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Communication Handbook for Customs Administrations

2022

World Customs Organization
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INTRODUCTION

Customs administrations worldwide have three core functions:
- collecting duties and taxes,
- protecting and securing the borders and
- facilitating legitimate trade.

To this end administrations rely on the coordinated efforts of other departments, including information technology and communication.

With the evolution of the trade ecosystem, Customs is now considered an economic partner to stakeholders and ambitions to become trusted government advisers. As a result, there is an overwhelming demand for communication activities in Customs administrations. The communication department is responsible for internal and external communication as discussed in this publication. A strong internal communication culture is necessary for a professional workforce with a sense of pride and shared purpose. Appropriate communication activities build relationships with stakeholders and the public. Communication teams work to develop a positive brand for the administration, thus contributing to increased compliance by the public.

The work of communication encompasses a variety of activities, including providing information to stakeholders and the public via a website. This is a service that WCO Members are committed to under the principle of transparency embedded in several international instruments. To fulfil this commitment and communicate with stakeholders, Customs administrations engage in various tasks, including the production, editing and publishing of articles, web news, publications, posts on social media, videos, visuals and the organization of events and direct communication with the media. Within each of these activities lies a further breakdown of tasks and planning. Regardless of the communication department’s mandate, it is essential to review the communication plan on a regular basis using proper measuring and evaluation mechanisms.

How to use this handbook
This handbook aims to be a support tool for those working in communication in Customs administrations. The document separates communication topics by section and then describes elements to consider when drafting a plan for communication activities throughout the year. Using definitions and a series of questions in each section, readers may find some answers and ideas to investigate further when drafting or updating their communication plan. There are examples provided and ways to measure the impact of the plan. For the purpose of clarity, communication is separated into sections that are linked, overlap and impact one another (e.g. reputation management and crisis communication). This has been done to provide as much precision as possible.

The handbook aims to support the development and increased sophistication of communication departments in Customs administrations.
1. COMMUNICATION GOVERNANCE

Communication has to be at the absolute core of running the organization and explaining why you are there and what you are doing, and if you can manage to do that, your teams will be aligned to your sense of purpose.

Mr. Stephen Quest, Director General, DG TAXUD in the European Commission, during the 2019 WCO Communication Conference

TAKEAWAYS

• Developing clear internal structures for effective communication
Communication governance addresses the direct correlation between planning and resourcing of communication activities and their effectiveness. It outlines the relevance of providing a clear mandate to the communication team, in line with the administration’s strategic priorities.

Communication teams should be able to adapt their actions to the right audience, through the right medium, and with the right message so that they can effectively measure the impact of their campaigns.

- Leadership-proximity is key to creating a clear, aligned communication strategy
- Measuring and collecting data is vital to evaluating the communication strategy
1.1 Strategic objectives

In Customs administrations, understanding the top-down structure can help determine the extent of the influence of the communication teams. For example, what are the limitations of the communication department’s decision-making authority? What can the department reasonably negotiate, and what it cannot? Remember that senior management also has responsibilities that constrain its decision-making options. Are concepts such as policy formation and resource allocation clear, and is there an understanding of how budgets and work programmes are set? What decisions can be influenced or changed and how can this be done? By answering these questions, communication departments can understand their influence and limitations in the organization, which in turn will guide the department in defining communication priorities.

For example, let us examine the idea of decision-making authority and demonstrate how it may affect the communication plan or workflow. If the communication team is tasked with creating a project (a newsletter or publication) based on input from another department, say in collaboration with the enforcement team, it is necessary to predict the workload and expectations to a certain degree. It is helpful to have a clear understanding of who will provide the detailed data, the expectations from the communication department, as well as all the other procedures to produce the publication. But is it clear who has authority and who controls the process, length, language, design or layout? Who has final say if there are disagreements? Without these procedural rules, risks such as delays, confusion and bad planning increase. The critical question to answer is - are processes and authority clear to the team and the other departments? If not, one objective could be to ensure these procedures are written down and understood by everyone, including senior management.

After clarifying the procedures and who has the authority, the communication department can look inward and assess the current (or past) plan and programme of work.

What is working, what is not and why?

The first step is to ascertain the expectations of the communication department? What does senior management expect?

What are the goals and objectives entrusted to the communication department by senior management?

The answers will guide the entire process of developing the communication plan. In answering these questions, the goal is to align leadership expectations with other departments and the communication team. The efforts to align expectations will help shape the communication plan. For example, the team may start the discussions by defining the department’s core functions, and clarifying priorities in order of importance.
1.2 Leadership proximity

Leadership proximity means having the attention of senior management. The principle of "leadership proximity" refers to leaders’ natural tendency to have a greater appreciation for the work of people they spend time with. On the other hand, distance leads to detachment and the belief by leaders that the work of others is easier than their own.

One way to remedy any misunderstandings regarding communication teams’ work is to ensure that heads of communication are part of senior management and that close formal working structures are established with other departments. Also, leadership proximity is crucial in times of crisis, as we will discuss in chapter 6.

1.3 Assessing and planning

The communication plan should be part of the work programme, so ideally should be reviewed and updated at least once a year. At any rate, the plan should include details of all planned communication endeavours such as activities, the major priorities for the year, and a general schedule with clearly defined achievable output. Planning and preparation are a large part of communication activities. For example, workflows need to be created regarding all core functions including (but not limited to) writing, editing and production, speechwriting, articles, website, social media content, publications, publication launches, events, communication campaigns, media events, and crisis communication. Templates, instructions and guidelines need to be reviewed and updated using information, data or lessons learned from previous years. Training can focus on technical skills but may also encompass planning skills, such as project management. Planning is a substantial part of communication.
1.4 Measuring and evaluating

Throughout the year, the department should collect information to use during the assessment procedure. The data compiled can measure the effectiveness of communication activities and the planning processes. To do this, we recommend gathering measurable information in three ways based on outputs, outcomes and perceptions.

Output is the most concrete example. Output data is gathered by measuring likes, number of visits, number of participants or number of complaints registered. It can also measure the quality of the content produced (high, low or average). Output is generally more precise, and information can be found easily and used when assessing objectives on an annual basis. In short, it can help measure when goals are being achieved and when they are not.

The second measurement is based on outcomes – did the speech win over the hearts and minds of the public? How much did participants enjoy the event? What was the impression left on the audience? One way to measure outcome, for example, is to send a survey to analyse what was done well, or how it could be improved. Outcomes are valuable when assessing the impact on stakeholders. Stakeholders’ input and opinions can be reflected when evaluating the communication plan. To put it simply, outcomes are the benefits that an activity/project is designed to deliver.

