Continuous activity							

How are you measuring your success?

To keep track of progress and how you're getting to your goals and objectives, define your Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

Examples of KPIs linked to your goals and objectives:



Goal: Increasing brand awareness
Objective: Identify 5 paid media opportunities in relevant media outlets to increase brand awareness in Q3
KPIs: **Number of media mentions**

Goal: Enhancing stakeholder engagement
Objective: Identify 6 events to attend next year to engage with stakeholders
KPIs: **Number of external events**

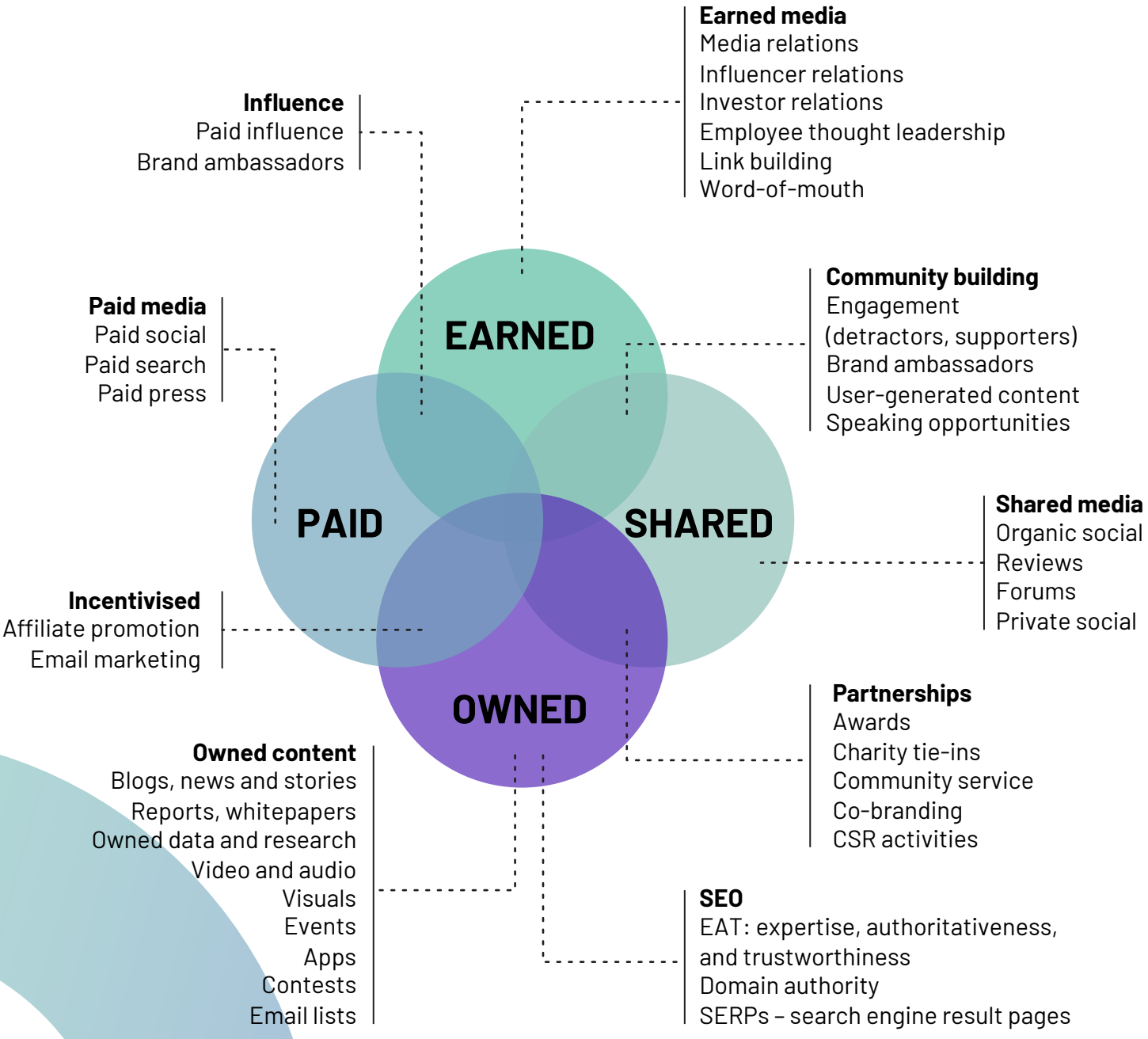
Goal: Influencing policy outcomes
Objective: Identify 5 stakeholders to engage with by the end of Q1
KPIs: **Number of stakeholder meetings held**

Keeping track of your progress allows you to be agile and optimise your communications in real time, which is important when looking at long-term success. While your goals and objectives are set in stone, your communications plan can be adapted to help you reach your targets.

