BENCHMARKING FOR EXCELLENCE
Professional Engineers Ontario Communications Audit Report

August 2024

MDR STRATEGY GROUP LTD.

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INTRODUCTION

I. Executive summary

Professional Engineers Ontario (PEO) engaged MDR Strategy Group Ltd. to assess its current state of communication practices, identify areas of improvement, and discover any communication gaps, barriers, and issues. Embracing PEO's vision to be a trusted leader in the regulatory space, we applied our lens as former regulatory personnel and carried out an extensive review of the communications department.

We engaged internal and external stakeholder interviews and consultations, reviewed documents, and assessed the department's overall practices. Following this extensive review, we objectively present this report, in two documents (report and supplementary information) as our best assessment, feedback, and recommendations.

II. About MDR Strategy Group Ltd.

MDR Strategy Group "MDR" is a consulting agency that provides strategic communications, public and stakeholder engagement, and organizational design solutions exclusively to non-profit and public sector organizations. Our primary client group is the Canadian licensing and professional regulation sector. We have supported dozens of organizations across Canada in all aspects of our work since we were established in 2017.

Our project team brings over 30 years of combined experience in regulatory communications, supporting a diverse range of regulators across jurisdictions, including those overseeing physicians, lawyers, massage therapists, social workers, opticians, geoscientists, pharmacists, immigration consultants, and more.

With a focus on strategic communications and auditing, we specialize in helping organizations improve and enhance their communications. Our expertise ensures that regulatory bodies know their public, can effectively engage with all stakeholders, maintain transparency, and be leaders.

Conflict of interest declaration

We confirm that there were no conflicts of interest, whether real or perceived, with any staff and associates. At no time was there a financial interest to influence the outcome of the work being performed.

Confidentiality

To safeguard privacy and protect the vulnerability of some respondents, the identities of some participants have been withheld. The electronic and hardcopy data to compile this report collected will be destroyed once this final report has been accepted by PEO.

III. Rationale for a communication audit

Purpose

We were retained to evaluate PEO's external communication practices and present opportunities for improvement and enhancement. The audit's findings will enable PEO to improve information flow, foster positive relationships with stakeholders, and ensure that the organization's communication is effective, consistent, and aligned with its public interest mandate.

PEO's goal is use the audit findings and recommendations to develop a strategic communication plan that aligns with their organizational strategic goals and objectives.

Objectives

The audit aims to provide PEO with comprehensive key findings and insights into the effectiveness of its current communication. The audit report will summarize key findings, identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, and outline actionable recommendations to enhance and improve external communication.

The specific audit objectives are to:
- Assess current communication practices.
- Uncover any communication gaps, barriers or issues.
- Identify and prioritize key stakeholders.
- Evaluate key communication channels.
- Analyze and review communication materials for clarity, message consistency and overall effectiveness.
- Benchmark against best practices.
- Gather stakeholder feedback and insights.
- Establish benchmarks for future evaluation.