The third way to conduct measurements is based on perception and reputation. Communication can influence how Customs administrations are perceived by stakeholders, the public and citizens. It may be useful to reach out to the public and ask questions, monitor answers and create opinion polls. For example, a website which provides information for traders could contain an opinion-poll, rating the site. Alternatively, it could provide an “e-suggestion box” that is monitored by the communication team who gather information on how services can be improved. There are further examples in each chapter of how the team can measure and evaluate the plan. The plan should integrate all planned communication activities, define themes, priorities and scheduling. There should, however, be room left for unplanned activities.
EVALUATION in three ways

Outputs
- Likes
- Number of visits
- Number of participants
- Number of complaints registered

Perception and reputation
- Opinion polls
- “E-suggestion box”
- Communication activities

Outcomes
- Survey
- Stakeholders’ input and opinions
2. BRANDING AND REPUTATION MANAGEMENT

We should explain who we are, what we are doing and how we work, so that audiences understand and can relate to us
Ms. Lissette Selman,
Communications Manager, General Directorate of Customs Dominican Republic

TAKEAWAYS

• Branding is not just for the private sector
Branding is often considered a private-sector term, but there are increasingly blurred lines between public and private-sector communication practices. Customs administrations should give branding careful consideration because it has a significant impact on the overall communication plan. Branding and reputation management are intertwined, though they are not the same thing.

One way to separate the concepts is to consider branding as an active, time-limited activity. Think of a company undergoing a "rebranding." It is an activity that has a beginning and an end. In comparison, reputation management is an ongoing process. Branding is how you present yourself to the world, while reputation is how the world perceives you. The two are closely linked and influence each other, but are not interchangeable.

Every organization has a reputation, and this reputation colours all external relationships and how officials see themselves within the organization (with employees acting as ambassadors). For Customs administrations, reputation is vital. For example, building a perception of integrity is a critical objective of Customs administrations worldwide. Integrity is a necessary quality for Customs officers and must be highlighted and showcased to strengthen core messages to the public, stakeholders and governments. Reputation management becomes even more important when you consider that the behaviour of Customs in one country can reflect on the international Customs family as a whole.

Reputation and credibility are paramount in Customs.

- Customs administrations need positive reputations and a perception of integrity
- Having a ‘brand manager’ position to stay on top of changes is key
Measuring and understanding reputation is an evolving field, and is more advanced in the private sector. “Interest in the theory of bureaucratic reputation has increased in the last decade with a body of consistent and robust findings showing strategic behaviours of public agencies to enhance their reputations while protecting themselves from reputational threats” (Lee and Ryzen, Measuring bureaucratic reputation: Scale development and validation, 2018).

2.1 How to create a branding strategy

To save work down the road, senior management needs to be involved in the process from the beginning. It needs to agree and understand that branding and reputation are not just logos and website graphic style questions, but rather a way of managing how the world perceives the Customs administration.

Management should provide answers to some crucial questions before the communication strategy is agreed upon. Questions such as:

What are the fundamental aspects of the administration’s identity?

What is the reputation now, and what, if anything, should be changed about it?

Are those fundamental aspects present in the existing reputation and brand, or do they need to be refined or newly introduced?

Who is the target audience for this identity change?

How does management propose to do this?

Is it willing to consider resources for planning, executing and evaluating new initiatives?

If not, it should update its priorities so that previous activities can be paused to implement the new strategy.

Opinions and answers to these questions are collected from both inside and outside the organization. Identity is a general idea and should include a variety of viewpoints. For example, what is the current public perception of the Customs administration?
administration? Collecting input on this question can clarify the administration’s current identity (think of a short questionnaire aimed at stakeholders and the public). Once these questions are answered, it will be easier for senior management to provide the communication department with a strategy. The communication team can then include this in all applicable sections of the communication plan (internal communication, stakeholder relations, media relations, social media, etc.).

The team will need to come up with proposals and specific initiatives that correspond to the strategy. It will need new initiatives, time and resources to this end. For example, carry out extensive internal communication to explain aspects of your identity. Ask your teams to chip in as they see first-hand the impact their work has on the public, and particularly how it is perceived. Put necessary changes into work plans, including evaluation, metrics and updates, if determined to be necessary. Concurrently, carry out the rebranding of physical and virtual spaces (website, logos, etc.) if this is needed. If it is a significant rebrand, hold a launch event to generate some excitement and interest and do not forget to hold it on social media platforms as well.

For its branding, the European Union (EU) made extensive efforts to be consistent across all the various agencies, through features such as incorporating the EU flag into logos and having intentionally similar external communication styles. Customs agencies are not as closely linked, though the self-reinforcing nature of reputations still comes into play.
2.2 Reputation management plan

Given that reputation and brand are closely connected, aspects of reputation management will come into focus when working on branding:

What is our reputation now?
How are we perceived, both internally and externally?
What reputation do we want to have?

For reputation management, you also need to consider how it will be managed and maintained regularly. These decisions can be made internally in the communication department to allow it to function more efficiently. For example, the team should strongly consider designating a brand manager within the team to ensure adherence to the brand and vision, reputation-policy, monitor progress and evaluate your reputation. The team can designate someone to be responsible for this task and ensure compliance with the vision.

The team will need to develop a concrete plan and initiatives that cross-cut other sections of their work. Essential tasks to start this process include: How are your mission, vision and values translated into simple messages? You should convey these to officials, so that they can incorporate them into their work. This helps create an “organizational voice” and message consistency. Consider an identity toolkit that can be used in all organizational communication to maintain that consistency and voice. This can include things such as the new visual identity, a writing guide and style book, a reference vocabulary, and a database with relevant information on work and missions that can be used to answer questions with consistency. As you read the other chapters in this handbook, it will become apparent where to include specific initiatives in the overall communication plan. The reputation management strategy is part of all the upcoming chapters.
2.3 Evaluating and updating

The reputation of any administration is constantly affected by new events, so it should be examined at regular intervals. Qualitative tools to do this include historical research and case studies. Surveys can be used both internally (aimed at officers and management) and contrasted with external surveys (aimed at stakeholders and the general public). Other methods include: requesting feedback after events (internal and external), social/traditional media monitoring (the specifics of this approach will be addressed in chapter 7) and exit interviews with departing staff members. Typical questions to ask staff members should centre on: performance, morality, procedural fairness, technical competence and general reputation.

