10-Step Strategic Communications Planning Matrix

**AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE (ASL) EDUCATION: Getting people motivated to learn a new language and understand a new culture.** 

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**Intro to PR**

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**RESEARCH**

**Step 1: Background**

I have a nephew and a niece that are both deaf. My nephew was born deaf but our family didn’t know until he was 2 years old. Knowing how to communicate with him and learning what we can do to help him grow into a good communicator to others was important. If we had known how to communicate with him earlier he may have been able to understand him when he was much younger. American Sign Language can enable your baby to communicate with you using language many months earlier than spoken language alone.

An article written by Laura Berg entitled "The benefits of using American Sign Language with Preschoolers" explains how much help American Sign Language can help a toddler in recognizing words if they are connected to a sign. Every parent knows that young children love movement and actions. When you sing songs and put actions to them, children always want to perform those actions. Berg uses "The Itsy Bitsy Spider" as an example of this. Berg explains that the soon as the toddler starts to sing the song they start to perform hand motions like the spider going “up the spout” and the “rain fall wash the spider out”. Laura Berg goes on to say that the children are able to remember better because there is muscle memory involved and the more senses involved the easier it is to learn.

Learning American Sign Language is not just beneficial for the parents of deaf children, but for everyone. I think it is necessary for all ages to know how to speak this language. More and more children and families are learning ASL today than ever before. Many preschools, daycare centers and elementary schools now have ASL as part of their curriculum. Many states have passed laws acknowledging ASL as a natural language. There has been increase in use of ASL throughout the media, especially when it comes to advertising. Most school systems are taking their deaf and hard of hearing students and mainstreaming them, which creates a dramatic need for sign language interpreters. American Sign Language continues to grow in usage everyday, while other languages have been slowly dying off.

The Manitoba School District in Canada believes the importance of learning ASL is enormous. Apart from the common advantages related to learning of a second language, it permits an insight into the deaf culture and bestows more opportunities to communicate with those who are deaf or hard of hearing. The learning of American Sign Language develops awareness and sensitivity to cultural and linguistic diversity in addition to preserving the cultural identity of one. It also provides cultural enrichment and is the best means of fostering understanding between people who are hard of hearing and those who are not. Furthermore it gives the opportunity to identify question and challenge one’s own cultural assumptions, values, and perspectives to contribute positively to society.

According to USA Today, ASL is close to surpassing German as the third-most-studied foreign language at America’s colleges and universities. It has been accepted as a true language by the U.S Supreme Court in 1989, and acceptable for study in most public and secondary schools for foreign language credit.



Learning American Sign Language is important because one of the greatest challenges for parents is communicating with their children. For parents who have deaf and hard of hearing children, the challenge is even greater. Other than communicating with the child, the parents have to deal with issues like the child’s education, social integration, hearing aids, health, and so on.

Deaf education goes back for centuries. It wasn’t until the 1500’s that deaf education was even attempted. In 1760 the French Sign Language was established. This was also the year that the first free public school for the deaf opened in France. In 1817 Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet and Laurent Clerc founded the first American deaf school, located in Hartford Connecticut. Since then ASL has become an official language and the deaf community has grown to be much more established.

Albert Mehrabian, a well known psychologist, discovered that only seven percent of the meaning conveyed by typical utterance regarding our feelings and attitudes comes from the words we use, 38 percent from our voice, and 55 percent from our body language. When our body language conflicts with our words, listeners will typically pay more attention to our nonverbal message. If we were able to improve our nonverbal communication skills it would make a huge difference in the way we communicate with people. Not just with deaf people, but anyone. Knowing how to use your body to affectively communicate can help anywhere you go.

There are many online resources that can help you learn American Sign Language, many of which are free. Michigan State University has a website available with resources that can help you learn sign language many of which are free. They provide access to online sign language webinars, video and online dictionaries. Books are another resource that you can use to learn sign language on your own. There are many books that you can read that will teach you basic sign language all the way to speaking it fluently. Many come with additional resources such as DVDs or access to additional products online. Before purchasing a book, check your local library to see if they have books available to learn sign language. That way you can learn for free. If your area has a community center or college near by, call or visit their website to see if there are formal classes offered. There is typically a fee associated with taking a formal class, especially when taking one at a community college or university. When registering for a class, see if there are any reduced rates or scholarships available to help cut costs.

**Step 2: Situation Analysis**

More people need to learn American Sign Language and the history and culture behind it. Knowing how to communicate with others and learning what we can do to help each other is important. If more people learned sign language then there would be a better understanding of the deaf culture and there would be less of a barrier between the deaf community and the rest of the population.

A potential problem with trying to get people to learn ASL is making them interested. A lot of people do not believe ASL is a “real” language and they do not see the importance in learning it. Also making people aware of how to learn sign language can be difficult.

**Step 3: Core Problem/Opportunity**

People of all ages should learn American Sign Language, because it will broaden their communication skills and lead to a better understanding of another culture.