Track your progress regularly. Select a frequency that works for you – weekly, monthly... And decide if you want to have a full tracker and/or specific ones for some communication activations. **Example of KPIs tracker**

Did you choose the right channels?

Do you know the PESO model? Paid, Earned, Shared, and Owned media is a model used to segment all the communication channels at your disposal. With this tool, you gain a broad overview of the available channels and see opportunities for specific activations.



Each channel has its unique purpose, and they all complement each other, which is why all four are key to your success. To have a gradual build-up in activities, start with owned, then add shared, then earned, and then paid channels.

Bringing it to life: Implementing your communications strategy

Are you controlling the narrative?

Thought leadership is about showcasing your organisation's expertise. An effective way to distinguish yourself from your competitors and engage your stakeholders, it can be an integral part of an impactful communications strategy.

Differentiation
Show your stakeholders who you are.

Credibility
Become a trusted source of information.

Influence
Influence the opinions and behaviours of others.

Use your organisation's expertise to feed all your communication tactics. This will give it more power and support your credibility within your industry.

Are you using your capabilities and insights to their fullest?

Establish yourself as a thought leader in the eyes of your audience by highlighting your organisation's capabilities and insights through white papers or technical reports.

White Papers

These detailed reports or guides should educate your audience and provide solutions to complex problems. Show decision-makers, policymakers or business leaders that you have an authoritative voice within your industry and that you are there to educate them.

Technical Reports

Identify relevant topics, conduct research and provide unique insights without having to go through the stringent rules of scientific research. The information you publish in your technical reports can empower you to make informed decisions and stay ahead in your industry.

Which tactics and tools can you use?

Why should you set up a public relations strategy?

Public relations help you build and maintain relationships with your public, whether customers, prospects, competitors, community members or employees. Developing a strong public relations strategy will help your organisation strengthen its brand awareness and will help showcase expertise to its different target audiences.

Focus on media relations

An integral part of public relations, media relations focus on building relationships with members of the media to maintain a positive image of an organisation. Use media relations as a tool to ensure positive media coverage.

How to pitch to media like a pro

Develop a bespoke media list
Cultivate and maintain strong relationships with key media contacts. This will strengthen all your ongoing media activities.

Work on your press tools
Using your key messages, you can develop various types of media content. Make sure you have strong press releases, background materials, Q&As, talking points, etc. readily available.

Publish your story & follow-up
You are ready to launch your media activation! Pay close attention to the news and be ready to adapt, it is better to push back than to be ignored. Also, don't forget to follow up in a few days!

Reflect and improve
Keep track of the outcome and fine-tune your media relations strategy as you go. What worked? What didn't? This is essential to increase your pickup rate by journalists.

Media Relations Toolbox

CISION Meltwater Brandwatch

Did you think of integrating events into your communication strategy?

Events can enhance stakeholder engagement, brand awareness, and executive positioning. Events also cater to very specific audiences – with research, you can be present where your target audience is. Consider how you want to participate in the event: do you want to speak or just be present to network?

Best practices for public speaking

Preparation is essential
If you're an opening speaker, write out your speech or have speaking points. It should have a strong opening and a logical flow – try it out with someone before to make the most of it.

Know your audience
Research and understand the audience so what you say is interesting to them and answers their questions.

Be aware of your body language
Stand tall and make eye contact will help you exude confidence and put your audience at ease. If sitting down, make sure your body is open to who you are addressing. Be aware of your posture and your facial expressions.

Avoid missing important opportunities by putting an event tracker in place that is constantly updated with relevant events. **Example of event tracker**

You may even decide to organise your own event. While organising an event can be a daunting task, breaking it down into simple steps can help to make it more manageable.

01 **Define** the objective of your event – this will help you to identify its target audience, the type of event it will be and the activities it will feature.

02 **Determine** the budget to check the financial viability of your project. Your budget should be granular and outline all expenses such as venue, catering and equipment rental.

03 **Choose** a venue that aligns with your objective, target audience and capacity to accommodate the envisaged activities of the event.

04 **Plan** the logistics by identifying what you need, defining roles, and using a planner with clearly defined milestones and timeline.

05 **Develop** a communications plan to promote your event.