Quantitatively, the field of reputational analysis for the public sector is constantly evolving and it is challenging to quantify the subject accurately (compared to social media success, such as likes, followers, engagement, etc.). Work is being done in this area, and for an in-depth method of assessing the issue, please see: Danbee Lee and Gregg G. Van Ryzin: Measuring bureaucratic reputation: Scale development and validation, 2018. The authors present a unidimensional tool for assessing bureaucratic reputation, based on 5 dimensions of reputation: General, Performance, Moral, Procedure and Technical. These dimensions are expressed on a short 5-item scale and a longer 10-item scale. The brand manager should be aware of these dimensions on an ongoing basis and should periodically present a summary to senior officials for evaluation of the communication plan.
3. TRANSPARENCY AND STAKEHOLDER RELATIONS

Customs procedures and practices shall be applied in a predictable, consistent and transparent manner.
- General Annex to the Revised Kyoto Convention

**TAKEAWAYS**

- The level of transparency is decided by senior management
For Customs administrations, the topic of transparency and stakeholder relations deserves special attention. Unlike other organizations, Customs administrations are bound by transparency embedded in various international instruments. This makes transparency an obligation and not merely a good practice. Most Customs administrations rely on websites to inform, update and educate their stakeholders. Websites are mostly used as one-way communication tools to provide the public, including some stakeholders, essential information for travellers and traders, duty-free allowances, penalties, prohibited goods, tariffs and trade restrictions, and contact information or contact points. This information should be coordinated by the communication department and should be part of the communication plan.

**Publish information in an accessible manner to enable governments, traders, and other interested parties to become acquainted with them.**

World Trade Organization Trade Facilitation Agreement, Section 1, Article 1.

- Providing information is an important communication function
- Involving stakeholders in the policy-making process is vital to transparency
3.1 Transparency by providing necessary information

One of the first questions for the communication team to reflect on is which department is responsible for overseeing the website and the information it contains. Additionally, has there been a formal decision on this? Perhaps it is a combination of departments responsible for different sections of the website. For example, the events, employees (intranet) and public sections may be spread out among various departments working together. What is important is to have formal procedures, so every department understands its responsibilities. Also, what are the procedures for updates, and who is accountable for wording, placement and the general ease of access to information by the public? How is this currently being measured?

Another consideration for the department is to agree on the specific aim of the administration regarding the level of service it intends to provide. It may be a case of providing the minimum service, or it may be one of providing high-level customer service. It all depends on the decisions and constraints of the administration. It takes resources and planning to achieve high-level customer service and it may not be realistic to expect this from all administrations. Other essential demands on management may make this problematic. Regardless, it should be clear to the communication team how tasks, time and resources are allocated.
The stakeholder relations team should consider who the primary audiences are and what information they need. If it involves contact points and information requests, ensure that guidelines are developed, whether formal or informal, on how to handle public information requests. What about addressing sensitive issues? How can these be taken into consideration? For example - the length of time it takes to process an information request should be written in the communication plan along with other details, so as to create measurable goals.

Communication teams should not forget to include methods of assessment or ways to measure progress. One example is to measure the users of the system or the people who visit the website. Who are they and what are they looking for? And how are their needs addressed? This can be measured by leaving contact details for comments or enquiries, or providing surveys to rate the website and collect feedback. This will help implement updates and make improvements. An efficiently designed and managed website sends a clear message that the administration is receptive to the public’s needs. As a general rule, a website should be user-friendly and easy to navigate. More details on websites are provided in chapter 7.

At the request of the interested person, the Customs shall provide, as quickly and as accurately as possible, information relating to the specific matters raised and pertaining to Customs law.

WCO Revised Kyoto Convention, Transparency and Predictability, Chapter 9.
3.2 Stakeholder relations

Stakeholder relations is a two-way relationship with the people that have a direct interest in the organization’s success. It may involve stakeholders with influence and interest in the outcome of Customs administrations’ decisions. The communication department’s critical question is, what is its designated level of involvement with the various stakeholders? Stakeholder relations is the Customs administration’s responsibility as a whole, and not just that of one or two departments. The communication department must first determine the level of involvement set out in its mandate.

For example, if an administration wishes to develop the consultation process with businesses, the communication team may take an active role in creating events and meetings to facilitate this process. The communication plan may include the objectives to formalize engagement with certain groups and assign staff responsible for stakeholder relations. It will be necessary to clarify who are the target stakeholders as defined by regulation. Who are the ones most interested in the Customs administration’s activities? In the end, the communication plan will have to align with the organization’s objectives by answering the following question: What do we want to achieve working with our stakeholders?

The Customs shall institute and maintain formal consultative relationship with the trade to increase cooperation and facilitate participation in establishing the most effective methods of working commensurate with national provisions and international agreements.

WCO Revised Kyoto Convention, Chapter 1.3, General Principles
The WCO Secretariat recognizes that stakeholder relations are a critical responsibility of Customs administrations as a whole. Along with this viewpoint, the WCO acknowledges the need for trade facilitation through communication, cooperation and coordination, and has developed the following tools to assist its Members:

- **Customs-Business Partnership Guidance** to assist Members with the development of a process for regular consultation and a robust partnership with business;

- The **Customs-Police Cooperation Handbook** to strengthen relations between Customs and Police and emphasize the importance of efficient coordination to avoid overlaps and waste of resources;

- **WCO Revised Kyoto Convention on the Simplification and Harmonization of Customs Procedures**, which contains standards dealing specifically with coordinated border management (coordinated opening hours, joint controls, etc.);

- **WCO Coordinated Border Management Compendium**, including the latest developments and practices in this field;

- **WCO SAFE Framework of Standards** to Secure and Facilitate Global Trade, which offers guidance on how Customs can cooperate with other cross-border regulatory agencies at a national and international level;

- **WCO Guide to Measure the Time Required for the Release of Goods**, which addresses requirements for cross-border cooperation and inter-agency coordination;

- **WCO Data Model solution** for optimized electronic data exchange.

The WCO also supports the dematerialization of supporting documents to facilitate cross-border trade flows and advocates integrating stand-alone border agency systems into one unified Single Window (WCO Compendium on How to Build a Single Window Environment).
3.3 Evaluation and measuring

Collection of feedback is important to understand if stakeholders’ expectations are being met and to determine if the objectives are best achieved by implementing the current activities. Regular face-to-face feedback on activities can provide this or, if practical, so can surveys. Transparency means focusing on the fundamentals, such as providing up-to-date information in an easily accessible manner, and a well-maintained website can serve this purpose. The website should adopt a constant improvement policy, and consider implementing suggestions from stakeholders about improving its service. Websites can collect comments and suggestions from users to help continually improve their content and better serve stakeholders. There should be contact points for all queries with a set response time.

Finally, co-creating with the private sector, involving it every step of the way and having a two-way dialogue with stakeholders can prove to be one of the best ways to evaluate the current stakeholder relations plan.
4. INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

We should all have communication policies in our institutions and create a communication culture.
Mr. Leonardo Trentini,
Director of Institutional Customs Communication, Uruguay, WCO Communication Conference, October 2019.