**ACTION PLANNING**

**Step 4: Goals and Objectives**

Goals:

To get people motivated to go out and learn American Sign Language and give them ideas on how to do so.

Objectives:

* *Create brochures* *that give information on American Sign Language, including: how to learn ASL, history of ASL, why you should learn ASL.* This will give people some motivation to learn about ASL. It will also help people see why they should learn it and how easy it is to access ASL education.
* *Create flyers with the ASL alphabet* to give people a first glance at the language. If people see the ASL alphabet they will understand that it is a language in itself and there are many ways to use your hands to create words. It gives people a glance at the big picture.
* *Distribute the brochures and flyers in multiple locations.* This is how the information will be distributed. The more people who see the brochures and flyers, the more people will talk about it, and the more people who will be interested in learning.
* *Create a Facebook account.* People can like ASL on Facebook and see information posted and find links to where they can go to learn ASL.
* *Create other blogs such as Tumblr, Pintrest, Blogspot.* Students especially go on these sites and it is easy to find.
* *Have Deaf people in the community go in and talk to schools and classrooms.* This will get both students and teachers on board with ASL education.
* *Create a website* with information on where people can go to take classes, links to online courses/videos, and books they can read. This way people can have access to different types of ASL education.

**Step 5: Key Publics and Messages**

* Parents and soon to be parents
	+ Learning sign language benefits not only you, but also your children. American Sign Language can enable your baby to communicate with you using language many months earlier than spoken language alone. Children who know sign language will have an easier time communicating effectively than someone growing up without learning it.
* College Students and High School students
	+ Foreign language is a requirement for almost all schools and many offer ASL as a language. It is a fun language and can benefit you in the business world. The deaf community is rapidly growing and Interpreters are needed in many organizations. Learning ASL can lead to greater job opportunities, along with give you a greater understanding of other cultures.
* Teachers (of all age groups)
	+ Teaching students sign language will help them grow in many different aspects. Children learning sign language are more likely to be able to communicate better than others. Teenagers learning sign language learn better nonverbal skills, along with being able to emphasize thoughts and ideas.

**Step 6: Strategies and Tactics**

* Parents
	+ Strategy: Get information to parents so they know they need to learn ASL.
		- Put brochures and flyers in mailboxes
		- Post brochures and flyers at local gyms, doctor’s offices, and stores, EST.
		- Post brochures in churches
		- Put brochures in newspapers
		- Put flyers in school offices
* Soon to be parents
	+ Strategy: Get information to soon to be parents so they know they need to learn ASL.
		- Put brochures and flyers in mailboxes
		- Post brochures and flyers at local gyms, doctor’s offices, and stores, EST.
		- Post brochures in churches
		- Put brochures in newspapers
* College Students
	+ Strategy: Get information to college students so they know they need to learn ASL.
		- Put brochures and flyers in college mailboxes
		- Post brochures and flyers all over school
			* In the rec center, in the classrooms, offices, dorm rooms, dining area, EST.
		- Post brochures in study places
			* Coffee shops, restaurants with WIFI, bookstores
		- Put brochures in schools newspaper
		- Create Facebook and send requests to students
		- Create Blogs such as Tumblr, Pintrest, and Blogspot
* High school Students
	+ Strategy: Get information to students so they know they need to learn ASL.
		- Post brochures and flyers all over school
			* In classrooms, offices, cafeteria
		- Create Facebook and send requests to students
		- Create Blogs such as Tumblr, Pintrest, and Blogspot
* **Teachers**
	+ Strategy: Get information to teachers so they know they need to learn ASL.
		- Put brochures and flyers in mailboxes
		- Post brochures and flyers at local gyms, doctor’s offices, and stores, EST.
		- Post brochures in churches
		- Put brochures in newspapers

