



# A COMMUNICATIONS PLAN TO SUPPORT ASN'S VISION OF BECOMING THE AUTHORITATIVE GLOBAL LEADER IN NUTRITION THROUGH SCIENCE

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*Presented by Colleen Kmiecik  
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# INTRODUCTION

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In 2028, the American Society for Nutrition will celebrate its 100th anniversary as an organization focused on the advancement of nutrition science. As such, the organization's leadership has evaluated its current state and desired state, and has developed VISION 2028, a strategic plan to guide the organization into the next decade and beyond.

Vision 2028 is a transformational vision for the future that builds on current strengths as ASN seeks new challenges. VISION 2028 aims to position the organization as a major contributor to public health through good nutrition, with a significant focus on expanding reach to the broader public.

A strategic and integrated communications plan is critical to the success of VISION 2028. A strategic and integrated communications plan spans all aspects of marketing communication such as marketing emails, newsletters, social and digital media, direct mail, public relations, promotions, etc., so that all work together as a unified force. It is a process designed to ensure that all messaging and communications strategies provide clarity, consistency, and maximum impact.

As ASN embarks on various initiatives in Membership and Member Services, Conferences, Publications, and Advocacy and Policy, it is important to communicate how these initiatives will create value for all audiences, thereby boosting confidence in ASN and establishing it as the foremost organization for nutrition professionals.

This communications plan is a strategic document that details the communication priorities, processes, and policies that will guide activities supporting VISION 2028. Its purpose is to outline clear and attainable communication priorities with tactics that will ensure success. VISION 2028 provides context for the goals, objectives and action items included in this plan.

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# ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT STATE OF ASN MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS

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# ANALYSIS

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## SOCIAL MEDIA

The frequency at which ASN posts on social media channels is ideal. The **Facebook** page could benefit from more engaging images (and images that are scaled correctly) and videos. Additionally, posts tend to be long. While character count is unlimited on Facebook, people rarely click "more." Posts with 50-80 characters perform the best. The **Instagram** page is very well done. Images are colorful, uncluttered and appealing, and engagement is high. ASN's **Twitter** posts do follow best practice; however, engagement is minimal. Suggest posting more engaging images and posting more often. ASN would greatly benefit from a stronger presence on **LinkedIn**.

## EMAIL

ASN recently modified its email template to allow for easier reading which should have a great impact on open rates and CTRs. One of the most important -- if not *the* most important -- factors of a successful email campaign is targeting. General emails blasted to an entire database aren't successful. Most emails will benefit from segmenting the list and tailoring the message and images to each audience. The better ASN can do this, the more successful emails will be. It can be very time-consuming, but this effort can reap the greatest improvements. Recipients should feel that the email was written just for them.

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### **NUTRITION.org**

The website is very clean, modern, and organized. Timely information is front-and-center, and navigation is easy to understand. Consider individual pages for various segments of ASN's diverse audience.

### **BLOG**

ASN has an extremely informative blog that deserves significantly more exposure. The topics are appealing to a wide variety of audiences and could be very instrumental in attracting new followers. New blog posts should be shared on social media and through a monthly email that compiles a summary of each month's posts. Additionally, blog posts with similar topics could be grouped together and published as a mini-report and shared with targeted audiences. Consider adding subscribe functionality that allows a user to be notified when a new blog is published.

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## **NUTRITION NOTES**

An analysis was recently conducted and recommendations have been implemented. Suggest analyzing open rates and CTR's in 4-6 weeks to determine if there has been any improvement.

## **MEDIA**

Media coverage of the American Society for Nutrition is primarily focused on press releases distributed on EurekAlert and other wire services (not considered to be earned media), and research presented at Nutrition 2018 and previous events. One media outlet covered the Truth in Nutrition initiative. There is significant opportunity for ASN to boost media relations efforts. Consistent media coverage throughout the year is essential to building awareness for ASN among the general public, and for increasing the organization's value to nutrition professionals. Media relations is a long-term strategy that takes time and plenty of care. Personal relationships must be developed with key editors and staff writers. This is achieved by providing timely information relevant to the outlet's audience and frequent communication. PR agencies that have existing relationships with health reporters can be beneficial in introducing key ASN leaders and spokespeople to the appropriate journalists and facilitating the relationships. PR agencies typically monitor trending topics and can quickly respond to journalists' often demanding deadlines. ASN should consider partnering with a PR agency for at least one year to help build these important relationships.

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## **PUBLIC**

Public awareness of ASN will be primarily driven by consumer media coverage and marketing materials distributed by healthcare professionals. While the general public likely doesn't have high recognition of ASN today, the following marketing plan includes several tactics that can improve this.



