



THE CONNECTION
Communication Plan

April 17, 2018

PURPOSE

Publicizing the Program

The Connection approached Sundog for assistance with its initial communications plans. As a newly formed organization, The Connection needs to tell its story to service organizations, donors, influencers and service users. The following document approaches the storytelling in four ways:

- + General talking points
- + Messages for each audience
- + Media or channel tactics for each audience
- + Website considerations

These recommendations intend to serve as a starting point rather than a comprehensive marketing plan. Limited resources mean The Connection must incrementally introduce messages and measure success instead of blasting the market with a major launch.

PROGRAM RECAP

Readiness for the Silver Wave

The Connection currently refers to its purpose as **“Promoting healthy aging by connecting people, information and resources.”** The program serves as Perham’s response to the growing number of seniors in the area. Not only does the town lack the infrastructure to house transitioning seniors, keeping seniors in their homes as long as possible is a better quality of life.

A user calls The Connection to coordinate resources to help supplement or perform the duties a senior no longer can. Example services include lawn care, transportation, nursing or help managing finances. What makes The Connection unique compared to similar organizations is its emphasis on remaining local and personal. The Connection exclusively serves the Perham region and personally coordinates these local services.

UNIVERSAL TALKING POINTS

While different audiences want or need specific messages, The Connection should have a consistent set of core talking points. Since time may be limited when telling its story, the following core talking points explore short, medium and longer formats.

Tweet

The Connection helps aging people in Perham, MN stay in their homes longer by connecting local people to local organizations.

Elevator Pitch

The aging population in the Perham region is getting older. Many don't need the care found at a retirement living center, but several do need some light assistance. The Connection gives these aging individuals and their families a single person to contact who can help coordinate the services they need. We provide a higher quality of life by keeping people in their homes and connecting them with local businesses and non-profits.

Dinner Speech

The Connection is a community response to a growing issue in Perham. Our aging population is getting older and they need a little help, but not enough to the point where they need a senior living facility. They belong in their homes. Our mission is to keep them there for as long as possible. The Connection partners with businesses and social services in the Perham region and, like the name says, connects them to individuals who need assistance. If someone needs help doing yard work, we connect them to a lawn care and snow removal service. If someone needs help getting to and from doctors appointments, we arrange transportation.

Because we're focused on being local, we support our citizens, social services and the businesses in our own backyard. It's good for our users as well since there's only one phone number to keep track of and the coordinator on the other end of the line is a resident of our community. The Connection is really about mobilizing our community to help our seniors stay put.

Example Story: Gladys

Gladys and her husband retired on Little Pine Lake many years ago. Recently widowed, Gladys is not only grieving her loss, but also faces the responsibility of maintaining a house on her own. She's never checked the oil on the snowblower. Winter is coming

and her heart's not strong enough to shovel. She never managed the household finances and worries about her power being shut off.

Gladys dials 218-347-LINK and speaks to Jill. They talk briefly about her concerns. Jill puts Gladys in contact with a local lawn care and snow removal company. She also coordinates a visit with a professional to help her manage her finances and set up automatic payments with the utility company. In talking, Jill learns the reason Gladys is also nervous about driving into town on icy roads to pick up her heart medication. They arrange for her to receive prescriptions by mail.

Example Story: Roger

Roger and his wife Marles live in Perham. Marles suffered a stroke last year and needs a lot of help. Normally, Roger manages to care for his wife - cooking, cleaning, bathing, and the like. Roger has been putting off a hip-replacement surgery for some time. He worries about his ability to recuperate and look after Marles. Even for someone as stubborn and tough as Roger, the pain is too much to handle any more.

Roger dials 218-347-LINK and speaks to Jill. He initially requests for home aid immediately following his surgery. Jill encourages him to make a list of all the things he and his wife will need during recovery. Jill helps him coordinate healthy meal delivery, physical therapy, weekly home cleaning and daily care visits for the couple.

Following the surgery, Jill follows up to ensure Roger and his wife are getting the temporary care they need. In doing so, she also helps arrange volunteers to perform light yard work since he will recover but may lack the mobility to do these jobs.

Example Story: Ann

Ann lives with her family in Minneapolis. While visiting her dad, Bruce, over the holidays, she noticed the refrigerator was essentially empty and most of the food in the pantry had expired. Ann's mother passed away last fall. Initially, she dismissed the food expiration and empty fridge since Bruce spends winters in Arizona. After conversations with her dad, however, she discovered his diet consisted of basic sandwiches and a meal or two in town. Bruce confessed he doesn't have the same social group at the lakes that he does in Mesa, but loves the area and being close to his family.

