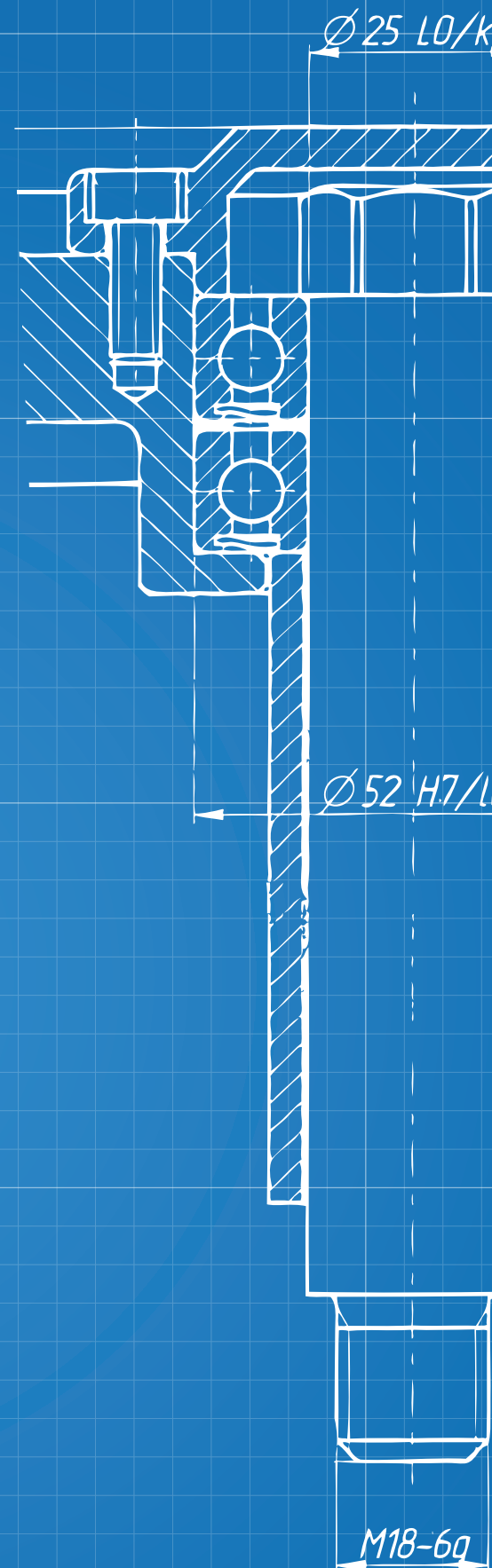
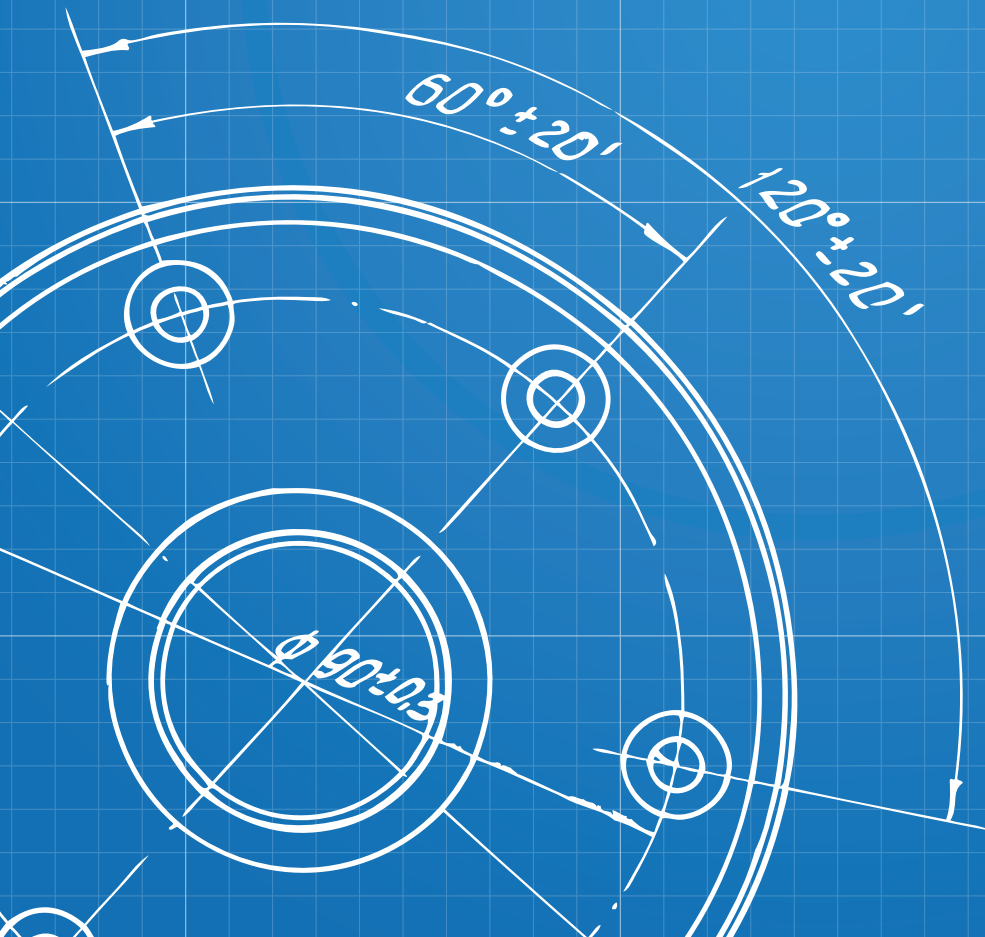


CREATING YOUR BRAND MESSAGE:

HOW TO CRAFT A TIMELESS IMAGE FOR YOUR COMPANY

Think of your messaging platform as a blueprint of your ideal company image. It is a sketch that captures—in words—the strongest, most compelling picture of your organization.