# 10-YEAR MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

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## GOAL

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To capitalize on ASN's existing strengths and brand awareness to create additional awareness among target audiences in order to assist in positioning ASN as the preeminent, go-to source for all things related to nutrition.

## STRATEGY

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Increase benefit-driven communication to targeted audiences with specific messages tailored to each audience based on their needs, challenges and values.

## AUDIENCES

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Current members (retention)

Prospective members (growth)

--Lapsed members

--Professionals

--Physicians

--Clinicians

--Students

Public/Patients

Media

Corporate sponsors, exhibitors and supporters

Government/policymakers

## OBJECTIVES

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- Improve communication about value propositions for each audience
- Raise credibility of the science presented in journals and at conferences/Increase trust in nutrition
- Become the leading source of unbiased, science-backed nutrition information for the general public by increasing public-facing communications
- Increase media presence
- Improve web presence/SEO
- Implement new methods of communication

## ACTION STEPS

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### Improve communication about value propositions for each audience

- Conduct surveys and focus groups to determine what is important to each audience. What do they need? What are they worried about? What is important to them? What do they want that isn't available from ASN or any other source? What can ASN offer to help them?
- Based on feedback from surveys and focus groups, develop value-added benefits ASN doesn't currently offer
- Based on feedback from surveys and feedback, develop messaging platform for each targeted audience (MDs, practitioners, etc.). All messages should be value-driven and reinforce why they can't do what they do without ASN
- Create a persona for each audience. Who are they? What do they read/listen to? Who do they listen to/respect? How do they form their opinions and beliefs?
- Based on personas, modify the key messages to maximize their effect (e.g., one audience might respond better to formal language while another appreciates casual language)
- Based on personas, determine how to best reach each audience through communication tools (e.g., podcasts and social media might be more effective for one audience, while e-newsletters are better for another)

## ACTION STEPS

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- Develop a comprehensive, ongoing communications plan for each audience. Communication will be benefit-driven, distributed via the methods most preferred by each audience, include clear calls-to-action, and will align with a marketing funnel (e.g., continue to communicate with increasing levels of urgency until the desired action is taken)
- Create pages on the website for each audience with resources tailored to their needs

## ACTION STEPS

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### **Raise credibility of the science presented in journals and at conferences/Increase trust in nutrition**

- Leverage the media. Host quarterly media roundtables – in person or virtual – to discuss the latest science, reinforcing transparency, openness, and reproducibility. Ensure that media understand the peer review process and ASN’s conflict of interest policy. Distribute an overview of the peer review process and COI policy with all science-related press releases
- Continue to institute high standards for accepting abstracts and papers at the event and journals. Repeat this message frequently
- Host webinars or podcasts translating the science for practitioners



## ACTION STEPS

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### **Become the leading source of unbiased, science-backed nutrition information for the general public by increasing public-facing communications**

Create a section on the website for the public

--Include plain language summaries about the latest science

--Feature information about what nutrition professionals do and how they help patients

--Pull in blog posts from the ASN blog that are relevant to the general public (e.g., “What’s in a name? That which we call ‘sweet’ by any other name may not be the same,” 10/28/18)

Create separate social media accounts for the public

Create a podcast for the public audience

--This is one of the greatest opportunities for ASN to break into the public sphere. A quick search for nutrition podcasts on Stitcher resulted in more than 100 podcasts hosted by everyone from physicians and registered dietitians to someone who “beat cancer through nutrition” and students. A true voice of authority is missing. A weekly podcast could consist of interviews with members on the hottest topics – weight loss, inflammation, diabetes, fad diets, etc.

Unravel controversies and react to non-scientific, “trendy” claims through media outreach, the blog, and podcasts

Create ASN-branded, plain language handouts that physicians and clinicians can give to their patients (e.g., the differences between fats, the truth about the Keto diet, etc.)

## ACTION STEPS

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### Increase media presence

Nutrition/health care/medical media

- Host media roundtables throughout the year
- Provide easy-to-understand one-pagers for key research findings
- Respond to “bad science” with op-eds

Consumer media (USA Today, Men’s Health, Self, local media, etc.)

- Plan a virtual media event for nutrition/health writers to establish or strengthen relationships. Over a four-hour period, provide education and resources for journalists via a dedicated website. Can include a series of live webinars and a Q&A session
- Focus on developing relationships at the top 10 daily newspapers in the country (The New York Times, The Los Angeles Times, The Washington Post, The Chicago Tribune, The Dallas Morning News, The San Francisco Chronicle, The Boston Globe, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, The Philadelphia Inquirer, and The Detroit Free Press), the top two nationally circulated newspapers (USA Today, TheWall Street Journal), three national news magazines (Time,Newsweek, U.S. News & World Report), six national broadcast outlets (National Public Radio, CNN, Fox News Channel, NBC News, ABC News, CBS News).