Ann dials 218-347-LINK and speaks with Jill. For the first time, Ann realizes her dad doesn't know how to cook. Jill and Ann devise a way to address Bruce's inability to cook and his loneliness. Jill points out a cooking class being held in town. She also provides information about various card clubs and social outings catering to seniors in the area. Ann receives tips on how to approach the sensitive subject and is able to convince Bruce to attend the class and make friends in the community.

Jill checks in on Bruce sometime later to find out he has a morning coffee group and hosts a monthly potluck with a book club.

Example Story: Scott

Scott lives in Detroit Lakes, while his siblings are scattered across the country. For the past few years, Scott's taken it upon himself to help his parents with yard work, general maintenance and checking on their overall wellbeing. As time passes, his parent's needs have increased. He worries about his parents driving, so he takes them to all appointments. He also found out both parents have skipped taking their medication a time or two. When he stepped in to help settle some missed payments, his siblings accused him of taking advantage of their parents. Scott feels stuck because his siblings don't trust him, but they also don't realize the responsibility on his shoulders due to his parents' increasing needs.

Scott dials 218-347-LINK and speaks with Jill. They arrange for transportation to and from all appointments. Jill also involves a neutral third party to assist with the family finances. Finally, they work out a daily house call to make sure his parents are taking their prescriptions and provide general wellness checks. Bruce is still involved in helping his parents, but now takes less time off work and most importantly, restored the trust of his siblings.

AUDIENCE COMMUNICATION: CORE MESSAGES

For-Profit Partners

While The Connection's purpose is altruistic in nature, the act of doing good alone may not increase participation from for-profit partners. Luckily, The Connection provides a business benefit for for-profit partners. Consider these talking points the top priority when exclusively addressing for-profit partners:

- + **The Connection acts as a referral generator.** Partners obtain pre-qualified leads.
- + **The Connection only serves the Perham region.** Partners have fewer competitors and customers are closer to home.
- + **The Connection is grant and donor funded.** As of now, partners are encouraged, but not obligated, to pay for these leads.

Non-Profit Partners

The Connection resembles other programs in Minnesota. What makes it unique is the emphasis on serving a specific community like Perham. For non-profit partners, messages can and should speak to serving an audience in need. The key is to speak about complementary services, not overlapping ones, while showcasing how The Connection elevates non-profit partners. Talking points ought to be:

- + **The Connection supports a specific audience.** The aging population, though growing, is and will be the exclusive focus of the organization. In other words, non-profits shouldn't worry about competition from all funding sources.
- + **The Connection identifies needs and routes clients.** It matches clients and organizations based on fit, which saves time.
- + **The Connection strengthens the community.** It raises awareness about the multitude of services available to help the people in our neighborhood.

Donors

While The Connection formed from grants, donors may determine how fast and large the organization grows. Messages must resonate with this audience at a deeply personal level. Talking points include:

- + **The Connection keeps our parents in their homes as long as possible.** They are vulnerable, yet venerable, and they deserve compassion.
- + **The Connection builds our economy with humanity.** We engage multiple businesses and services from our community.
- + **The Connection sustains a high quality of life.** Too often, our parents are forced to move into a facility too soon. They worked hard building this life and should be empowered to decide where they want to enjoy it.

Users (Seniors)

The aging population will likely be the hardest to impact, but they are also the audience who will likely become The Connection's greatest advocates. Messages should double down on themes of home, a personal touch and "here to help." Talking points include:

- + **The Connection is one person named Jill.** She lives in town and knows a lot about what's going on here.
- + **The Connection is here to help.** It's okay to admit you can't do the same things you used to do. There's no shame in asking for help. We want to help.
- + **The Connection is free.** Keep the number close to the phone or, if you use a smartphone, put it in your contacts. It's only one number you have to call and that number is 218-347-LINK.

Influencers (For Example, Children of Seniors)

Influencers may prove to be the most common “customer.” Tactically, they will be a challenging group to reach since they may reside outside of the community. Even if they live in or around Perham, the disconnect between their needs and the services provided require a unique set of messages. Talking points include:

- + **The Connection eases the worry.** It's not easy, or often possible, to make sure your parents are safe and happy 24/7. The services The Connection coordinates take on that responsibility.
- + **The Connection alleviates guilt.** It's emotionally difficult to take care of those who used to care for you. Guilt for not being able to help they way you want is common. Calling The Connection *is* helping.
- + **The Connection prepares you for difficult conversations.** Parents may resist services or brush off the need for a variety of reason. The Connection provides you with information and techniques to have these talks with firm compassion.

TACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Search for Low-Cost, High-Impact Options

Stretching an annual budget of \$7,500 for marketing purposes presents immense challenges. Budget limitations compounded a small team requires The Connection to make the most of every dollar.

