

STRATEGY 3 - KNOW THE PURPOSE FOR EVERY PIECE (CLEAR MESSAGES AND CALLS TO ACTION)

Great content is about more than just reinforcing important brand messages that our audiences find interesting. Your content should also serve a purpose, achieve a goal you're trying to reach with your target audience(s), such as:

- What you want your audience(s) to think, know or believe after consuming your content: the messages.
- What you want them to do with that new perspective: calls to action (CTAs) and offers.

MESSAGES THAT MOTIVATE

In marketing terms, messages are the ideas we want to convey to audiences at various points throughout their engagement with NOVA. A message means something deeper than the specific information a piece of content might communicate on the surface.

For example, the information that a program page communicates might be related to the coursework students will take in a particular program. Thinking back to our pillars though, the message should be that:

- Our offerings are **Relevant and In-Demand**.
- Our courses are taught by faculty who are **Experts in the Classroom and the Field**.
- Our program will be a **Springboard to Opportunity** for the students in their academic and professional futures.

The way you convey those messages should be informed by what you believe your primary audience(s) will find relevant, interesting and persuasive.

RSVP TODAY. APPLY NOW. LEARN MORE.

Simply offering compelling messages is not enough, though, because the ultimate purpose of our content is not just to inform or entertain. It's to engage our audiences, and to deepen relationships so they take a specific action we want them to take.

The best content invites audiences to act on the messages through a call to action (CTA).

Coupling your content with a clear CTA entices and invites your reader to move further along their decision-making journey. Our goal is to make it as easy as possible for audiences to take that next step.

One of the best CTA techniques is to provide an offer that promises extra value to the audience.

Ask yourself: if the audience found this content interesting or helpful, what else would they REALLY appreciate or enjoy that might keep them engaged with the topic at hand?

A few good offer examples might be:

- On a web page, link to related content we'd like the audience to go and read next after consuming the page at hand (this easy "offer" of more relevant information is also frequently overlooked by content creators).
- On your program pages, offer the chance to download a PDF about related careers or a summary of job trends in our region related to that program.
- In your brochure, offer the chance to email an expert faculty member directly.
- In your fundraising appeal, offer the opportunity to participate in exclusive donor-only engagements with key College leadership.
- In an email, provide a CTA in the form of a clickable button for your audience take your desired action: Apply for classes before a deadline; Learn More about financial aid, or RSVP to an event such as an open house.
- On a web page, entice applicants to submit by a priority deadline with a CTA of Secure Your Classes Now.

Pro Tip: Before you begin to outline a particular content piece:

- Note the relevant brand pillars and identify your target audience and their concerns.
- Once that is done, consider where in their decision-making journey your audience is likely to be.
- Decide the action(s) you'd like them to take after consuming your content.
- Brainstorm what offers might entice them to take that step.

A "COMPLETE" EXAMPLE

Let's play out a complete example of how to deliver appropriate messages and calls-to-action to move an audience along a decision journey.

Say you're targeting non-traditional prospective IT students with an ultimate goal to get them to enroll. Consider how your content, your messages, your calls-to-action and your offers might change as the audience moves along the decision journey:

- **Awareness Stage:** We assume prospects don't yet know much about NOVA or even about the IT field, but they are beginning to consider pursuing a new career.
 - Content type(s): Brochure, direct mail flyer
 - Topic: Career opportunities in IT in the Northern Virginia region; overview of NOVA's IT programs
 - Deeper Message(s): You can trust the quality of NOVA's IT offerings, which can be a springboard to new meaningful, lucrative job opportunities
 - CTA: Visit the website/program page
 - Offer: Promise of more information, including communication with NOVA IT faculty, via sign-up on the website

- **Consideration Stage:** We assume prospects have visited the website and consumed basic program information on the program page.
 - Content type(s): Automated email workflow
 - Topic(s): Specific certifications students can pursue; internships we offer; statistics on job placement/hiring rates our graduates enjoy; testimonial from key faculty
 - Deeper Message(s): Our curriculum is relevant, our graduates are in-demand, and our faculty are experts in the classroom and in the field
 - CTA: Visit campus; attend a webinar or info session
 - Offer: Promise opportunity to talk with program director/key faculty member

- **Decision Stage:** We assume students have opened and read a series of nurturing emails and/or have demonstrated proactive engagement, either by attending an info session or even starting an application.
 - Content type(s): Direct email
 - Topic(s): Registration deadline approaching; simple overview of application steps
 - Deeper Message(s): What seems like a big, complicated, potentially scary decision is actually quite simple and easy; we'll be a supportive partner, with you at every step
 - CTA: Apply
 - Offer: Automatic entry for scholarship consideration if application submitted by X date