IV. Audit methodology

DEAR evaluation model

To safeguard privacy and protect the vulnerability of some respondents, the identities of some participants have been withheld. The electronic and hardcopy data to compile this report collected will be destroyed once this final report has been accepted by PEO.
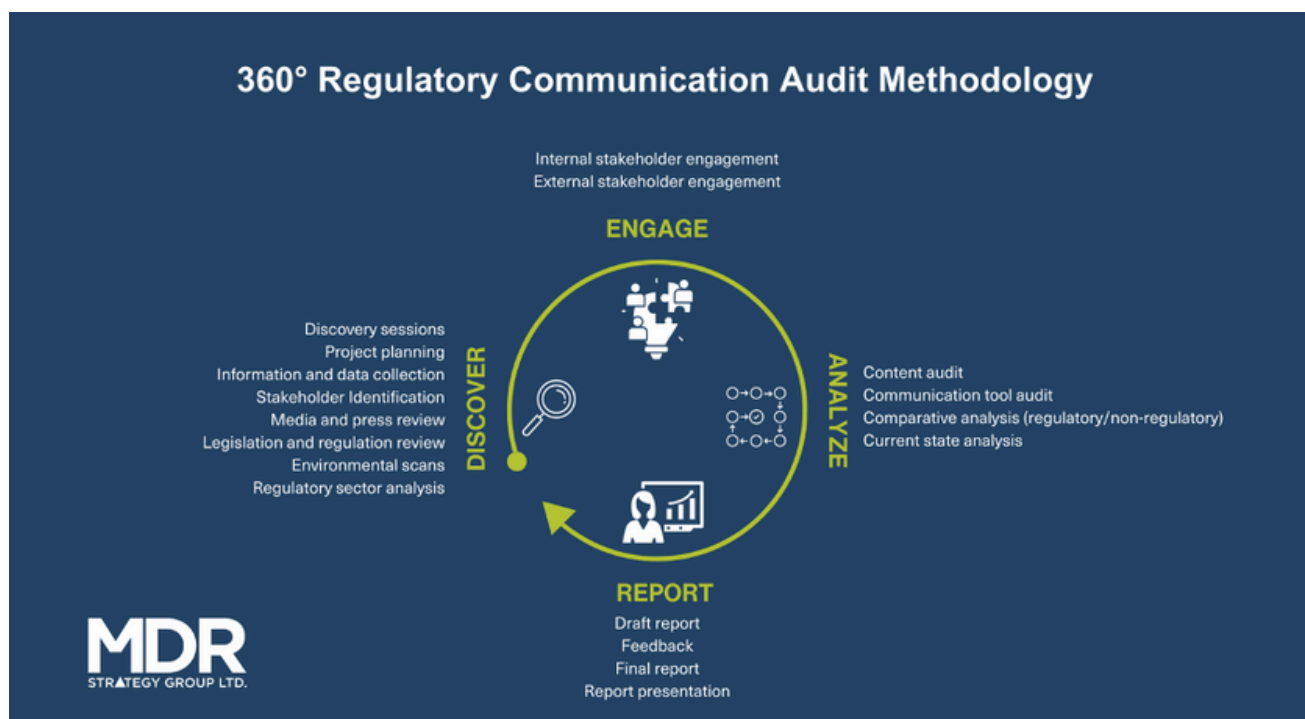
Discover
- **Discovery sessions:** We conducted initial discovery sessions with PEO personnel to understand the organization's goals, challenges, and communication needs.
- **Key document collection:** We collected a comprehensive package of PEO's communication materials including mass emails, documents, communications plans, media releases, reports and more.
- **Preliminary data and content review:** We gathered preliminary data and existing communication material for initial review and to further understand the tools, channels and strategies PEO employs.
- **Legislation and key document review:** We reviewed the *Professional Engineers Act*, along with PEO's mission, vision, values, and strategic goals to ensure alignment with the organization's communications strategies.
- **Stakeholder mapping:** We conducted a stakeholder mapping exercise with PEO staff to identify and map out key internal and external stakeholders to ensure comprehensive engagement through the audit.

Engage
- **One-on-one meetings:** We met one-on-one with PEO leadership to gather their detailed perspectives and gain further insight into current communication challenges and successes.
- **Surveys:** We conducted two surveys including a staff survey to understand internal perspectives and a comprehensive stakeholder survey to gather feedback on PEO's external communication effectiveness.
- **Focus groups:** We held a series of focus groups with diverse stakeholder groups including staff, Council Executive, Chapter leaders, committees, and engineering associations to gain firsthand feedback and insights into PEO's external communication.
- **Council presentation:** We also presented preliminary stakeholder survey feedback to PEO's Council to support staff in keeping Council informed of the initial audit insights.

Analyze
- **Comprehensive stakeholder feedback analysis:** We analyzed feedback from the two surveys, all focus groups, and the one-on-one meetings to identify common themes, communication strengths, and areas for enhancement.
- **Channel evaluated:** We evaluated the effectiveness of PEO's primary communication channels outlining areas for improvement or enhancement.
- **Content and message analysis:** We analyzed message consistency, clarity, language and terminology used and consistency of PEO's visual identity to identify challenges and areas for improvement.
- **MDR's scorecard:** We utilized our internal regulatory communications scorecard to support the analysis of PEO's communication.
- **SWOT analysis:** We conducted a comprehensive SWOT analysis to identify PEO's communication strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

Report
- **Draft report:** We drafted the communication audit report for PEO's review.
- **Finalize report:** Based on PEO's preliminary feedback, we finalized the communication audit report for submission.