TAKEAWAYS

- Internal communication is key to staff motivation and efficiency
Internal communication is the way staff exchange information within a Customs administration. A positive, robust communication culture is strongly correlated with staff engagement and motivation. When employees feel their voice matters, they are more empowered to generate positive change. Good organizational communication creates a sense of belonging in the workplace and encourages people to work together to achieve common objectives.

In this way, Customs administrations can rely on employees to enhance their reputation. Employees are the primary ambassadors of the organization and can demonstrate the importance of Customs administrations to the outside world.

If workers feel like they belong, companies reap substantial bottom-line benefits. High belonging is linked to a whopping 56% increase in job performance, a 50% drop in turnover risk, and a 75% reduction in sick days.


- The Customs administration is responsible for building a communication culture
- Measure and evaluate using surveys, interviews and group discussions
4.1 The internal communication plan

The internal communication plan starts with the overall scope of communication in a Customs administration. Identify key partners or departments with a keen interest and influence in the internal communication strategy and activities. Try to envision where and how tasks will overlap and require cooperation and collaboration. For example, internal communication will rely heavily on the input and cooperation with the human resource (HR) department, since particular objectives and tasks naturally intersect. HR is responsible for internal staff matters. Therefore, it serves as the logical gatekeeper to some internal communication tasks. For example, if one were interested in measuring work satisfaction rates this would require collecting and storing private data, which only HR can do.

The internal communication plan will require close collaboration with and support from senior management. Management will likely need to sign off on the mandate and objectives, and its input will be necessary for specific initiatives in the plan. There may be other essential departments to liaise with. The aim is to agree on objectives, responsibilities and evaluation methods and align them with the organization’s overall goals.

To do this, it is important to have in place a clear separation of duties and responsibilities for each activity. If there is a need for cooperation, this should be clearly identified. The internal communication plan is the communication team’s responsibility; however, the success of a communication culture is the responsibility of the Customs administration as a whole. There should be an agreement on allocating sufficient resources, time and planning to internal communication activities. The highest-ranking communication official should have direct access to senior management and leaders of other departments. This leadership proximity is essential when negotiating the details of the plan.
Important questions that guide the creation of a plan are:

**Does the communication team have the support of key departments and, if not, how can the latter be persuaded to lend their support?**

**Do the key departments and the communication team have the same understanding of what internal communication should be and who is responsible for it?**

**Where are the agreements and disagreements, and how can the team negotiate a path forward?**

There should be guidelines and a consensus on the aim and what should be accomplished in the plan. Ideally, the objectives should be related to creating a positive and transparent communication culture within the Customs administration and one that can be measured periodically. Perhaps the plan may stress the need to increase efficiency, staff motivation or worker satisfaction. Whatever the main goal, it should be clearly stated.
4.2 Tools and channels

The next step is to analyse the specific tools and communication channels being used. Are there enough and are all stakeholders being reached?

Or are there perhaps too many channels and too much noise?

Should more tools be added to the mix or should the number be reduced to increase focus?

Who is managing the channels and responsible for the content?

What are their opinions on the content and channels currently being used?

Is there a better way?

Those who manage the channels and are responsible for content are often in the best position to explain why some tools are working and why others are not. The information they provide should be the first point of consideration.

In some initiatives, the communication team will be expected to play a supporting role rather than a leading one. Does the team understand when it is expected to play a support role and when it is expected to be the creator or leader of a project? Specific initiatives should have a stated purpose and a way of measuring if the objective has been met. For example, if staff wish to host a workshop or a social event, it should be obvious why the event is taking place and what it is aiming to achieve. By doing this, it will be much easier to plan and resource activities from the outset.

To assess the tools and channels, start with identifying the purpose of the message. There are generally two purposes for internal communication; announcements (or providing information) and dialogue communication. Announcements are often a top-down form of communication that comes in the form of notices such as new rules or procedure of conduct. However, they can also be initiatives such as staff bulletin boards, flyers and internal newsletters. The point is to think of the most effective way to pass on information in a top-down manner.
Dialogue communication, on the other hand, takes a different approach. Dialogue is not only top-down, but it can also be lateral or bottom-up. It is reciprocal communication. This type of communication can be carried out through formal meetings, informal face-to-face activities, workshops, social media and informal social events. There should be a mix of both types of communication initiatives within a Customs administration, depending on the purpose to be achieved.

4.3 Evaluating and updating
Once the plan’s intentions have been clarified, resources assigned and specific objectives stated, the plan should include ways to measure and evaluate. Measuring and evaluation techniques are used to re-evaluate the internal plan at particular intervals, for example on an annual basis. A Customs administration may wish to gauge the level of satisfaction officers express for their administration, or how engaged and motivated staff may feel. In this case, surveys may be a good tool to use. Ascertaining whether experienced staff are taking enough time to train recruits is another example. This information can be gathered through interviews. Records can be kept to encourage stable measuring techniques over long periods. Some of the standard evaluation tools are surveys, interviews and group discussions.
5. MEDIA RELATIONS

**TAKEAWAYS**

- Prioritize proactive media relations over reactive ones
Media relations entails communicating and coordinating with those who produce the news. Connecting with the media is an effective way to reach the public and those in decision-making positions. One of the benefits of strong media relations is it can increase the administration’s credibility as an information provider and as a voice in issues affecting Customs. Popular media outlets are newspapers, television, print, radio, internet news and blogs.

There are two core strategies in media relations when formulating a plan. They are proactive and reactive media relations, and Customs administrations should include both in their communication plan. However, the media relations plan should favour proactive initiatives since they are crucial to building long-term relationships with media sources. The proactive approach allows a degree of control over what and how messages are circulated. For example, regularly contacting a core group of journalists, inviting them to events or distributing press releases to certain journalists enhance targeted messaging. Proactive relations allow an administration to choose the media it wishes to work with and for what purpose.

A reactive media strategy should also be part of the plan because it may be necessary to explain or sometimes protect the administration’s actions. A reactive process should be created as a pre-emptive measure to deal with negative press. For example, there should be guidelines for dealing with enquiries by the media and on how to handle questions and provide appropriate answers within a set timeline. Timelines, templates and procedures are beneficial when the administration is defensive and dealing with bad press. Reactive media strategies are covered in greater detail in the next chapter.

- Set up clear guidelines on procedures and utilize media multipliers
- Measure and monitor using reports and lessons learned
5.1 Developing the plan

To develop the media relations plan, the communication team can start with some preliminary questions such as:

What are the main messages the administration wants to communicate?

Who is the target audience: the public, politicians or perhaps business leaders?

What does the administration hope to gain with these messages?

Are these messages in line with the objectives of the organization?