It is not necessarily how your company will appear to the public or your target audience every day, but rather a vision of the company you aspire to be. Some days, you'll be a perfect reflection of that image, while other days you may fall short. But the blueprint will serve as a timeless anchor that keeps everyone aiming for the same goal.



BUILDING YOUR MESSAGING PLATFORM

The messaging platform is an internal document intended to help unify the company voice by adopting a common identity, with content that can be tailored for marketing copy, media publications, story pitches, press releases or other materials as needed.

Messaging can take many forms, but ultimately it should define your core principles, tell a compelling narrative, and identify objective, boilerplate language for press releases.

The Big Idea

You should begin with something we call the Big Idea. This is essentially a headline theme that captures in a brief statement why people should care about your company, product or service. It is not intended to communicate the key features of your various business lines or product functions, so much as it is to make an emotional connection with your audience.

Positioning Pillars

Next, you should identify three core principles that define your company and list supporting bullets for each that explain their significance. These principles should be high-level concepts that speak to the driving forces of your firm. They can be character traits, such as Integrity, Accuracy, and Tradition, or they can align with target markets, company objectives, or specific offerings. These pillars will serve as the foundation for the rest of your platform.

The Narrative

Your platform should also include a narrative, or a story that captures the most compelling aspects of your firm, one that forges an emotional connection with your target audience and inspires them to act. It could be your company's remarkable evolution of growth, a founder's personal story of triumph, or a team's moment of discovery. It should reveal something engaging and memorable, without becoming mired in technical details of products or services.

Proof Points

Proof points are bullets of hard evidence to support the more subjective statements in your messaging. If you are positioning your firm as the leading provider of retirement planning software, your bullets might detail your market share, sales revenue, or industry citations.

The Boilerplate

Your boilerplate is the language that goes at the bottom of every press release, and what any reporter will likely refer to first to quickly understand the function of your company. This text should be a short, objective profile of your company of no more than two to three concise paragraphs. It should include the year your company was founded, its geographic locations, a description of what it does, and a link to your website.

COMMON PITFALLS TO AVOID

As you build your platform, there are some bad habits to avoid that can significantly weaken your message.

Don't Over Sanitize

Your messaging should embrace bold viewpoints and a distinct voice that showcases your company's personality. While your platform should stick to a tone and content that's appropriate for your audience, it shouldn't conform to the widely used language and ideas of your peers. And you shouldn't assume that revealing a weakness or sharing a moment of adversity will compromise your message—it's often seen as a strength.

Screen for Jargon and Clichés

Scrub your messaging for jargon and clichés. Industry jargon that's vague or unclear will only serve to alienate your audience. Clichés will only bore them, and give the impression that you're unoriginal. Your messaging is meant to fortify your brand and amplify your voice. Replace bland text and listless ideas with sharp, vivid language that conveys a passion for what you do and gets your audience excited about your vision.

Don't Lock Yourself In

While a messaging platform is meant to have a long shelf life, it is a fluid document, and should be revisited any time your company experiences a major change, such as an expansion, or needs to refine a viewpoint.

OVERCOMING MESSAGING OBSTACLES

As we know, companies often have issues ranging from image black marks to bad timing that can't be glossed over when building a messaging platform. We can't simply salvage the good and excise the bad, but we can take additional steps to minimize any fallout.

The Plain Vanilla Plague

Companies sometimes suffer from what we'll call the plain vanilla plague. That is, they struggle to showcase differentiators because they don't really have any. It can be challenging to craft messaging for a firm that isn't offering anything new, but sometimes the plain and simple version is what an audience wants.

While your platform can be a blend of who you are and who you aspire to be, it can't paint a picture of something you're not. Sometimes, it's better to embrace your plain vanilla identity than it is to try and obscure it. Instead of focusing on product or service differentiators, you can shift the focus to your old fashioned service delivery or appeal your audience's need for simplicity in an increasingly complex world.

The Elephant in the Room

Some companies may be struggling with a seemingly insurmountable image problem. Maybe you're an asset manager trying to launch a new product after your flagship fund tanked, causing massive losses for investors. Maybe you're a CEO recovering from a public scandal. These incidents usually call for defensive messaging components such as a media Q&A or even a separate narrative that attempts to address the issue head-on, then steer the conversation in another direction.

Messaging "The Unknown"

Companies occasionally are forced to build messaging platforms that must incorporate major unknowns. Maybe you've had a major launch, but faced complications that resulted in an extraordinarily long transition period. In these cases, the messaging language may need to bake in some flexibility or identify selling points to position the unknown as a positive development for the company.

Contact **Chris Cherry**, Chief Engagement Officer at **ccherry@jconnelly.com** or call us at **973-850-7329** to see how we can help.