



# KICK FUTURE-PROOFING PLAYBOOK

Your guide to navigating the complexities of modern crisis communications and perception marketing. Providing the peace of mind that comes from being prepared.

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# Imagine waking up one morning to find your phone buzzing with 2,000 notifications...

...headlines declaring a welfare crisis, social media ablaze with outrage, and your brand's reputation hanging by a thread. You're caught off guard. There's no clear strategy, no prepared responses, no progress data to reference, and no plan to calm the storm. This is the nightmare scenario that keeps industry leaders up at night.

But what if you didn't have to panic? What if you could scroll through those notifications with a calm sense of control, knowing you've already done the work to protect your brand from this very crisis? This is the peace of mind that comes with being prepared, and it's exactly what the Kick Future-Proofing Playbook is designed to deliver.



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## INTRODUCTION

In today's world, where information spreads like wildfire and public perception can make or break your brand, the horse racing industry—or any business—can't afford to be reactive. The stakes are high, and the rules of the game have changed.

We've moved beyond the days of "never complain, never explain." Silence is no longer an option. Transparency, consistency, and proactive communication are now the keys to survival and success.

This **Playbook** is your guide to navigating the complexities of modern crisis communication and perception marketing. It's not just about reacting to challenges; it's about anticipating them, preparing for them, and turning potential disasters into opportunities to build trust and demonstrate leadership.

**Let's get real. Let's get organised. And let's get loud and proud.**

“  
Let's get  
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# SECTION 1

## GET REAL

Getting real is about more than just identifying problems—it's about having the courage to confront them before they become crises.

By proactively addressing vulnerabilities, communicating your progress, and staying transparent, you set the foundation for a brand that can weather any storm. In the end, the best way to prevent a perception scandal is to be better, so that it doesn't happen in the first place. Because once a crisis hits, you can't put the toothpaste back in the tube.

### 1.1 Embracing the Hard Truths

Before you can protect your brand, you need to get real about its vulnerabilities. This isn't just about acknowledging that problems exist; it's about shining a light on the areas that don't pass the pub test of public opinion. These are the issues that, if left unaddressed, can lead to scandals that no amount of PR can fix.

#### Visualise this:

Imagine your brand as a ship navigating through rough waters. If you don't take the time to inspect every inch of that ship—and proactively fix the weak spots—you're at risk of a hole sinking the ship. The key to future-proofing is to find those holes and start plugging them before it's too late.



## 1.2 The Slippery Slope Fallacy

One of the biggest mistakes brands make is assuming that addressing a single welfare issue will lead to a slippery slope of endless demands. This kind of thinking is lazy and dangerous. It's like refusing to patch a leak in your boat because you're afraid you'll have to repair the entire hull. The reality is, if you don't address that leak, the whole ship is going down.

## 1.3 Facing the Skeletons

When I work with clients, I tell them to think of me as a defense attorney in a murder trial. If I don't know where your skeletons are buried, I can't help you fix them. It's better to face those skeletons now than to have them become front-page news later.



## What to do:

### Be Transparent:

It's not enough to acknowledge your flaws; you need to be open about what you're doing to fix them. This doesn't mean airing your dirty laundry, but it does mean being honest about your progress.

### Communicate Progress:

Start compiling data and accurate information now. When a crisis hits, you'll need those facts to back up your story. Without numbers and science, you're fighting misinformation with your hands tied behind



## 1.4 Proactively Addressing Vulnerabilities

Getting real means being proactive about your vulnerabilities. This is where the rubber meets the road. You can't just talk about making changes—you need to start making them. This involves conducting a thorough vulnerability assessment and developing a plan to address the areas where your brand is most at risk.

**To get started, work through our critical questions on the following page.**



# ADDRESSING YOUR VULNERABILITIES

## What crisis scenarios could arise in your business or industry?

Shine a light on all the dark corners to reveal what could get a spotlight on it when it's too late, in the public eye.

## What could someone in the public think of this situation?

Put yourself in their shoes. How might they perceive the situation, and what assumptions could they make?

## What is the Ideal Outcome that the public expects of the industry or business?

Determine what "perfect" would look like from the public's perspective.

## How could the situations present themselves?

Identify where the pressure will come from, where negative media could surface, the content formats it will take, and who it will reach.