06 **Have** a checklist ready for the day to ensure the smooth running of the event.
Example of event checklist

Avoid food waste by always ordering less food than you think. Portions are usually bigger than expected.

Did you tailor your communication strategy to social media?

When used strategically, social media can be an impactful and cost-effective tool for your communications strategy. It is unmatched when it comes to its potential in reach, amplification, engagement, analytics and targeting (when using paid options). Consider using audience-focused storytelling on social media to create a real behavioural change.

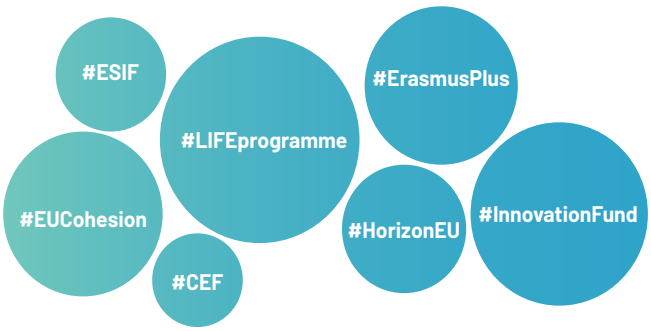
Identify which **social media platforms** your audience uses to communicate, where you can reach them. Keep in mind that each platform has its use, constraints and established customs, so adapt and tailor your message for each platform.

Do you know the main differences between the key social media platforms?

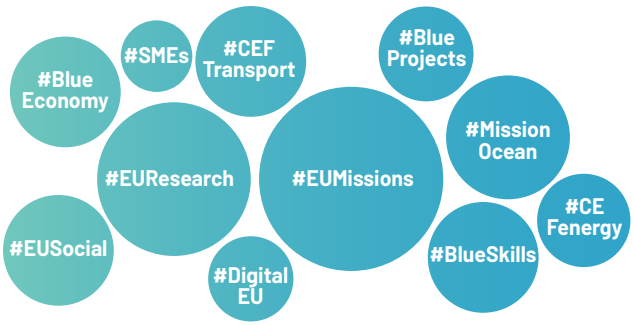
	LinkedIn	X	Facebook	Instagram
Usage	• Professional usage and industry news	• Focused on bite-size content dedicated to reacting and share information	• Share news and updates • Less used for industry, more interesting for public organisation	• Focus on brand image and building a strong aesthetic
Audience	• Industry experts Prospects	• Industry stakeholders • General audience	• General audience	• Younger audience
Technicalities	• 150-200 characters • 1200 x 627 px • Max 10min videos	• Maximum 280 characters • Image format 1600 x 900 pixels • Max 140 second videos	• 80-150 characters • 1200 x 630 pixels • Max 4min videos	• Post length 135-150 characters • Image format Square 1080 x 1080 px Story 1080 x 1920 px • Video length max 90 seconds for stories

Keep your posts short and always include a clear call-to-action (CTA) to encourage your audience to engage with your posts.

Specific Funding Programs



Funding Themes & Priorities



What about paid social media?

To boost your social media strategy, consider allocating some of your communications budget to paid social media. Paid social media is a great way to reach a broader audience or key prospects. You can develop a paid social media strategy for each of the mainstream social media.

What will you get from paid social media for each social platform?

- **LinkedIn:** reaching and connecting with a key set of prospects through their job information.
- **X:** connect with industry-specific people through the extensive targeting options.
- **Facebook:** reach a specific demographic and build awareness on your topic.
- **Instagram:** developing your brand awareness through aesthetically pleasing visuals.

Short on content? No inspiration? Consider using generative AI to draw inspiration and develop your next social media activation

Social Media Toolbox

Hootsuite® sproutsocial Buffer

Social media strategies are continuously changing, and keeping track of everything can be challenging. We recommend using an editorial calendar to gather the copies, design assets, and logistical details for posts **(template available here)**. If using a social media management tool, you can have this feature included, otherwise a shared document can be sufficient.

Social media state of play in 2023[1]

2h31 Spent daily on social media

4.76 BILLION USERS on social media (all platforms aggregated)

900 MILLION USERS on LinkedIn

556 MILLION USERS on X

2,958 MILLION USERS on Facebook

2,000 MILLION USERS on Instagram

[1]Source: We are Social, 2023 (https://wearesocial.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Digital-2023-Global-Overview-Report.pdf)

Are you optimising your online presence?

Websites or microsites are key tools to help your organisation develop not only its online presence but also their credibility and expertise. The development part of your website is important but maintaining it is just as crucial to keep it up to date and maximise its potential.