What was the previous media strategy, and how did it work, who did it target and what were the main messages?

Identify the successes and failures of the previous plan and then describe how to build upon these lessons.

A media plan will work more efficiently if built on clear guidelines and rules. Guidelines are essential within the administration and the communication department itself. For example, what are the current regulations for staff regarding media contact? Who can speak to the media and how often? Does everyone understand this? Is this method efficient and helpful in achieving the objectives of the communication plan? How much time and planning (resourcing) is needed to implement the initiatives? Can the communication team manage with the current resources? Can the process be streamlined? For example, it may help to develop templates for communication with key contacts and media multipliers. Clarification should be provided on how to approach contacts. The aim should be to standardize the professional relationship with the media and establish Customs administrations as a predictable and reliable partner. Bear in mind that key contacts are journalists or members of the media. However, for Customs administrations they may also be government agencies (i.e. law enforcement) other Customs administrations or other organizations (i.e. the WCO).
A media relations plan relies on a network of multipliers such as journalists, opinion leaders, influencers, news agencies, government agencies and partner organizations relevant to a specific sector and a particular topic. Multipliers are those who can pass on a message and amplify the voice of the administration. Are there other agencies that can work together with the Customs administration to develop a common message? If so, how can they be approached and what can be done together? Multipliers have access to a wide audience and can easily disseminate a specific message, article or piece of information.

5.2 Details to include

A media relations plan relies on making connections with the media or experts in their field. For example, the communication team can identify the media they want to reach and the journalists who work in the different outlets as well as their fields of specialization, for example, valuation, origin, drugs, terrorism, small arms and light weapons, hazardous waste, endangered species, and illegal trafficking of cultural objects. The communication team can establish regular conversations with them before an operation or at the beginning of a project, with regular follow-up. Start this process by building a database. The database can be updated and maintained by the team to maintain good relations and foster new ones. Key contacts can be provided with embargoed material or perhaps given an offer to participate in a local story, such as an exclusive interview on a recent story in Customs news. Or reach out with press conferences or meetings regarding reports that may be useful to your contacts. A well-crafted campaign, such as getting an article in a prominent newspaper or a well-read magazine, can positively impact various stakeholders and key contacts.

Media relations may involve other organizations or government departments such as the police and law enforcement agencies. There are inherent difficulties in coordinating with external organizations. It can be challenging to assign tasks and accurately specify how credit for the operation will be shared. Sometimes it can be challenging to implement a plan where there is no authority, but only goodwill between the organizations. One tool to consider in such joint-initiatives is using a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). Customs administrations can formalize cooperation with organizations and government agencies to co-promote the vital work they both do. An MoU is a practical tool for encouraging collaboration and sharing the success of an operation.

Another aim of the communication plan is to generate publicity for certain important events. The communication team (or its most senior official) likely has direct contacts with key media outlets and can work to make this happen. Simultaneously, a communication team will need to make itself valuable to the news organization by offering information on a story related to Customs or a direct quote from the organization’s head. Media relations is the domain of professionals whose objective is to create or maintain a favourable public image for their organization. Therefore, brand awareness and a reputation management strategy form the foundations of the media relations plan.
5.3 Measuring the impact of the plan

Measuring and evaluating the result of a media relations plan is essential. It helps clarify whether or not the messages are reaching the target audience. There are a few tools that can help do this. If there is a large budget, the easiest way may be to hire a consultancy firm or pay for media subscriptions to track and monitor the impact, provide data or produce an overall assessment. However, this can be expensive and may not be the optimal use of resources.

A more cost-effective way of measuring media relations’ success is counting the number of placements secured throughout a campaign. Counting the number of placements will give an idea of how well the press received a news announcement or story idea. However, the impact of a placement relies on various factors such as the circulation of a publication, demographics of the readers and engagement level. A much more quantifiable evaluation can be carried out using the cost-method-analysis based on Ad-Rates. The Ad-Rates method calculates the news story’s value against paid advertising costs in a given media. The process uses the news story’s size in square inches (or centimetres) in a newspaper to determine how much the organization would have paid in advertising fees to receive the same amount of space. As we move to digital media, we can use this same tactic to compare the placement to the cost for a sponsored post or a link from the site.

For example, let us imagine that Customs prevented the smuggling of arms into the country and this achievement was reported on the radio during a national news segment. How could we calculate the value of this news report? The value would be approximately the price of paid advertising on that same radio station for the same duration. The same method applies to newspapers, where the value is equal to the price of paid advertisement of comparable size to the article (or where a Customs administration is highlighted). The principle also applies to the internet news site, i.e. how much paid advertising would cost. This is valuable information for the communication team as it can help target certain media outlets and multipliers to enhance messages in a cost-effective manner.
Google News is a free tool that can help measure the reach and intensity of media campaigns or news about Customs. Google News can identify and track news coverage of a given topic and uncover which agencies picked up prominent stories related to Customs. Another tool is Google Analytics. It is also a free tool that can measure the page views on a Customs administration's website to measure readership of articles or events. Finally, there are group discussions and team meetings. The communication team members will gain in-depth knowledge of which communication objectives were achieved and which were not and why. Solutions can be explored, and the plan can be re-evaluated using the lessons learned and best practices throughout the year.

There is no perfect way to measure the success of a media relations campaign given that there are often several variables and indirect metrics in play.

We can gain an insight into how successful a media relations campaign is based on these techniques.
6. CRISIS COMMUNICATION

By the time you hear the thunder, it’s too late to build the ark
Unknown

TAKEAWAYS

- Have a crisis plan and protocols on hand in advance
A crisis is an unexpected event that quickly disrupts the reputation or operations of a business. It can occur at any time and usually requires a short response time. If not managed properly, a crisis can lead to long-term consequences. A crisis can be an external event, such as a global health pandemic or the reaction to a controversial decision or improper conduct of a Customs administration. A crisis communication plan can guide an administration through a crisis and protect its image and reputation.

Crisis communication is reactive communication. During a crisis, the administration is likely to be on the defensive. Therefore, time and efficiency are crucial. A pre-determined plan can help mitigate and manage a crisis before it even begins. When a crisis hits, a plan provides a reliable and stable response, maintains calm for employees and ensures essential services continue to operate. How an organization manages a crisis can improve the organization’s reputation or damage its image if mishandled.

- Update tools and templates that will guide an administration through a crisis
- Review and update the plan based on past experiences
6.1 Creating the plan

The communication team can develop a crisis communication plan with the support of senior management. The building blocks of the plan should rest upon some key questions.

Does the administration currently have a crisis plan?

Can it be adapted to both external threats and threats of reputation damage?

Are there clear protocols such as who can speak on behalf of the organization?

What are the lines of communication to staff?