## Who is likely to be involved?

Workshop who will be directly and indirectly affected by the crisis, including stakeholders at all levels.

## What active response strategy should be adopted?

Follow this formula:

- State the situation (what you know and don't know).
- Express genuine empathy (and remember, empathy can't be faked).
- Accept responsibility (even if only part thereof).
- Outline next steps to deal with this particular issue.
- Discuss the ideal scenario and what's going to happen to work towards achieving it.

## What Potential Misinformation or Follow-On Issues Could Arise?

Consider the misinformation that could spread and how to counter it.

## Let's be honest—getting real can be terrifying.

Admitting that change needs to happen can make you feel vulnerable, even obsolete, like the world is moving forward and leaving you behind. It forces you to confront the possibility that the way things have always been done isn't good enough anymore. That realisation can hit hard, making you question everything you know about your business, your industry, and your place in it.

But here's the thing: facing those fears, no matter how deep or scary, is what will protect you in the future. It's not about dwelling on your shortcomings; it's about having the courage to acknowledge them and the determination to fix them. Because the alternative—putting your head in the sand and hoping for the best—is far more terrifying.

Change is hard, and it's even harder when it feels like it's challenging your very identity. But avoiding it won't make the problems go away; it'll just leave you more exposed when the storm hits. So, face your fears honestly. It's this bravery and transparency that will not only safeguard your brand but also ensure that it stands strong, respected, and trusted in the eyes of the public.

## SECTION 2

# GET ORGANISED

Alright, you've faced the tough truths, identified where your brand might crack under pressure, and now it's time to roll up your sleeves and get seriously organised. This is where your proactive efforts transform from ideas into action. Think of getting organised as assembling your brand's ultimate survival kit—a toolbox packed with everything you need to navigate the rough waters ahead.



***This isn't just your average first-aid kit for crises; it's your brand's crisis-proof fortress***

We're not talking about slapping on band-aids when things go wrong. You're preparing a full arsenal to tackle challenges head-on, maintain control of the narrative, and come out stronger on the other side.

In this section, we're diving into the nitty-gritty of building that strategy toolbox. We'll cover how to craft tailored content, develop rock-solid crisis communication plans, and set up a system that doesn't just react but proactively builds trust and goodwill—enough to weather any storm without breaking a sweat.

It is not about waiting for the fire to start; it's about making sure your brand is fireproof. Get ready to lay the foundation for a future-proof brand that not only survives crises but thrives through them.



# GETTING ORGANISED

## 2.1 What to Consider?

To get truly organised, you need to dig deeper and ask the right questions. It is not just about having policies and procedures in place—it's about understanding the “why” behind them and being able to clearly communicate that to your audience. Let's break down the key questions you should be working through to build a bulletproof strategy.



### **What Policies and Processes are in Place?**

Start by assessing your current systems and protocols. What's in place to handle crises, manage operations, and maintain public trust? Knowing your framework is crucial for identifying where improvements are needed.

### **What Science or Data is it Based On?**

Why are these policies in place? What credible research or data supports them? In today's transparency-driven world, showing that your decisions are rooted in solid science builds trust and legitimacy.

### **What Progress Has Been Made?**

Document the steps you've already taken. This doesn't mean vague claims—backup your progress with specific data, examples, and case studies that demonstrate real-world improvements.

### **What Information is Needed to Support This?**

Consider the stats, studies, or visuals you'll need to make your case undeniable. Your success stories should be clear, compelling, and impossible to ignore.

### **What Concerns Could Arise?**

Every step forward might face some pushback. Think ahead about what people could question or criticise and prepare to address those concerns proactively.

### **What Areas of Progress Are You Actively Working On?**

Highlight your ongoing efforts. Show that your commitment to progress is continuous, evolving, and backed by real action.

### **How Are These Communicated Internally?**

Your team needs to be fully on board. How well do they understand the policies and their roles in implementing them? Strong internal communication ensures everyone's ready to act when it matters most.

### **What Are the Risks of Staying Silent?**

Consider the consequences of not communicating. What's the potential impact on your brand's reputation and stakeholder trust if you choose silence over transparency?