New media (bloggers, podcasters)

- Conduct research to identify the influencers and create a plan to build relationships with them

## ACTION STEPS

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### Improve web presence/SEO

Audit website copy for SEO purposes

Issue press releases via EurekAlert monthly for purposes of increasing SEO

Post media coverage on website

Improve tagging on blogs. Currently, blogs are minimally tagged with a general topic area. Increase tags to include at least 10 keywords per post

Research top nutrition search terms on Google and publish more blog posts related to these search terms

Increase backlinks from other sites

Quote/reference other online authorities (USA Today, etc.) on frequently updated pages (e.g., the blog)

Track top ranking keywords on Google and publish content related to these words

## ACTION STEPS

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### Implement new methods of communication

Start a podcast

Utilize LinkedIn

--Posts

--Create a group

--Promote event registration, abstracts, membership, and the blog through Sponsored Content

--Place the LinkedIn Insight Tag on ASN.org to track demographics about LinkedIn users visiting the website

Be transparent about the progress of VISION 2028 and Trust in Nutrition

--Provide quarterly or biannual reports on the status of new initiatives

--Develop individual reports highlighting progress achievements/successes in each of the key areas of focus

## MEASUREMENT

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Begin by benchmarking current analytics, such as:

- Email open rates and clickthrough rates
- Social media followers and engagement activity
- Website visitors and bounce rates
- Google ranking
- Media hits
- Membership
- Google Scholars citations
- Nutrition* registration
- Journal Impact Factors

Additionally, obtain qualitative feedback through:

- Anecdotes
- Surveys
- Focus groups

## MEASUREMENT

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Then, establish milestones at which to re-evaluate the data. Because an integrated marketing plan such as this one is designed to be implemented over time, with each tactic building upon and reinforcing the others, it is advised to allow the plan at least 6 months before re-evaluating the data.

Improvements in the following marketing channels can be expected after one year if the plan is implemented strategically and consistently:

Email open rates	+30%
Email clickthrough rates	+35%
Social media followers	+40%
Social media engagement activity	+25%
Website visitors	+30%
Website bounce rates	-10%
Google ranking	+50%
Media hits	+50%

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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### Platforms/tools

- Google Analytics
- SEM Rush
- Google ads
- LinkedIn sponsored ads
- Facebook sponsored ads
- Feathr
- Email platform that integrates with your ARM

### Staffing

- VP or Director of Communications
- Marketing Communications Specialist (strategic planning, messaging, copywriting)
- Digital Specialist (social, SEO, website)
- PR Specialist (media and blogger relations, speaking events)

## BUDGET (PER YEAR)

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Staff/agency/consulting costs	\$300,000
Advertising	\$40,000
Material development (printing, etc)	\$50,000
Software and technology systems	\$30,000



## NEXT STEPS

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ASN leadership will review this proposed plan and evaluate the feasibility of the recommended strategy, budget, staffing and platform/tools. I am available to answer any questions, provide clarification, and expand on any of the recommendations.

Following review and evaluation by ASN leadership, I recommend we meet in-person for a half-day or full day to move this plan forward. This session should include activities to develop audience personas, targeted key messages, timing, resources, and responsibilities.

# DEVELOPING A CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

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## OVERVIEW

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ASN aims to be the premier source of research-based education in nutrition; one way it plans to do this is through new strategies for nutrition education and professional development. A certification program would achieve this.

While the nutrition space is full of various certificate and certification programs offering expertise in areas such as holistic nutrition, nutrition coaching, sports nutrition, or weight management, there doesn't appear to be competition for a certification focused on efficiency and/or continuous improvement (similar to Lean Certification that focuses on minimizing physical and process waste and increasing efficiency in manufacturing -- and increasingly in healthcare). A certification focused on efficiency/continuous improvement is applicable to all fields within nutrition, including research and clinical practice. All nutrition professionals can benefit from applying principles that eliminate of steps and processes that do not positively contribute to research outcomes or patient care.

A professional certification program establishes core standards for the field of patient safety, benchmarks requirements necessary for health care professionals, and sets an expected proficiency level.

## HOW A CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT CERTIFICATION CAN BENEFIT THE NUTRITION COMMUNITY

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- Reduce unnecessary or redundant paperwork
- Reduce unneeded tests
- Reduce patient wait time
- Reduce idle equipment
- Minimize excess inventory (forms, testing equipment, etc.)
- Minimize incomplete or incorrect patient records
- Maximize communication among patient's healthcare providers

## WHY CREATE A CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

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- Increase the value that ASN offers to the nutrition community
- Improve the public's experiences with nutrition professionals
- Establish ASN as an authority/thought leader
- Elevate the ASN brand
- Increase revenue
- Member recruitment and create new opportunities for cross-organizational activities (e.g., attend review programs at Nutrition event, participate in online study groups for members only, etc.)