What are staff rules for communicating with those outside the organization during a crisis?

Has a targeted audience been identified and who should contact whom?

Have proper channels been identified (news outlets, social media) and how they will be approached when a crisis strikes?

Are there plans in place to reassign resources for the duration of the situation?

A crisis may not end quickly and this should be reflected in the plan. Are the regular operations of the administration sustainable if the crisis persists?

Having a protocol in place during a crisis is essential. Employees need to know what is expected of them during a surprise event. Communication between employees and management should remain predictable and continuous. Damage control or planning starts inside the administration, and plans should be communicated internally before public announcements. Employees should not be surprised. Clear procedures should be in place, such as having a pre-designated spokesperson who is authorized to speak on behalf of the organization. The communication team should understand who is responsible for liaising with stakeholders (contact media).

Management will need to be involved in approving the crisis plan. During a crisis, senior management will define objectives early, communicate them internally and then explore ways to communicate with the public. Customs administrations should determine protocols for speaking to the press and posting on social media about the event. It is difficult to portray a unified message with many voices talking simultaneously, and an organization risks appearing confused or divided.

The plan should consider risk management, such as ensuring the plan can be scaled up or extended for longer periods. As we have witnessed with the COVID-19 pandemic, a crisis can last longer than anticipated and Customs administrations should be ready to adapt. During the pandemic, Customs administrations have been forced to change how officers work on a daily basis. The goal is to maintain productivity and protect the health and safety of employees, while boosting morale. Some officers have had to work in higher-risk situations or extremely remote locations. This burden of isolation has therefore been added to the list of risks facing employees. Crisis plans need to be adaptable to protect employees during a long-term crisis. To assist its Members the WCO has developed a “Guidance on how to communicate during a crisis”, available on the WCO website.
6.2 During a crisis

Focus on preparation so that the administration can adapt quickly and efficiently to a crisis. The messaging should remain consistent. This builds trust and confidence that the administration is in control of the situation. Templates should be created containing a list of possible questions and answers (Q&As). Responses can be general but not evasive. They should not appear defensive, but preferably be stern and measured. A Customs administration has a right to defend itself for actions taken but only as far as it was right in its actions (this is not always clear). However, if errors or misconduct have occurred, this should be admitted and responsibility accepted. Long-term relations with stakeholders and the public are based on building trust, and trust should not be sacrificed if errors were made.

During a crisis, the communication team may reach out to the media to offer transparent dialogue. When speaking with the media, the protocol should emphasize sticking to the facts and the information available. Do not presume or guess what will occur in the future. The messages should address the known, not the unknown. It is also vital to focus on the human side of the story, not just the dry facts and figures. By sticking only to the facts, the organization risks giving the impression that it is not interested in the ordinary individual’s plight. Telling the human side of the story, or not, is often where relations with the public can either be made or broken.

Another responsibility for the communication team is to double-check any stated facts and figures before communicating during a crisis. This point should be highlighted in the plan. There is nothing worse than losing the confidence of the public during a crisis. Finally, communication should be regular, especially at the beginning of a crisis situation. It shows commitment on the part of an administration. It also demonstrates that the administration is either adapting to or solving the problem. Being open and transparent about what is not known is essential, and should be stated. Transparency builds trust and, during a crisis, there needs to be a high level of trust.

6.3 Measuring

The crisis communication plan can be updated regularly. Q&A templates should be reviewed, the spokesperson list updated and protocol procedures examined. Contact lists should be updated to ensure media contacts can be accessed quickly. Updating the crisis communication plan usually requires meetings that analyse the lessons learned from the last crisis. These lessons are the building blocks of a long-term crisis communication plan and should be scrutinized appropriately.

The WCO guide on how to communicate during a crisis is publicly available on its website: www.wcoomd.org
7. SOCIAL MEDIA AND ONLINE COMMUNICATION

In social media, you need to listen, read, and monitor audiences and, most importantly, measure, because if you don’t measure, you don’t know if you’re improving.

Peter Heurling, Enterprise Solutions Director, Meltwater

TAKEAWAYS

- Use social media and online communication to reach a targeted audience
Social media offers an economical way for Custom administrations to reach a broad audience. It facilitates a quick and easy way to engage, allowing information exchange, networking and awareness raising. Social media has specialized in niche areas, such as social networks (Twitter and Facebook), careers (LinkedIn), pictures and lifestyle (Instagram) and video (YouTube).

Social media continues to evolve with new tools and channels, so keeping up-to-date with trends and updating knowledge is essential. Customs administrations should have at least a minimum presence online to be relevant. Increasingly, users visit social media and bypass traditional websites for quick and accurate information. However, a website is still an indispensable tool for Customs administrations to provide reliable, updated information to stakeholders and the public (chapter 3). The site and the social media presence can and should be used to build on each other, directing traffic back and forth.

- A clear policy can help achieve social media goals
- An updated website remains an indispensable tool
7.1 Social media plan

To create or update the online media strategy, start by asking a few questions, including:

What is the branding and reputation management (chapter 2) strategy?

How does this impact the social media plan?

What is the communication mandate from senior management (chapter 1) and how much social presence does the administration envisage?

What are the current social media objectives, and who is the target audience?

Do they match the strategy and reputation management goals and are they specific enough to measure?

Once the plan has been envisaged, the communication team can consider planning levels of activity and initiatives. Activity level can range from dozens of posts per day across many platforms (for large institutions such as the European Commission) to a few a month on, say, only Twitter. Consistency is key. Social media initiatives can be such things as mini-campaigns (for instance one post per day for a week) around a specific event, a message to be pushed, a new regulation or anything else that can raise awareness or convey a message.

Let us take an example of a social media initiative to highlight Customs officers’ integrity and relatability. There are several ways to showcase this through social media. One way could be to create a short video for Twitter and Facebook to show a Customs officer’s daily activities, accompanied by the officer’s detector dog. The aim is to build a relationship with the audience and the team (the officer and the dog), thus putting a human face on the Customs organization. The video could focus on positive emotions such as companionship and duty. It may tell a personal story about the two actors, day-to-day training, work environment, downtime, etc. The story could highlight the team’s service backed up with some statistics and data. Since it will be for social
media, the video should be short and catchy, as no one spends extended time on a particular item on these platforms. When deeper information needs to be conveyed, typically there would be links back to a website.

Finally, one of the most useful aspects of social media is that a Customs administration can empower all employees to maintain or enhance their social media presence. It is not only the communication department that can help drive the social media presence. All employees can be encouraged to participate and represent the administration as brand ambassadors. However, this should be enabled in a controlled manner. This is where a social media policy document can be helpful. The social media policy does not have to be long or complicated, but it should be clear and understandable to reduce the risk of reputation damage.