The layout of this report aligns with the DEAR model.

MDR Regulatory Communication Scorecard

We integrated the DEAR evaluation process into our newly released propriety evaluation tool that scores regulatory bodies' communications.

The MDR Regulatory Communication Scorecard is based on the structure and principles of other successful evaluation methodologies used by organizations around the world to determine the health of their operations and programs:
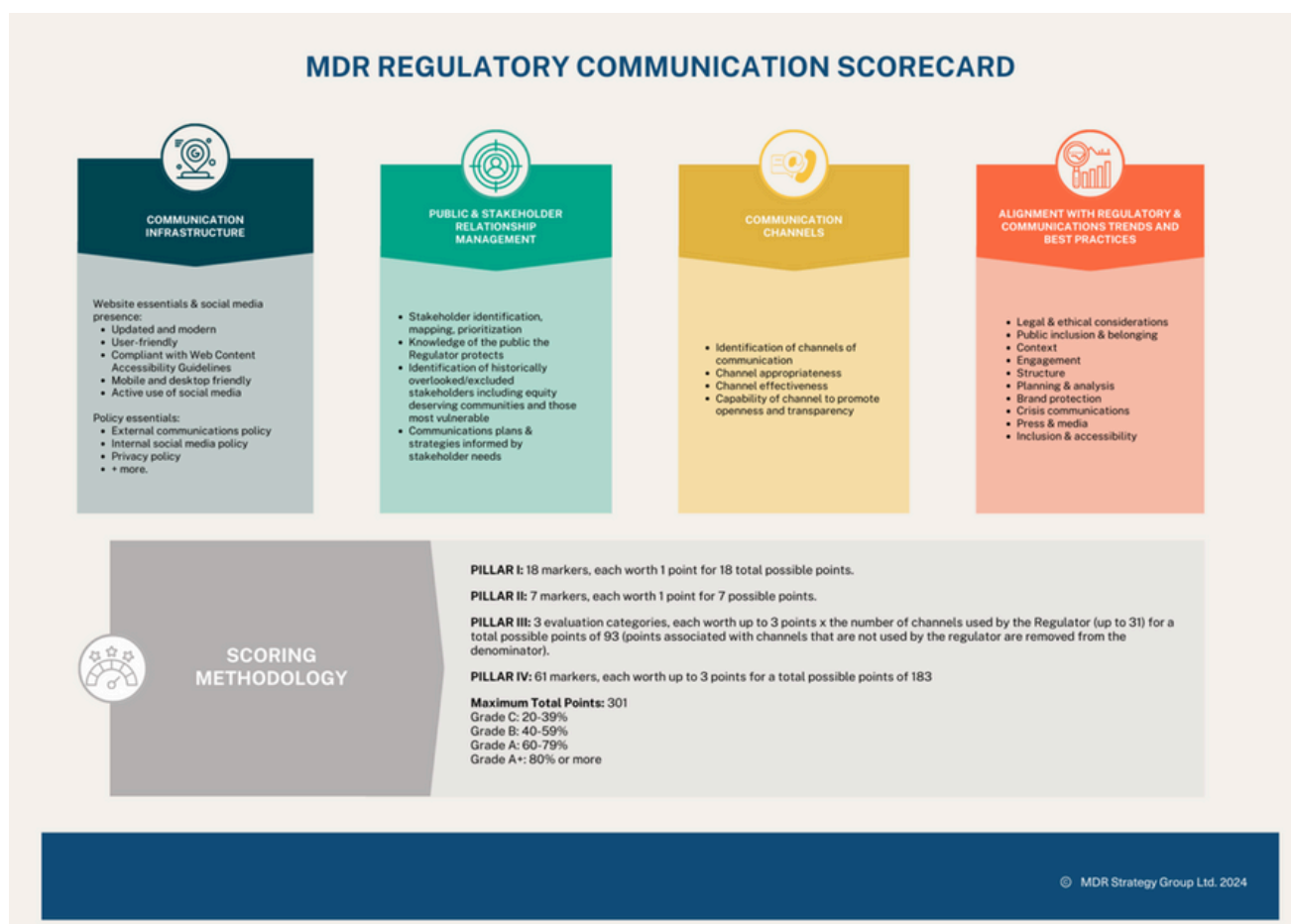
The first of its kind to grade communications, this tool applies 86 markers and other indicators to provide a perspective on the performance of communication practices. The markers and indicators are grouped in the following four pillars:

