

## How to do a Communication Audit as a Creative Project

by Bernie Gonzalez

A *communication* audit can be defined as "a complete analysis of an organization's communications-internal and/or external -designed to 'take a picture' of communication needs, policies, practices, and capabilities, and to uncover necessary data to allow top management to make informed, economical decisions about future objectives of the organization's communication (Kopec, 1982, p. 24).

If you going to conduct an audit for the graduate program's exit option, here are few suggestions:

### **1. Start early**

Once you decide an audit is the way you want to go, start looking at examples. Look at previous creative projects, text examples, and ask the faculty. The more examples you see, the more you'll know about what you're getting into.

### **2. Assemble the committee**

The faculty you assemble are going to be your guides in this process so choose wisely. Pick people you know you can work with and that can help you get to the final draft. Also, get to know their schedules and be clear about what you'll need from them. If your expectations, on both sides, are clear from the get go, the project will run smoother.

### **3. Hit the ground running**

Having a pile on your floor doesn't get you anywhere. With samples in hand, start to think about where you can conduct the survey. Look to personal contacts, previous employers as a start but the best option (my opinion) would be to do a company or organization you are not involved with.

### **4. Administer the Survey**

This is the most important part. With the raw data in hand, the deadline rests on you. You'll probably have to collect some more information from the organization but 90% of what you need is done.

### **5. Do the Analysis**

SPSS can be difficult but if you take some with it, especially after taking 504, you'll get through the data. When you run into a problem or have a question, figure out exactly what you need and ask someone the question. Remember; Know what you need when you ask-you're the expert on your project!

### **6. Buckle down and type, and type, and...**

No way around it: the paper is the end product of all your hard work. Take it a little at a time. Organization's history. Procedures. Literature review. One section at a time, completed with a personal deadline in mind, will add up to 20-40 pages in no time. That should give you the momentum to get the rest done

### **7. The Last Lap**

Once you have the project pretty much in hand and you think you are ready, it's just started. Make sure you have an executive summary completed and start working on a presentation. All your hard work will be shown to the public, friends, faculty, etc. A little extra time spent on a PowerPoint presentation and a few handouts will let your audience know you take the project serious and so should they. The defense is your time to shine.

## **The Organization's Side**

Here are six steps you should consider when planning your contact and working process with the organization or company you are going to survey. Remember, to them, you are the expert so be prepared, ask questions, and also be ready to learn.

### **1. Adaptation** of the existing survey

- Company titles, vernacular, etc.

### **2. Construction** of the survey

- One to two week turnaround time after primary changes

### **3. Finalization**

- Check with Human Resources dept., additional changes (wording, style)

### **4. Implementation**

- Schedule enough time, mailing options (ground and electronic)

### **5. Analysis**

- SPSS, suggestions, results, implications

### **6. Presentation**

- Full presentation, complete survey with analysis, executive summary

## **A Breakdown of the Paper**

This is a fairly general outline for the breakdown of the paper. An audit's presentation should have some givens but you have some room to play with in constructing the format.

Cover page

Table of Contents

Executive Summary

Literature Review

- What is a communication audit?
- Examples of previous audits

History/profile of the Organization/company

Procedures

- Survey Instrument
- Survey Implementation
- Sample

Results

- Quantitative (tables, graphs, charts)
- Qualitative

Conclusions

- Strengths
- Weaknesses
- Recommendations/suggestions for change

Summary

Personal Summary

References/Works Cited

Appendices/Tables

## **Good Resources**

- Downs, C. W. (1988). *Communication audits*. Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman, & Company.
- Frey, L. R., Botan, C. H., & Kreps, G. L. (2000). *Investigating communication: An introduction to research methods*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Kopec, J. A. (1982). The communication audit. *Public Relations Journal*. 38(5), 24-27.
- Shelby, A. N., & Reinsch, Jr., N. L. (1996). The communication audit: A framework for teaching management communication. *Business Communication Quarterly*. 59(2), 95-108.