7.2 Social media policy

Not everyone can be an official spokesperson on social media. That is why procedures are important in the plan. The social media policy should clarify such things as: who is responsible for the content and what are the procedures for using social media? Who is authorized to use official accounts? How many different channels are being used? Are the same things being reposted on other channels? On the following page is an example of how to shape a social media policy.

The policy should identify the social media objectives for the organization along with the target audience. Then it should identify or list the channels and tools. It should clarify how authorized employees who speak on behalf of the organization should act. There should be a clear distinction between spokespersons, i.e. those entrusted to represent the organization officially, and those who use social media for private purposes. The policy can support and encourage Customs officials to participate in online discussions in the right way. Even when using social media “privately”, all employees should be aware of the implications of engaging in social media regarding the Customs administration. Everyone should be encouraged to be brand ambassadors but also know the risks posed by social media, such as the danger of posting information that may damage the Customs administration’s reputation.
I AM A CUSTOMS EMPLOYEE

I use social media

I am an entrusted spokesperson for the administration, Director General, Head of Communication, etc.

The administration’s code of conduct applies both to my personal and professional online activities

I do not express my personal views online if they are not in keeping with those of the administration

I only reference publicly available information and not internal matters

I am part of the communication team or I am authorized to use social media actively as part of my duties

I adhere to the internal procedures of content management

When expressing personal opinions, I clearly mark posts as my “personal opinion”

If I am unsure about a situation I ask advice from those entrusted with actively protecting and managing the administration’s reputation

I do not use social media at work or I am only a passive social media user

I have read the administration’s code of conduct and understand the need to use sound judgment so as not to damage the administration’s reputation

The time I spend on social media during working hours is adding value to my job. I do not use it for entertainment

Stop reading this

Example of social media policy
7.4 Website strategy

A website is the most important online tool for a Customs administration. It is a reliable way of providing official information to stakeholders and the public. However, a website needs constant maintenance and updates. Ideally, a website strategy should aim to improve its services on a regular basis. This continuous improvement is logical because technology is evolving and vital information is always changing. To keep material and services easily accessible, old data has to be archived or deleted. The website should be continuously updated, cleaned and decluttered. It needs to be re-organized along the lines of what is essential to users and stakeholders, as opposed to what is important to the administration’s internal workings. For internal workings, an intranet or a sophisticated database can be used.
To create an effective website strategy, it is helpful to answer some important questions.

The most important question is: What is the website’s primary goal and has this been well defined and clarified by senior management (chapter 1)?

Who is the primary audience, and what is it most interested in?

What is the view inside the administration as to the most crucial section of the website?

Do these two views diverge and how can this be remedied if so?

Are there procedures in place such as guidelines for producing content, workflows and decision-making authority?

Are there sufficient resources to implement maintenance, updates, improvements and measuring?

Is the website compatible with mobile browsers?

Maintaining a website is a constant job and needs a clear website plan. Other than maintenance, initiatives throughout the year for the website should be based on improving it or measuring its current effectiveness. For example, is the most important or relevant web page being visited the most often, according to the website statistics? One of the best resources to guide this process is the website content manager. These individuals will logically have an in-depth knowledge of where and how website improvements can be made. They will be able to re-focus by identifying the most visited content on the website rather than what are perceived to be the most important areas of the website. Measuring can be carried out by analysing page traffic, downloads, bounce rates and other statistics.
7.5 Measuring and evaluating

The basics of measuring and evaluating social media presence are easy, since all platforms provide tools that clearly show things like retweets, likes, shares or the number of followers. These should be checked regularly throughout the year, such as on a quarterly basis, and judgements made about the strongest performing content, best time of day for posts, best platform and other issues that can be compared quantitatively.

Beyond that, given that social media is often somewhat ‘fuzzy’ (i.e. how do you measure awareness-raising?), more qualitative measuring on social media and the website will depend on the users’ feedback and things such as surveys, historical research/comparisons and advanced techniques. ‘Awareness raising’ and the overall impact of social media and the website directly tie into reputation and branding, so qualitative measurement should be addressed in the scope of those issues, as discussed in chapter 2.3: Evaluating and updating.
8. HIGHLIGHTS FROM CUSTOMS AND STAKEHOLDERS

- Stakeholder relations - Belgium
- Social media (detecting fake news) - European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex)
- Public relations - United Arab Emirates
- Media relations - Zambia
In this section, we highlight some communication techniques used in Customs administrations around the world. It is meant to showcase practical issues and the solutions adopted. Communication teams are often faced with problems that need creative and innovative solutions. Customs administrations are unique in the sense that they mix both private and public sector practices. Because of this, Customs may find benefits in sharing practices and highlighting what works for certain administrations.

- Internal communication - The European Union
- New communication technology - Indonesia
- Internal communication - Saudi Arabia
**Stakeholder relations - Belgium**

An administration's degree of engagement towards stakeholder relations is an important component of any communication strategy. The Belgian Customs Administration (finances.belgium.be/fr/douanes_accises) engages in dialogue with the private sector via the National Forum (naforna.be/fr). It is a permanent platform where Customs officials and representatives from the private sector meet regularly to devise or improve services and policies through information, consultation and co-creation. The principles of equality and mutual trust are at the forefront of the Customs community's values and make the National Forum a best practice for stakeholder engagement.

For example, in 2020, the National Forum has been one of the main tools used by the Belgian Customs Administration to mitigate the risks of the COVID-19 crisis and Brexit. Direct communication was established through the National Forum. When Belgium went into lockdown in March 2020, the National Forum kicked off its COVID-19 meetings and held 11 such meetings during the first two months of lockdown. The direct communication offered by the National Forum was highly appreciated by the private sector. Turning to Brexit, a dedicated working group was established in January 2019 and is still active. The added value provided by the National Forum includes growing support for the Customs administration’s policy, the improvement of content and social learning. Also, internal communication within the Customs administration has improved through the exchange of information at meetings and officials are more involved as they have a better understanding of the impact of their work on the private sector. Stakeholder engagement is a real return on investment.

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**Social media (detecting fake news) - European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex)**

Social media is an effective tool for reaching a target audience, though it does come with risks. Izabella Cooper, Head of the Press Office at Frontex, says that social media is full of disinformation. For example, there is authentic-looking ‘news’ about miraculous treatments for COVID-19, conspiracy theories about its origins and rumours about how it spreads. However, on social media, fake news spreads faster and more easily than the coronavirus, and no direct contact is needed to spread it around the globe. News-like formats are easy to reproduce and it can be tough to spot the difference between a genuine online article and a hoax. Old video footage is used to illustrate recent events and edited photos are published to increase the sensationalism of invented stories, which makes it difficult to distinguish which ‘news’ is real and which is fake.