Exercise Caution with Traditional Media

Traditional advertising, or paid media as it's called today, presents some tricky situations. On the one hand, the aging population consumes a lot of traditional advertising like print (newspapers, magazines or directories), radio, TV, etc. On the other hand, these media are expensive, not only because placement costs continue to rise, but the frequency necessary to make messages stick means advertisers need to run more ads than ever.

First, look for unconventional places where the audience consumes content but where there aren't a lot of advertisers competing for attention. An example would be church bulletins. As a cause which aligns to Christian teachings, churches may be willing to place advertisements for little to no cost.

Second, aim for repeated visibility instead of splash. A full-page ad makes an impact, but won't necessarily be remembered. Conversely, running several small ads for a period of time might be overlooked every time. Work with vendors to find unique placements. The obituaries are a prime location. They remind readers life is short and precious while providing an option to help them live their lives more fully.

Third, consider production cost and quality. Radio or TV stations often throw in free production as a value-added service. But if the ad doesn't stand out from the other station-produced spots, the impact may be compromised. Quality counts.

Leverage Existing Networks

Find ways for partners to promote their participation in The Connection. Businesses, especially, should take pride in being a part of the network. Options in this category include giving those who do the work pins or small window decals to show they serve The Connection. These small indicators have the added benefit of telling users the business or service provider is a trusted partner.

Perham Health promotes and supports The Connection. Treat newsworthy stories as opportunities to gain future exposure in any community-facing Perham Health communications like newsletters or annual reports. The Connection partners with local businesses making the Perham Chamber of Commerce another alliance to spread the overall brand message.

Strike an Offline/Online Balance

Influencer audiences research online long before they pick up the phone. An “owned” channel, like a website, needs enough content to educate on the benefits The Connection provides as well as the process. A higher volume of content also improves rankings on search engines.

For years, Facebook has seen its user base grow in the demographics The Connections needs to reach. While Sundog does recommend a Facebook page for The Connection, the organization must commit to posting content on a regular basis so long as it owns a social media page. This doesn't necessarily mean posting every day, but it does mean avoiding long stretches of dormancy. Adhering to a content calendar will help.

Digital media offers unmatched possibilities, though The Connection is better served by honing in on its partner and mature audiences at this point in its development.

Establishing Marketing Metrics

Measuring the effectiveness of any communication activity goes a long way towards maximizing budgets. It's important to set goals. The Connection is new, so it may take time to dial in realistic performance benchmarks. Below are introductory areas to measure as The Connection embarks on marketing activities.

Website Basics

The Connection website should use Google Analytics. The free service provides a massive amount of information. At this stage, The Connection should focus on three statistics:

- + **Bounce Rate** - the percentage of people who immediately leave your site. The lower the percentage, the better. Rates vary, but a good goal to start with is 75%.
- + **Traffic Source** - how a user finds the page. Common sources are search engines, referral sites, social media pages or users typing in the URL. Using this information helps you identify which avenues to pursue.
- + **Form Completions** - the number of people who use the "Get Connected with Us" feature. Weigh the number of submissions versus the number of calls. Also, compare the number of site visits to the number of form completions. Both visits and submissions should increase over time, so it's important to monitor the visit-to-submission ratio as well.

Attribution

Attribution attempts to tie a marketing tactic directly to a specific activity. Often this means proving an ad led to a sale. A classic, yet still effective, way to attribute the success communications is to ask. At the end of every introductory phone call, ask the customer how they heard about The Connection. Over time, The Connection can fine tune its outreach communications to support these channels. The same analog measurement technique can be used for "suppliers" like businesses and non-profits. When they come aboard, ask how they heard about the program or what made them want to join the network.

Tactics by Audiences

While messages target groups more specifically, communication channels address three categories: suppliers, supporters and users.

Suppliers (For-Profits and Non-Profits)

The goal is to onboard businesses and service providers. In its infancy, The Connection should take a grassroots approach to register these suppliers. That means phone calls, emails and letters to get stakeholders to engage in a one-on-one conversation. For early calls and communication, use the elevator speech-length content. For emails and letters, use dinner speech language. One-on-one conversations should include some type of leave-behind collateral specifically addressing the core messages of each audience. Targeted talking points should be lightly introduced during the calls and correspondence, but the bulk of the benefit messages help close the “sale.”

After the groups join the network, attempt to involve them in the promotion of The Connection. This document suggested some tactics earlier, but small window decals and pins help suppliers show their support. Taking things a step further, see if these businesses are willing to put brochures or rack cards on their premises. For example, if there is a salon frequented by the user audience, ask if each booth would put a small window decal on the mirror and a small stack of print materials on the station. In this scenario, the brochure or rack card would use messaging appropriate to seniors.