### **Who Are the Key Stakeholders, and How Will They Be Informed?**

Identify who needs to be kept informed—both internally and externally. Tailor your communication strategies to ensure each stakeholder group gets the right information at the right time.

### **How Will You Handle Media Inquiries?**

Anticipate how you'll respond to media inquiries and public scrutiny. Have clear, consistent messaging ready, and designate a spokesperson who can communicate your position effectively.

# GETTING ORGANISED

## 2.2 Immediate Reaction: Responding with Transparency

The first step in getting organised is preparing to react immediately and transparently when an issue arises. This is where your ability to contain the situation by sticking to the facts comes into play. When a crisis hits, your response must be swift, clear, and honest. You need to have the tools and strategies in place to address the issue head-on, provide accurate information, and communicate what you know—and what you don't.

Transparency is crucial. The public needs to see that you're not hiding anything, and your stakeholders need to trust that you're in control of the situation. Your initial reaction sets the tone for everything that follows, so it's essential that you're organised and ready to respond quickly. This stops misinformation from forming in the first place.

## 2.3 Proactive Preparation: Planning for Potential Crises

The second level of organisation involves proactive preparation. Here's where you take the time to develop detailed plans and train your team for potential crises. By anticipating what could go wrong, you ensure quick and effective responses.

Proactive preparation means you're not just waiting for something to happen—you're actively planning for it. This includes creating detailed crisis communication strategies, training your team on how to implement them, and having key messages—backed by science and data—ready to go.

The more prepared you are, the less likely you'll be caught off guard. It's about being ready for any scenario with a plan that's been thought out, tested, and is ready to be put into action.



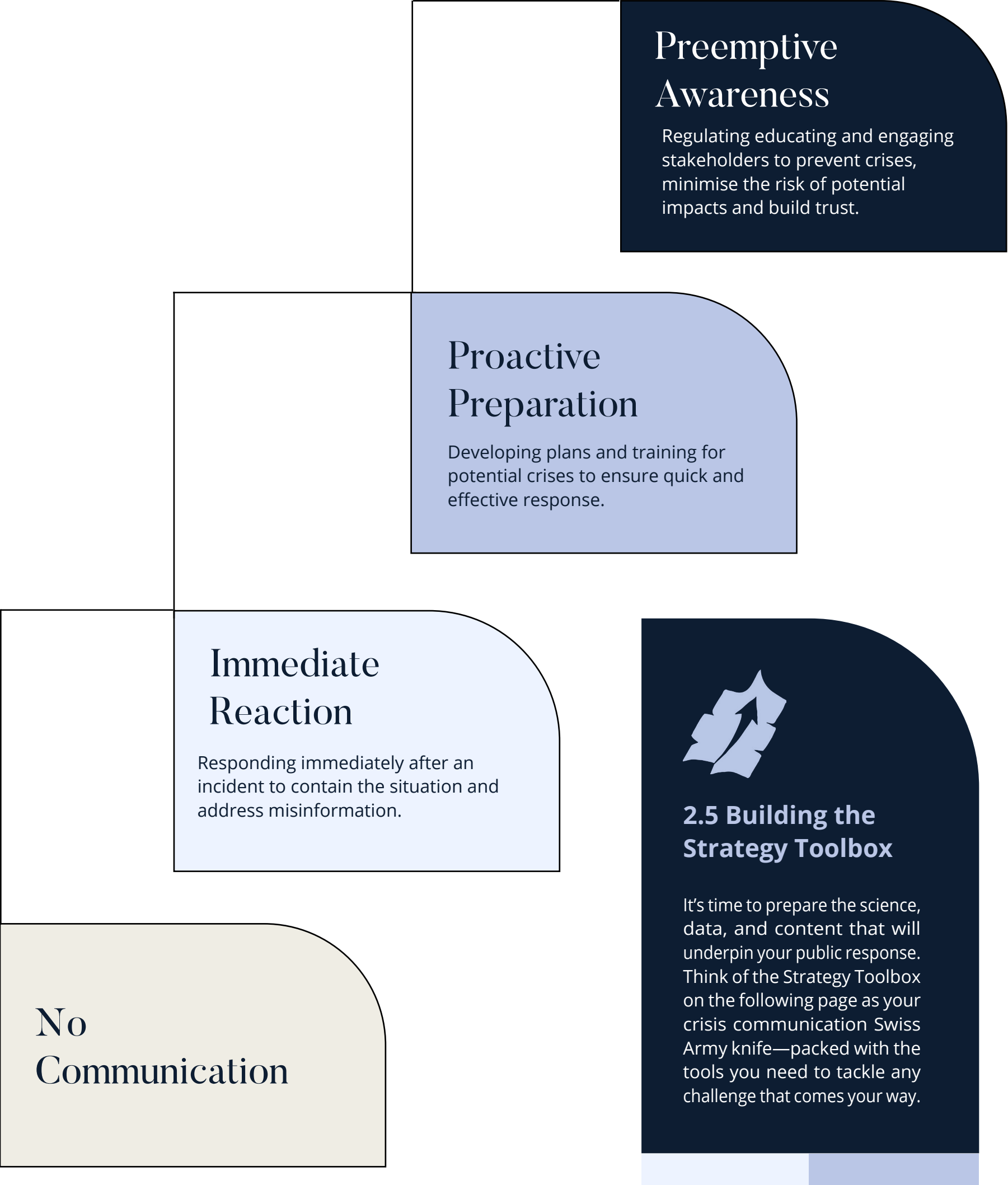
## 2.4 Preemptive Awareness: Building Up Goodwill