Pillar I: Communication Infrastructure
Assesses communication policy essentials and digital tools including the regulator's primary website for public and licence holder outreach.

Pillar II: Stakeholder identification and relationship management
Evaluates the regulator's stakeholder management processes and practices.

Pillar III: Communication Channels
Determines the presence and value of the regulator's communications to the public and stakeholder on the basis of appropriateness, effectiveness, and openness and transparency.

Pillar IV: Alignment with regulatory and communication trends and best practices
Considers a regulator's alignment with corporate communication best practices and changing trends in regulation, with emphasis on inclusion, belonging, and accessibility.

While the audit aligns with the MDR Regulatory Communication Scorecard, we did not conduct a full evaluation that includes a final numeric score. To determine progress in the evolution of PEO's communications, an evaluation midway through PEO's next strategic plan is advised.

DISCOVERY

I. The science and practice of regulatory communications

Overview

Delegated by the Ontario government to oversee licensing and regulation to protect the public, there is an increasing expectation of regulators for greater accountability through transparency, openness, and engagement with and for the public.

Regulators are also required to communicate effectively with licence holders (also known as registrants and members depending on the authority) and provide them timely, effective, and appropriate information and resources to enhance greater public safety.

Typically, there are two primary audiences on whom regulators focus their communication:

The public: A regulatory body should consistently communicate its mandate and role, which is:

- Principal Object
    - To regulate the practice of professional engineering and govern its members in accordance with the *Professional Engineers Act*.

- Additional Objects
    - To establish, maintain and develop standards of knowledge and skill among its members.
    - To establish maintain and develop standards of qualification and standards of practice for the practice of professional engineering.
    - To establish, maintain and develop standards of professional ethics among its members.
    - To promote public awareness of the role of the PEO.

Licence holders: A regulatory body should consistently communicate its purpose. Not a service, but an authority that designates the privilege to practice with established standards. New regulations, licence renewals, continuing professional development opportunities, and governance and operational changes should be clearly and regularly communicated.

Some other stakeholder groups that regulatory communications should prioritize, depending on the authority and its statutory obligations, include government, professional associations, educational institutions, and regulators with similar mandates.

Importance of effective communication in regulation

Effective communication is a primary consideration in relevant self-regulation. Approaches to regulation have shifted from traditional top-down one-size-fits-all oversight, to compassion and leading with a greater understanding of the correlation between individuals' personal circumstances, their needs, and overall professional competence.

Communicating with meaning to the public, registrants, and other critical stakeholders has never been more important, and regulators across Canada are placing greater emphasis on dialogue, engagement, openness, and transparency.

Ingredients of effective regulatory communication

Effective communication in regulation requires:

Strategic alignment
To ensure consistent messaging, communication needs to be directly aligned with a regulator's strategic and operational plans.

Strategic planning
Communications teams should develop their own strategic plan aligned to their organization's plan.

Knowledge of and understanding of the regulator's "public"
Knowing one's audience is critical for effective communication and regulator effectiveness. This understanding enables the right type of communication to ensure maximum reach and understanding. Whether age, race, language comprehension, or other demographics, as the population and professions diversify, one should adjust communications accordingly.

Metrics for effective evaluation
It is important to consistently evaluate the impact of communication. Determining how audiences interact with content provides a barometer to determine how to engage in the future and what tools to utilize.

Media monitoring and social listening
Media monitoring is an effective tool to stay informed. It provides a greater understanding into communications and marketing trends, while social listening enables regulators to scan conversations by the public and registrants about their organization or others and prepare proactive communications.

Relevant regulation

Relevant regulation refers to regulatory bodies having a proactive and meaningful impact in the lives of others.