How do websites and microsites differ from one another?

Websites: they are the anchor of your online presence. A website is very general about your organisation and does not focus on one specific part of the work. Websites are meant to remain online indefinitely.

Microsites: they are treated differently than websites. They generally have a few pages or one unique page and focus on a specific topic (such as a particular event or launch). Microsites are not meant to live indefinitely.

A great way to use the full potential of your organisation's website is to properly optimise its content. By following Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) guidelines you can see a boost in your online ranking.

Website Toolbox

WordPress · Drupal · Joomla!

Key data on websites

3rd
Websites are the 3rd main source of brand discovery[2]

30%
Average bounce rate on website[3]

6h37
Spent daily on the internet[4]

Did you consider using a blog?

Explore **blogging** to support your successful digital communications strategy and thought leadership. It allows you to share your expertise, insights, and opinions on important trends and topics. By publishing high-quality blog content relevant for your audience, your organisation can become an industry figure of authority and build your leadership. Research interesting topics, by identifying customer pain points, monitoring social media conversations, or looking at competitor content.

Not sure how to structure your article or want to find an eye-catching title? Consider using Generative AI to draw inspiration and take your title to the next level.

[2]Source: We are Social, 2023 (https://wearesocial.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Digital-2023-Global-Overview-Report.pdf)
[3]Source: Similarweb, 2024 (https://www.similarweb.com/blog/research/market-research/bounce-rate/).
The bounce rate corresponds to the ratio of people leaving your website without looking at your content.
[4]Source: We are Social, 2023 (https://wearesocial.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Digital-2023-Global-Overview-Report.pdf)

Create engaging blog content

- **Use storytelling techniques:** People love reading stories, use this to your advantage to make your content more engaging and relatable.
- **Use visuals:** Images, infographics, and videos break up long blocks of text and make your blog post more appealing.
- **Adapt your writing tone:** Tailor your blog posts to your audience and topic to support your audience's understanding.
- **Think your structure through:** Key information should be included in the first paragraph of your blog post to grasp the interest and retain your audience

Short-form or long-form blog post? Here's a handy guide on their differences!

	Short Content Blogpost	Long Content Blogpost
Average length (in words)	400-600	1.500-2.000
Reading time	4-5 minutes	10-15 minutes
Purpose	Grab the readers' attention	Provide in-depth analysis
Target Audience	New to the topic	Engaged readers
Thought leadership	Low	High
Frequency of publication	Often	Less frequency

Are you showcasing your expertise adequately?

Designed to provide in-depth descriptions of specific projects and highlight previous successes, **case studies** are a great tool to showcase your organisation's capabilities. Your organisation can use case studies as assets to feed other communications tools like your website, brochures, events, etc. Showcasing your previous successes will help you demonstrate your organisation's value, establish credibility, and provide differentiation from other industry members.

Best practices

Provide clear "before and after" examples: Think of your case study as a business pitch trying to persuade new stakeholders to join your project.

Tailor your case study to your audience: Try to find similarities between the needs related to previous successes and the results your audience wants to see.

Communicate your case studies in different ways: Sharing your case study in different ways allows you to speak to several audiences.

Are you keeping your audience hooked?

Use **newsletters** to keep your audience engaged and up to date with your organisation's activities. Tailor your newsletters to your organisation's brand identity and include brand assets. Define the frequency which works best for your organisation and compile enough relevant content for the audience. Beyond sharing information, newsletters are also a communication tool you can use to boost your engagement, so don't forget to cross-promote your channels.

How to master e-mail newsletters?

Know your audience
Consider your audience's demographics, interests, and pain points, and adapt your newsletter to these characteristics.

Stay on brand
Be consistent with your branding and align all your communications with your organisation's brand guidelines.

Measure and optimise
Use analytics to measure the effectiveness of your newsletter campaign and to optimise them over time.

Hook your audience
Design your newsletter to interest within the first few lines of your newsletter and invite them to scroll through the content.

Newsletter Toolbox

mailchimp mailerlite Campaign Monitor

Newsletter data[5]

21.5% Average open rate

2.3% Average Click rate

Which brand assets should your organisation develop?

To execute your communication strategy, you need to use a variety of brand assets to keep the conversation going and catch your audience's attention.

How should you use video in your communications?

Consider including **videos** in your organisation's communication strategy to better convey your message and support its understanding. Videos are proven to be one of the most effective tools to catch your audience's attention and interest which will also boost your online engagement.