The third level is all about preemptive awareness—building up goodwill like lollies in a jar. Every time you engage with the public, share a behind-the-scenes look at your practices, or transparently show welfare progress—even if it's not perfect—you're adding a lolly to that jar.

This is about regularly educating and engaging your stakeholders, so there's already a baseline of trust and understanding when issues arise. Preemptive awareness helps ensure that when a crisis does happen, the public doesn't jump straight into judgement and condemnation. Instead, they're more likely to give you the benefit of the doubt because you've already demonstrated a commitment to transparency and progress.



# The Stages of Crisis Communication





# Your Strategy Toolbox

## Power Plays

These are your heavy hitters—the paid strategies that get your brand in front of the people who matter most.

**Search Engine Advertising:** Ensure your brand is visible when people search for information, controlling the narrative by leading the search results.

**Social Media Advertising:** Target specific audiences with precision, ensuring your message reaches the right people at the right time.

**Display Advertising:** Capture attention with compelling visuals on relevant websites, reinforcing your brand's presence.

**Sponsored Content:** Partner with trusted voices to deliver your message within content that resonates with your audience.

**Email Marketing:** Communicate directly with your audience, delivering personalised messages that drive engagement.

## Trust Builders

Trust is the foundation of any successful brand. Trust Builders are the strategies that make your brand accessible and trustworthy.

**Public Relations:** Craft narratives that build a positive reputation, even in challenging times.

**Crisis Communications Plans:** Have a plan in place to respond swiftly and effectively during a crisis.

**Internal Staff Communications:** Equip your team with the knowledge and tools they need to represent your brand confidently.

**Community Engagement:** Show your commitment to the community by actively engaging and addressing their concerns.

**SEO:** Ensure your online presence is strong and trustworthy, making it easy for people to find and believe in your brand.

## Social Amplifiers

Social Amplifiers are all about sparking conversations and turning your audience into passionate advocates.

**Social Media Strategy:** Develop a comprehensive plan that drives consistent, authentic engagement across platforms.

**Community Building:** Nurture communities around shared values and your brand's mission.

**User-Generated Content:** Encourage your audience to create content that champions your brand.

**Content Sharing:** Leverage the power of sharing to spread your message far and wide.

**Interactive Content:** Engage your audience with content that invites them to be part of the conversation.

## Home Base

Your digital home base is the content and platforms you own and control. This is where people come to learn, engage, and build a deeper connection with your brand.

**Website:** Your digital headquarters, where your brand lives online.

**Landing Pages:** Tailored pages that guide visitors toward specific actions, from signing up to purchasing.

**Email Newsletter:** Keep your audience informed and engaged with regular updates.

**Content:** Create valuable content that showcases your expertise and builds trust.

**Webinars:** Offer in-depth insights and build authority through live, interactive sessions.



## 2.6 Implementing the Strategy Toolbox

Once your toolbox is built, it's time to put those tools to work. This involves developing a tailored plan that aligns with your brand's goals and proactively addresses challenges.