Supporters (Donors and Communities)

The Connection already has the support of Perham Health and will be the focus of an upcoming fundraiser. Having other organizations select The Connection as its charity of choice ought to be a goal. To do this, identify influencers who belong to various philanthropy groups and use the same grassroots tactics to tell The Connection story. Consider hosting an event. It doesn't need to be on a gala scale - a breakfast, lunch and learns or happy hour would suffice.

Leverage community networks and other service providers. This document mentioned the Perham Chamber of Commerce earlier. It's a low-effort way to introduce The Connection's story to an organization with its pulse on the businesses in the region. Attempt to put The Connection's story in newsletters or other Chamber publications.

Users (Seniors and Influencers)

Building demand ranks higher than adding services. At this launch stage, the majority of paid efforts should focus on users.

Digitally, start with the webpage and a Facebook page. Use existing partnerships to help gain followers. Tag partners in posts. If a particular post gains traction, invest a few dollars to boost the post to a wider network. In some instances, it might make sense to run paid Facebook advertising within a limited number of zip codes. Other times, boosting posts to “friends of friends” may reach those influencers who live out of town but have parents in Perham.

From a traditional standpoint, create print collateral for distribution. Keep print runs small, between 250 and 500 materials depending on the price breaks. This way The Connection can update its services more often without wasting hundreds or thousands of materials.

As mentioned earlier, find places where the aging populations will engage with The Connection content. This includes church bulletins and obituaries but could extend to posters on community bulletin boards.

Find a way to get into the homes of your main audience. Traditional or “snail” mail works in this instance. To reduce waste and cost, see if The Connection can obtain mailing lists with only addresses in your demographic. If The Connection already works with a local newspaper, the vendor may have access to lists already.

The direct mail piece should feature a personalized letter from Jill, inviting recipients to call her for help if and when they need it. Including a lightweight magnet with The Connection phone number and categories of service. Refrigerator magnets are something the audience can use. If they do, The Connection and its message become front and center every time the user passes by.

HOME PAGE CONTENT

Points to Consider

Overall, the landing page uses a nice layout. Clearly, the content is in placeholder form, though here are some initial thoughts as the page begins to take shape.

Phone Number in the Header:

Add code to enable someone reading the site on a smartphone to click the phone number and automatically dial. It won't work on a desktop or tablet, but it saves a step on mobile devices to improve the experience.

Intro Content:

In this first section, also referred to as a hero spot, it appears The Connection wants users to fill out a quick form as another method to get in touch. The supporting content on the left should urge visitors to fill out the form. Right now, and this is likely placeholder text, the content only delivers the mission statement.

Instead of “**A Place to Start**, Promoting healthy aging by connecting people, information and resources,” try a conversational introduction with a call to action.

Could You Use a Hand?

The Connection wants to maintain a high quality of life for our aging population. We match local businesses and services to promote healthy aging. Call us when you or a loved one needs a little help with:

- Home healthcare
- Home maintenance
- Transportation
- Life skills
- Financial education
- And more

It's free. It's local. Give us call or fill out our quick contact form.

Introduce Jill:

Personalize the “How It Works” section by promoting Jill. While understandably reluctant to serve as “the face of The Connection,” allowing users to put a face to the voice on the other side of the phone makes the experience more comfortable. A local, personalized experience is what differentiates The Connection from statewide services. Demonstrate this advantage. Revisit and restructure the section as the program grows to include more coordinators. For now, it’s perfectly acceptable to showcase the primary coordinator.

Revise the Benefits Section:

Visually, the concept of highlighting three benefits makes sense. However, each section deserves more content and context. The current layout limits the ability to expand on each benefit. For now, containing all the content within a single page provides a better experience than sending the user to other pages with thin content. Depending on how the site is built, The Connection site could use “snippet” content. A snippet shows the first X number of words and prompts the user to click “show more” where the rest of the content appears in a drop-down content block.

Categories could be:

- “How We Help” (using the information that would have been used on the How It Works section)
- “Why We Help” (shifting the proactive versus reactive message to focus on The Connection’s purpose)
- “Where We Help” (talking about not only the Perham metro, but outlying areas The Connection serves)

Note: The list of services gets omitted from this section since the categories are highlighted in the intro.

Combine the Helpful Links and Supporters:

Use the bottom area to categories your supporters. For example, put all the lawn care partners in a group with links to their website (or social media accounts if they don’t have a site). This approach allows The Connection to list out more of its services, promote its partners communication channels and reduce potential redundancy.