**COMMUNICATION**

**Step 9: Communication Confirmation**

* **Key public:** Parents
	+ **Self interest:** ASL education
	+ **Primary Message:** Learning ASL benefits you and your children by broadening your communication skills and helping you understand different cultures. Also helps you communicate with each other better.
	+ **Objectives:**
		- Getting 5,000 parents to learn more about ASL and its benefits.
		- Having these parents learn ASL and teach it to their children.
		- Create a more diverse community
		- Create an understanding between the deaf community and hearing community
	+ **Strategies:** Get information to parents so they know they need to learn ASL
	+ **Tactics:**
		- Put brochures and flyers in mailboxes
		- Post brochures and flyers at local gyms, doctor’s offices, and stores, EST.
		- Post brochures in churches
		- Put brochures in newspapers
		- Put flyers in school offices
* **Key public:** Soon to be parents
	+ **Self interest:** ASL education
	+ **Primary Message:** Learning ASL benefits you and your children by broadening your communication skills and helping you understand different cultures. Also helps you communicate with each other better and sooner.
	+ **Influentials:** Family, Community, Medical Professionals, Media, World
	+ **Objectives:**
		- Getting 5,000 parents to learn more about ASL and its benefits.
		- Having these parents learn ASL and teach it to their children.
		- Create a more diverse community
		- Create an understanding between the deaf community and hearing community
	+ **Strategies:** Get information to soon to be parents so they know they need to learn ASL.
	+ **Tactics:**
		- Put brochures and flyers in mailboxes
		- Post brochures and flyers at local gyms, doctor’s offices, and stores, EST.
		- Post brochures in churches
		- Put brochures in newspapers
* **Key public:** College Students
	+ **Self interest:** ASL education
	+ **Primary Message:** Learning ASL benefits you in both your current education along with your future career choices. It helps broaden your communication skills and also to understand another culture.
	+ **Influentials:** Friends, Family, Community, Medical Professionals, Media, World
	+ **Objectives:**
		- Getting 1,000 students to learn more about ASL and its benefits.
		- Having these students take classes in their schools, community, or online to learn ASL.
		- Have students talk to friends about ASL in hopes that more people will become interested
		- Get 20,000 likes and reblogs on Facebook, Tumblr, Pinterst, and EST.
		- Create a more diverse community
		- Create an understanding between the deaf community and hearing community
	+ **Strategies:** Get information to college students so they know they need to learn ASL.
	+ **Tactics:**
		- Put brochures and flyers in college mailboxes
		- Post brochures and flyers all over school
			* In the rec center, in the classrooms, offices, dorm rooms, dining area, EST.
		- Post brochures in study places
			* Coffee shops, restaurants with WIFI, bookstores
		- Put brochures in schools newspaper
		- Create Facebook and send requests to students
		- Create Blogs such as Tumblr, Pintrest, and Blogspot
* **Key public:** High school Students
	+ **Self interest:** ASL education
	+ **Primary Message:** Learning ASL benefits you in both your current education along with your future career choices. It helps broaden your communication skills and also to understand another culture.
	+ **Influentials:** Friends, Family, Community, Medical Professionals, Media, World
	+ **Objectives:**
		- Getting 1,000 students to learn more about ASL and its benefits.
		- Having these students take classes in their schools, community, or online to learn ASL.
		- Have students talk to friends about ASL in hopes that more people will become interested
		- Get 20,000 likes and reblogs on Facebook, Tumblr, Pinterst, and EST.
		- Create a more diverse community
		- Create an understanding between the deaf community and hearing community
	+ **Strategies:** Get information to students so they know they need to learn ASL.
	+ **Tactics:**
		- Post brochures and flyers all over school
			* In classrooms, offices, cafeteria
		- Create Facebook and send requests to students
		- Create Blogs such as Tumblr, Pintrest, and Blogspot
* **Key public:** Teachers
	+ **Self interest:** ASL education
	+ **Primary Message:** Learning ASL helps you communicate better with your students and gives you the benefit of teaching your students something new and useful for their futures.
	+ **Influentials:** Students, Family, Community, Medical Professionals, Media, World
	+ **Objectives:**
		- Getting 500 teachers to learn more about ASL and its benefits.
		- Having these teachers learn ASL and teach it to their students.
		- Create a more diverse community
		- Create an understanding between the deaf community and hearing community
	+ **Strategies:** Get information to teachers so they know they need to learn ASL.
	+ **Tactics:**
		- Put brochures and flyers in mailboxes
		- Post brochures and flyers at local gyms, doctor’s offices, and stores, EST.
		- Post brochures in churches
		- Put brochures in newspapers

**EVALUATION**

**Step 10: Evaluation Criteria and Tools**

* **Objective 1:**
	+ **Criteria:** Getting 5,000 parents/soon-to-be-parents to learn more about ASL and its benefits and go get ASL education.
	+ **Tools:** Keep tabs on all educational programs teaching ASL and having them hand out surveys asking how students found out about the program. Also send surveys through emails and put website on brochures and ask for people to go online and share their experience.
* **Objective 2:**
	+ **Criteria:** Getting 2,000 students to learn more about ASL and its benefits and go get ASL education.
	+ **Tools:** Keep tabs on all educational programs teaching ASL and having them hand out surveys asking how students found out about the program. Also send surveys through emails and put website on brochures and ask for people to go online and share their experience.
* **Objective 3:**
	+ **Criteria:** Get 20,000 likes and reblogs on Facebook, Tumblr, Pinterst, and EST.
	+ **Tools:** Facebook, Tumblr, and Pinterst count amount of “likes” and “reblogs” on each page.
* **Objective 4:**
	+ **Criteria:** Getting 500 teachers to learn more about ASL and its benefits and go get ASL education.
	+ **Tools:** Keep tabs on all educational programs teaching ASL and having them hand out surveys asking how students found out about the program. Also send surveys through emails and put website on brochures and ask for people to go online and share their experience.