### Scenario Outline:

**Initial Steps:** As soon as a potential crisis is identified, activate your Crisis Communications Plan. Ensure your key messages are clear and consistent across all channels.

**Key Messages:** The main points that should be communicated to reassure the public and stakeholders. For example, "We are committed to the highest standards of animal welfare."

**Next Steps:** Ongoing communication and follow-up actions to manage the situation and prevent misinformation from spreading.

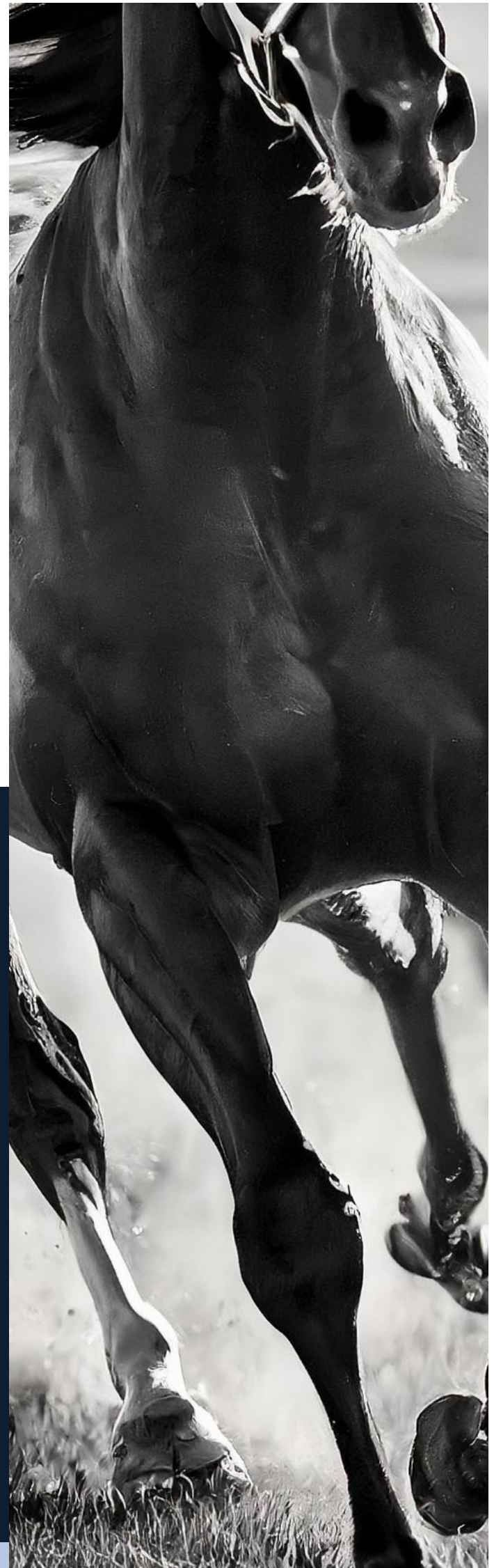
### What to do:

Use your Power Plays to control the narrative. Paid strategies ensure your message reaches the right audience at the right time.

Deploy Trust Builders to reinforce your commitment to transparency and leadership. Show your audience that you're trustworthy by consistently engaging with them and providing accurate information.

Leverage Social Amplifiers to spark conversations and drive engagement. Encourage your audience to become advocates for your brand.

Maintain your Home Base as the authoritative source of information. Ensure your website, content, and other owned media are up-to-date and reflect your brand's values.



## SUMMARY

# GET ORGANISED



**Getting organised isn't just a checkbox on your to-do list—it's the backbone of your brand's resilience.**

Getting organised isn't just a checkbox on your to-do list—it's the backbone of your brand's resilience. It's what separates those who scramble when crisis hits from those who confidently steer the ship through the storm. By equipping yourself with a comprehensive strategy toolbox, you're not just reacting to issues as they arise—you're proactively preparing for them, and building up the trust and goodwill that will carry you through.