Nevertheless, Izabella says that it is not that difficult to spot fake news – we just need to look out for a few simple signs. Frontex has developed a booklet for this purpose that offers a number of checks that allow users to filter authentic news reports from ones that distort the truth. She believes we can stop the spread of fake news by identifying it early, reporting it and not spreading it further. This short booklet will increase resilience to the spread of disinformation, honing our skills in identifying and removing disinformation and supporting the dissemination of reliable news. (op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/7317a29c-02ca-11eb-8919-01aa75ed71a1).
Public relations - United Arab Emirates

The public is an important stakeholder for Customs administrations. Public perception can have a direct impact on an administration's reputation management. When the Government of Dubai launched an initiative under the slogan "Happiness Meter", Dubai Customs took its customer service to the next level.

The Happiness Meter aims at creating an environment among the various government departments in which they compete with each other for the highest happiness and satisfaction rating based on public feedback. For the past two years, Dubai Customs has attained the highest level of happiness, around 98%, of all the Dubai Government service providers, departments and organizations as measured by customer and stakeholder feedback under this initiative. This success is attributed to a unique tool for effective handling of customer complaints and suggestions, through which Dubai Customs has a comprehensive policy recognizing the right of its customers and stakeholders to complain and provide suggestions as a valuable form of feedback and input to improve its services and processes. Dubai Customs also has a mechanism to reward its customers and stakeholders for their complaints and suggestions, called the "Best Complainer/Suggester Award". On an annual basis, this award is given to a customer who makes the most helpful and critical complaint or suggestion for improvement. The award ensures a win-win situation for customers as well as for Dubai Customs, as critical issues are registered, analysed and resolved to produce a system of constant improvement within the organization.

Media relations - Zambia

Using the media to communicate with the public is one of the most effective ways to reach a wider audience. Mr. Mupishi Miti, Senior Collector & Manager in Zambia Customs, says that his Administration uses roadshows and short video commercials to get its message across to the public. The campaigns are designed to make people aware of Customs rules, despite this often not being the most exciting subject matter. Tax can be a tough subject for attracting interest, and no one is excited at paying tax. So, with this challenge in mind, Zambia uses local celebrities, comedians and musicians to help draw attention to their campaigns, through videos. Mupishi explains that the videos begin with music and a little drama, and then, at the right moment, the celebrity delivers the message. The videos are funny and entertaining, while the messaging is simple and to the point. It helps bring awareness to people about important Customs issues. He says that this strategy is successful because it seeks to entertain people and the audiences appreciate the effort and remember the message.
Internal communication - The European Union

Internal communication is critical to staff morale and motivation. Dace Kalnina, an internal communication specialist at the European Commission, talks about setting a welcoming tone for new recruits. According to Dace, a well thought-out welcome pack can get newcomers on board quickly and effectively. The immediate effect is that new staff members feel their arrival has been anticipated and prepared for. They are often quickly motivated to be part of a larger group in which they feel appreciated. This can enhance employee retention rates and increase worker satisfaction.

In addition, internal communication is a catalyst for creating space for informal conversations. For example, the game of coffee roulette is also greatly appreciated by newcomers. Willing participants are invited to add their names to a pot. Names are drawn in pairs or in threes, and in the following days people are invited to have a coffee break together so that they can speak to and get to know each other. It also works for online Zoom coffee breaks to which random participants are assigned. This is the beginning of creating a culture of openness and communication.

New communication technology - Indonesia

Technology is constantly evolving and for communication specialists the benefits can be far-reaching. For Benedictus Jackson, Communication Manager at Indonesian Customs, there is significant upside potential to using Artificial Intelligence. Indonesia Customs developed a chatbot called Noni Bravo, which was deployed in 2019. Noni Bravo is designed to do two things: help guide answers on tracking for traders, and answer simple questions in text-based messaging. The Chatbot has a dedicated officer who works to improve the response efficiency and effectiveness based on extensive data collection. According to Benedictus, the Chatbot correctly responds to around 46% of queries and works around the clock, 24 hours a day. He says that customer satisfaction has increased since the Chatbot came into use (2018), from 8.03 (index with a scale of 1-10) to 8.78 in 2019. In 2020, this number reached 9.03. This is a positive result for the Administration because there is always a desire to cut costs and save time, yet not sacrifice the services provided to the public. Moreover, against the backdrop of the pandemic, Noni Bravo has become a reliable channel to provide optimal feedback in response to information queries.
Internal communication - Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia understands that Customs issues can be complicated and are subject to changes or updates from time to time. It is challenging for officers to keep up with all the material. According to Mr. Adel Baraja, General Manager, Marketing & Customer Experience, the Saudi Arabia General Customs Authority has found an innovative solution. The Authority has developed a game to harness the power of competition to help employees strive for excellence.

The Authority began by developing a service portal for employees to access all relevant information related to Customs, taking the form of a study library of sorts. It then built a game based on the portal. Adel says the game is based on challenges and questions. Staff can challenge anyone in the organization, who then receive three questions requiring Customs knowledge (on the topic of VAT, for example). Participants have to answer quickly and correctly. They can earn points and badges, and the outcome is that Customs staff love the game and learning through competition.

To sweeten the deal for employees, management is talking to the HR department to offer incentives (extra holidays) to the top points earners in the game, adding tangible benefits for officers demonstrating the highest level of expertise. Adel says that the current pilot phase involves 500 employees. He believes that Saudi Customs has found an innovative, exciting and motivating system to make its employees the agents of change its wants them to be.
9. CONCLUSION
Communication is a dynamic function that adapts to an ever-changing environment. It is important for Customs administrations to stay alert to new trends, and communication tools to keep pace with their audience. While this document reflects the current state of play, it is far from being exhaustive and serves as a reference tool. Each administration has its own set of constraints and challenges but the fundamental importance of exchanging information, creating understanding and developing relationships remains the same.

This handbook can be read as a reflection on the opportunity for Customs administrations to reassess their communication plans. Some administrations already go beyond what this Handbook has analysed and we encourage them to share their experience with the WCO, so that we may share their stories with other Members. We understand that the customs family is large and diverse, and so are their needs and resources. Some have limited budgets and scope while others have more elaborate communication activities than what we have described. That is why this Handbook does not provide an exhaustive list of tools and activities but ensures that the fundamentals about planning, measurement and monitoring are covered.

We believe that this Handbook can facilitate the interest of communication teams from Customs administrations around the world to come together in a network to share innovative ideas and tools adapted to their own needs, and ultimately extend this dialogue to their stakeholders. The WCO will be glad to facilitate such a process to ensure that the message is standardized and amplified for the benefit of the whole Customs community.