# DEVELOPING A CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

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A professional certification program establishes core standard, benchmarks requirements necessary for nutrition professionals, and sets an expected proficiency level. The process of developing a certification program include:

Form a work group

- Members
- Employers
- Professors
- Industry

Determine the purpose of the credential

Conduct a feasibility study/determine market interest

Partner with an accredited education institute or aim to achieve accreditation from ICAC

Trademark the name

Set the standards for certification

Decide if it will be a single-level certification or multi-level program (Bronze, Silver, Gold).  
How are multiple levels differentiated?

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Determine pricing model

Determine the frequency of the exam (will it be offered once a year, in collaboration with the Nutrition event? Will it be offered throughout the year at pre-determined dates and locations? Can a candidate take the exam at their convenience with a proctor?)

Determine candidate requirements (degree, years of experience, etc.)

Develop a Competency Framework

Develop a Body of Knowledge

Identify learning objectives

Develop a prep program

- Online classes
- Reading material and videos
- In-person or virtual review programs
- Professional experience – research or clinical practice

Develop the exam

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Determine the scoring system. What is the passing score? If a candidate doesn't pass, can he/she take it again? How many times and in what period of time?

Determine maintenance/recertification process. How long is the certification valid and how do they recertify? Do they need to do training, provide relevant professional experience, or just re-take the exam?

Promote the program and recruit candidates!



## MARKETING A CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

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Marketing a new credential program requires a plan highly focused on the value of earning certification and alleviating any concerns about the time and financial investment required. Like any successful marketing plan, a strong brand should be created, target audiences should be identified, key messages and FAQs developed, and marketing using strategic communication channels. Videos, webinars, white papers, LinkedIn advertising, social media saturation, and print ads in ASN and other nutrition publications should all be considered.

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When launching a new product, consider a multi-phase go-to-market plan. The following is an example:

**Pre-Launch:** Even while the certification program is being developed, be sure to market. Announce the intention for the program and build excitement. Create a page on the ASN website with ongoing updates, key messages, and solicit input and questions. Collect email addresses from people who want to “stay in the know” and send them more frequent updates.

**Pilot Launch:** Recruit a dynamic group of nutritional professionals (25-50 people) to be the first to earn their certification. Think ASN leadership, members of the work group that developed the certification, and key leaders in the nutrition community. Be sure to include representatives from each target audience. Leverage this pilot group’s influence to promote the certification. Obtain testimonials, ask them to write blog posts about their experience in earning the certification, create a video, and congratulate them publicly.

**Pre-Public Launch:** Ask each person from the pilot group to recruit 10 people to earn certification, and invite people who gave their email addresses to “stay in the know.” Send personal invitations. Host a private webinar in which the pilot group talks about the certification and answers questions from this personally selected group of candidates. Once certified, leverage this group to further raise awareness for the program. Provide sample social media posts and emails that they can share with their network.

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**Public Launch:** Now, with at least 150 people already certified, make the certification program available to your entire audience. Tie the exam into a large event such as the Nutrition conference (e.g., candidates complete all prep activities prior to the Nutrition event, and sit for the exam during the conference). Recognize all who passed the exam during the Awards Ceremony, in the daily newsletter, on a digital board at the event, etc. Recognize everyone (pilot group, pre-public group and the first public group) in social media, on the ASN website, and in a print ad.

**Ongoing:** With a solid foundation in place, it's now time to implement ongoing communication and marketing tactics. Identify ideal candidates – based on demographics, experience level, job title, etc. -- and market directly to them. Continue to develop engaging marketing materials such as brochures, direct mail pieces, emails, and digital ads. Host webinars that discuss the value of certification. Create a video loop to display at events. Write blogs and share on LinkedIn. This is also the time when you'll want to create a marketing plan for recertification. Since most certifications are valid for a specific period of time (2-5 years), your early adopters will soon be approaching their renewal period, and you'll want to begin communicating to them to ensure they understand and complete the recertification process.

## FINAL WORDS

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With a strong Strategic Map, the highly successful implementation of a standalone event, the Trust in Nutrition initiative, and VISION 2028, ASN is primed to skyrocket its reputation as the authoritative, global leader in nutrition through science. A comprehensive marketing plan aimed at communicating value-driven messages to carefully targeted audiences and the development of a certification program will be critical components of ASN's growth.

I'm ready to help you.