It's not just about having a plan; it's about having the right plan, one that's tailored, tested, and ready to roll. It's about knowing that when things go sideways, you've got everything you need to keep the narrative in your hands and the trust of your stakeholders intact. In short, getting organised is what will allow you to not only survive in today's fast-paced, high-stakes environment but to excel and lead with confidence. So gear up—because with the right preparation, you're not just prepared - you're unstoppable.



# SECTION 3

## GET LOUD AND PROUD

You’ve done the hard work. You have faced the tough truths, got organised, and built your strategy toolbox. Now, it’s time to step into the spotlight and make sure the world knows about it. This is where your efforts come full circle. Getting loud and proud is about leveraging the trust you’ve built, engaging your community, and turning your audience into passionate advocates for your brand.

### 3.1 The Power of Trusted Values

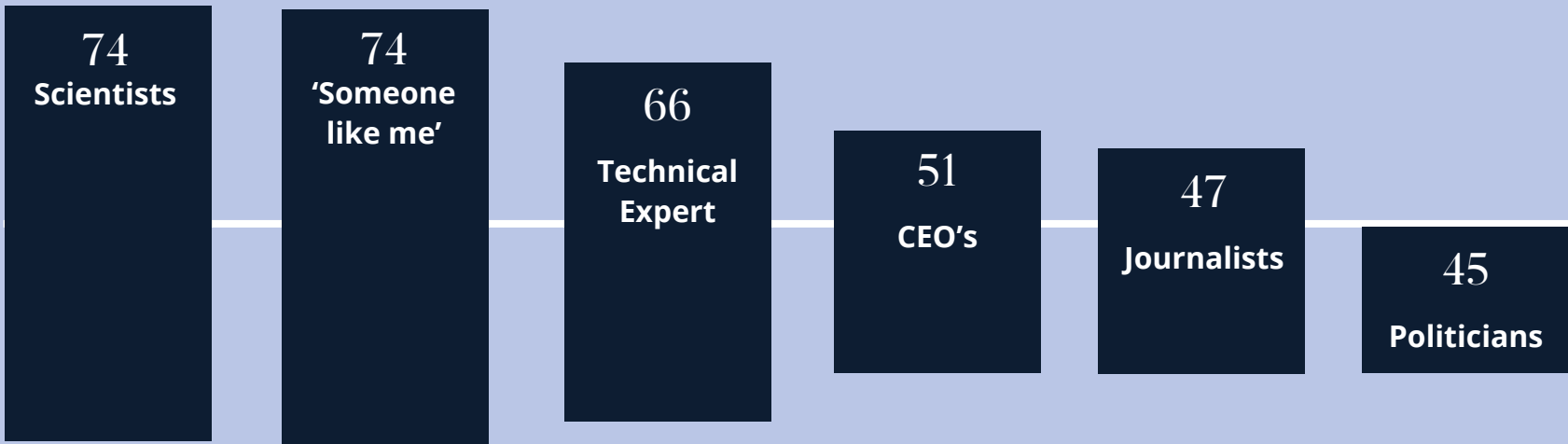
Trust isn’t just a nice-to-have—it’s the cornerstone of any successful brand. And trust is built on shared values. In today’s world, people don’t just buy products; they buy into the values that a brand represents. They trust those who reflect their beliefs and speak their language. That’s why the ability to communicate your values clearly and consistently is vital.

Trust in information is paramount. If people trust the source, they are more likely to believe the message. In a crisis, this can mean the difference between a narrative that spirals out of control and one that is effectively

managed. When your audience sees that you’re not just talking the talk but walking the walk, they’re more likely to stand by you—even in tough times.

**Why It Matters:** In an era where trust in institutions is at an all-time low, people are turning to those they see as ‘one of them.’ This is why developing your audience and community isn’t just important—it’s essential. When you cultivate a community that shares your values, you’re not just building a customer base; you’re building an army of ambassadors. These individuals will not only defend your brand but actively promote it.

## Who do we trust?



SOURCE: Edelman Trust Barometer 2024 - Dispersion of trusted sources of authority



### 3.2 Why Developing Your Audience and Community is Crucial

Building an engaged and loyal audience is more than just a numbers game. It's about creating a tribe—a group of people who are not just customers but believers in what you stand for. These are the people who will defend your brand against criticism, spread your message organically, and amplify your voice when it matters most.