What video format for what purpose?

	Short format	Long format	Report	Interview
Length	**120-140** seconds	**2-5** mn	Up to **30mn**	Between **5 and 10mn**
Content	Bite-size content Teasing	Informative Event highlights	Reports of projects	Discusssion with a topic's expert
Distribution	Mainly social media	Website Newsletter	Website	Website, newsletter, social media

[5]Campaign Monitor, 2022 (https://www.campaignmonitor.com/resources/knowledge-base/what-are-good-email-metrics/)

Before scripting and producing your video, think strategically and define the message you want to convey, who is the target audience, and which medium you want to share it on. Consider using motion design videos instead of classic ones to better support your message.

What about GIFs?

.GIF

GIFs are short, animated brand assets. Very popular with certain demographics, they can be used on social media, in newsletters, for presentations, etc.

Your longer format videos (long format, reports, interviews) can be cut to fit the short format purpose. Check out the long format of the **#WaterborneDays2023** interviews and the social media version we made.

Video Editing Toolbox

OpenShot Video Editor

KINEMASTER

Why are impactful static visuals important?

Static visuals are simple but impactful brand assets you can use across all communication channels. These visual should link to the message that you are trying to convey. Use high-quality images to enhance engagement with the audience and to demonstrate professionalism.
Adapt your visual to your channel. As stated previously, on social media certain formats (square, landscape) work better than others so be sure you are following the guides.

Why should you use infographics?

Design **infographics** to convey complex information in an intelligible and accessible way. They are powerful communications assets to educate the audience on complex ideas by distilling and simplifying data sets, comparing and contrasting concepts or providing an overview of a topic. **See an example here of an infographic.**

A clear structure, easy-to-understand data points, clear messaging and compelling visuals are key ingredients to creating an effective infographic. Your organisation can also easily adapt them for various uses including social media, news articles, websites, print materials, amongst others.

To gauge an infographic's effectiveness, use a test audience with no prior knowledge of the topic to see how well they understand and digest the information.

Why should you dive into the wonderful world of podcasting?

A **podcast** can provide you with an opportunity to connect with your audience on a more personal level. When you use your podcast to conduct interviews, make sure to feature employees, customers, or other industry experts to showcase the human side of your organisation.

Key data on podcast in 2023

1h02 spent listening to podcasts each day in 2023

+12.7% compared to the year before.[6]

Master your podcast strategy

1. **Decide your format:** Think about what you wish to achieve with your podcast and adjust your format to this.
2. **Invest in your podcast:** Spend time on your podcast to produce a qualitative product. Investing in good equipment will also support a successful podcast.
3. **Engage with your audience:** Engage with your audience to build a loyal following. Consider asking your audience to come up with topics.
4. **Promote your podcast:** Share new episodes on social media and include links in your email newsletter. Encourage listeners to leave reviews and ratings to help increase visibility.

Podcast Toolbox

Transistor · Acast · buzzsprout · descript

[6] Source: We are Social, 2024 (https://wearesocial.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Digital-2023-Global-Overview-Report.pdf)

Why should you keep working with print assets?

Design **printed brand assets** and capitalise on their longevity compared to other digital assets to create a tangible representation of your brand. Printed assets can be used in a variety of settings, from distributing them at networking events to sending them out in direct mail campaigns. A well-designed print asset can be kept by your audience, providing ongoing exposure for your organisation.

Which print assets for which purpose?

	Brochure	Leaflet	Flyer	Busiess card
Length	**Long** format folded to create multiple panels for content	**Short** format often includes folded pages to create multiple panels	**One page**	It fits in your **wallet**
Purpose	Informative	Concise but informative	Eye-catching	Networking
Content	Detailed information	Textual, but in bullet points highlighting key features	Graphics to highlight information	Professional contact details
Distribution	Direct mail, handed at events or left behind at meetings	Both in high-traffic areas as in Direct mail or handed at events	Distributed in high-traffic areas	At meetings or networking events
Information Period	**General** and **long-term** information	**Short-term** promotion	**Short-term** promotion	**Long-term**

Printed Assets Toolbox

Canva

visme

Learn more about **LASTING's benefits**

Identify information gaps regarding innovation needs

Fostering dialogues amongst sector stakeholders

Learn about available funding opportunities

Support the development of communications skills

Joining WaterborneTP

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This playbook was developed by Burson Brussels in 2024 as part of the LASTING project and in collaboration with the consortium. For any questions on communications, you can reach out to their team.

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