#### Visualise this:

Imagine your brand as a fortress. Your community is the wall that surrounds it, protecting it from external threats. But more than that, it's the bridge that connects you to the world outside, ensuring that your values resonate far and wide.

## CASE STUDY: KICK UP

Let's talk about Kick Up, a project born out of the need to tackle the perception challenges facing the horse racing industry. When the Melbourne Cup saw two devastating horse deaths in 2018 and 2020, public sentiment turned sharply negative. My team at Kick Collective—a young, passionate group, most of whom are in their 20s—were devastated not by the race itself, which had been run safely, but by the need to spend the entire day defending the industry they love.

The problem wasn't their passion; it was that they lacked the resources to back up their personal experiences. They were struggling to find facts and easily accessible data to counter the narrative that horse racing was cruel and outdated. So, we decided to do something about it.

We spent 11 months researching, reading, and creating content that would address the most common questions and concerns. The result was Kick Up—a website and social media presence dedicated to providing transparent, science-heavy content that didn't shy away from admitting where the industry needed to improve.

The response was overwhelming. Within the first six weeks, the website saw 527,000 interaction events, with the most popular page being "Common Questions" and the most-read article titled "What Happens to the Slow Horses." This success wasn't just about numbers; it was about building trust. By leading with the elephant in the room—admitting that horse racing isn't perfect but showing the progress being made—we earned our audience's trust.



# COMMUNITY



## Why It Matters?

**Shared Values Create Loyalty:** When your audience shares your values, they're more likely to stay loyal to your brand. They're not just buying a product; they're buying into a lifestyle, a belief system, a mission.

**Your Army of Ambassadors:** These loyal followers become your most powerful advocates. They'll share your content, spread your message, and defend your brand in ways that paid media never could.

**Trust Through Transparency:** Transparency fosters trust. When your audience knows that you're open and honest, they're more likely to give you the benefit of the doubt when things go wrong. This trust is invaluable during a crisis, where the narrative can easily slip out of control if you don't have your community's support.

## How To Build It:

**Engage Consistently:** Regular, meaningful engagement with your audience builds strong relationships. This isn't about bombarding them with sales pitches; it's about creating content that resonates, informs, and inspires.

**Be Accessible:** Make sure your audience knows they can reach out to you, and that you'll listen. Open channels of communication are vital for building trust.

**Leverage Social Proof:** Highlight testimonials, case studies, and user-generated content. Show that real people, just like them, trust and believe in your brand.



### 3.3 Turning Your Audience into Advocates

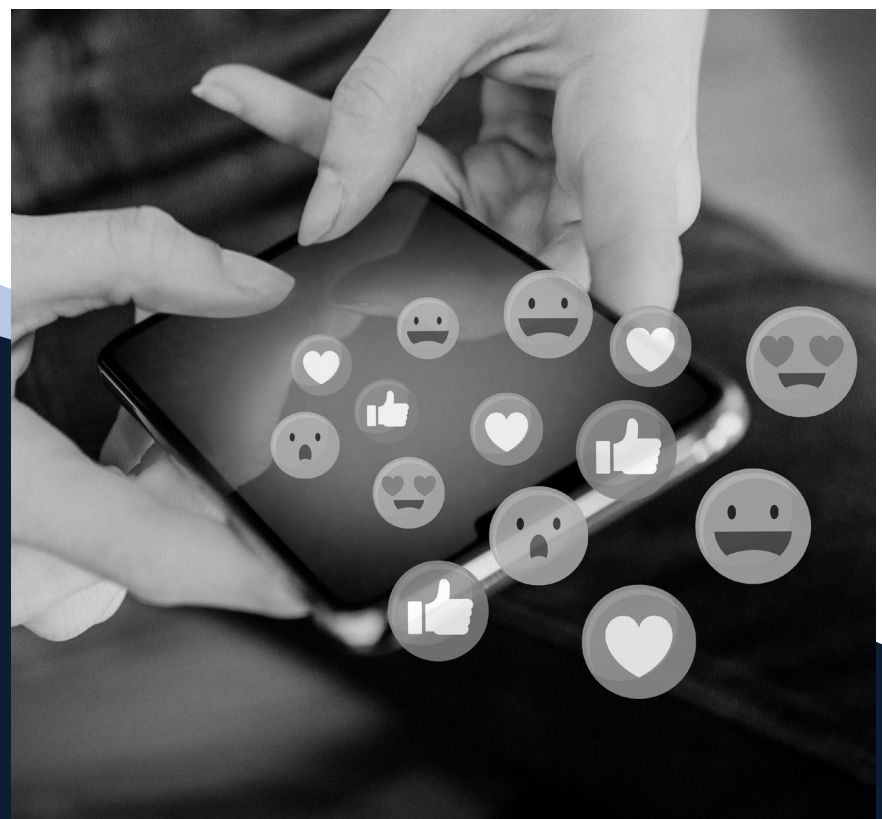
Once you've built trust, it's time to mobilise your community. Your audience isn't just there to consume content; they're there to be a part of something bigger. When you turn your audience into advocates, you're creating a network of voices that amplify your message, defend your brand, and help you reach new heights.

#### Strategies to Activate Your Advocates:

- **Incentivize Sharing:** Encourage your audience to share your content by making it easy and rewarding to do so. This could be through exclusive content, early access, or other perks that make them feel valued.
- **Empower Peer-to-Peer Communication:** Give your audience the tools they need to spread your message. This could be in the form of shareable content, easy-to-use graphics, or clear talking points.
- **Celebrate Your Community:** Highlight the contributions of your most active and loyal followers. This not only makes them feel appreciated but also encourages others to get involved.

### 3.4 The Role of Social Media and Peer Influence

In today's digital landscape, social media is where your community lives and breathes. It's the platform where your values are communicated, where your audience interacts, and where your message is amplified. Social media isn't just a marketing tool; it's the heartbeat of your community.



## Why It Matters?

**Reach:** Social media allows you to reach a broad audience quickly and efficiently.

**Engagement:** It provides a platform for real-time interaction, allowing you to respond to feedback, address concerns, and build relationships.

**Amplification:** Your message can spread rapidly through shares, retweets, and likes, reaching far beyond your immediate audience.

## How to Leverage It:

**Consistent Messaging:** Ensure your message is consistent across all platforms. This builds trust and reinforces your brand values.

**Interactive Content:** Use polls, Q&A sessions, and live videos to engage your audience in real-time.

**Social Proof:** Leverage testimonials, case studies, and peer reviews to build credibility and trust.



## SUMMARY

# GET LOUD AND PROUD



**Watch as your brand not only survives but thrives in today's fast-paced, ever-changing landscape.**

This is the moment to step into the spotlight and let your brand's values shine. By developing a community that shares your beliefs and turning your audience into advocates, you're not just building a brand—you're building a movement.

In a world where trust is earned, not given, your community is your most valuable asset. They are the ones who will carry your message forward, defend your brand in times of crisis, and amplify your voice when it matters most.

So, get loud and proud. Embrace the power of your community, leverage the trust you've built, and watch as your brand not only survives but thrives in today's fast-paced, ever-changing landscape.

# The Future Is Yours— And We're Here to Help

You've done the hard work. You have faced the realities, organised your strategies, and laid the groundwork for a resilient brand. But this journey isn't easy. It's challenging, sometimes daunting, and not something you should have to navigate alone.

## **That's where Kick Future comes in.**

At Kick Future, we're here to guide you through the process, helping you identify and address the vulnerabilities that others might overlook. We work with you to build a strategy that's not just about surviving but thriving in a world that's constantly changing. We're your partners in future-proofing—making sure you're ready for whatever comes next.

And when it's time to bring that strategy to life, Kick Creative is here to turn your vision into reality. Whether it's designing a compelling website, crafting engaging

videos, or developing content that resonates with your audience, we handle the creative execution with care and precision. We ensure that every piece of content not only aligns with your strategy but also builds a community that's engaged and invested in your brand.

Think of us as your support system—here to make the tough stuff easier, to bring clarity to the complexity, and to ensure your brand is positioned for long-term success.

So if you're looking for a partner to help you navigate the road ahead, we're here. Ready when you are, to help you build a brand that's not just prepared for the future but leading it.

## **Let's take that next step together.**

“If an industry is not talking, people assume there is something to hide.”

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