This occurs when:

Regulators listen: They understand the needs of their registrants and permits the registrant greater insight into regulation.

Regulators are open and transparent: They engage in meaningful ways with the public, their registrants, and other stakeholders, and can be counted on to be honest.

Regulators can be relied on: The public and registrants can count on the regulator for accurate and timely information, assistance, and justice, most notably, when they are most vulnerable.

Regulators understand the importance of kindness: Registrants are individuals within their own communities who hold tremendous influence on the public they serve. A regulatory body understands that every type of communication can influence the mood, sense of safety, livelihood, and family of registrants. With the public, understanding that a complainant is in distress and supporting them with empathy builds trust in the regulator.

Regulators understand diversity: A one-size-fits all approach to regulation is ineffective, so regulators adapt and become more accommodating to registrants and the public.

II. The current state of communication at PEO

Transformation

PEO is committed to continuing to grow as an effective, professional, and modern regulator. This commitment is being realized with the organization's enterprise-wide transformation launched in response to recommendations in a 2018 external regulatory performance review, which examined various aspects of the organization's work and evaluated PEO's overall effectiveness in fulfilling its regulatory mandate.

PEO's transformation strategy is built on the three pillars: operational effectiveness, organizational alignment, and governance renewal.This communication audit aligns with PEO's commitment to transformation as it aims to better understand the organization's current external communication, identify areas for improvement and enhancement and provide actionable recommendations. The audit findings and recommendations will support PEO in developing a plan that underscores communication excellence, collaboration, and leadership. It also supports PEO's goal to enhance its work as a trusted, modern regulator, and reinforce its public interest mandate.

Notable changes and initiatives

PEO has undergone considerable transformation in recent years. Changes to the Continuing Professional Development (PEAK program), changes to the engineering intern program, and new requirements set by government under the F*air Access to Regulated Professions and Compulsory Trades Act* (FARPACTA) illustrates an inevitable modernization process. Under new leadership, there is visible enthusiasm surrounding these changes and more to come as PEO strives to redefine itself.

Advocacy divestment

PEO, established in 1922, initially had a dual mandate to regulate engineers and serve as the profession's voice. After 78 years of operation, PEO divested its advocacy activities in 2000, becoming a single-mandate organization solely for licensing and regulation to protect the public. In response, members of the profession established the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers (OSPE) to ensure the continuity of the profession's voice.

Yet, despite the change almost 25 years ago, many licence holders continue to believe in and demand an advocacy role for PEO. While legislation is clear about the organization's single purpose and mandate, ongoing disagreement remains. Engineers and non-engineer stakeholders repeatedly called on PEO throughout the evaluation to clarify its role. This is not unique to PEO, regulatory bodies around the globe face similar challenges. Role clarity between advocacy and public protection continues to evolve and clear communication will assist greatly in this endeavour.

III. Communication resources, practices, and strategies

Organizational structure

Two separate divisions within the organization's Policy and Governance department manage PEO's communications. The first, the "communications department" currently led by director Katarina Praljak, manages traditional public affairs and relations. The "external relations" department, overseen by director David Smith, maintains relationships with stakeholders to inform policy and communications.

Communication policies

PEO's communications policy was last reviewed in April 2012. This policy states that "communications involves everyone in PEO [1]" and that it governs Council, staff, chapters, and members-at-large (licence holders) in their dealings with stakeholders including media and government.

The organization also has a corporate social media policy, last revised in March 2015, which outlines expectations for those authorized to publish on PEO's behalf on social media including PEO's President, Registrar and CEO, chapter executives, and designated staff and spokespeople.

Strategic communications

PEO's communication is currently not guided by a formal strategy and plan, and based on interviews with staff, has not in recent memory been aligned with the organization's strategic guiding principles. However, a comprehensive communications strategy that considers and incorporates this audit's findings and recommendations is planned with the goal of achieving alignment with the organization's strategies and direction.

Currently, PEO develops communication strategies to drive messaging, tactics, and timelines for specific key initiatives, such as elections. These strategies, while helpful for message deployment, typically lack measurable objectives to ensure success and impact.

Recent social media calendars and analytic documents that track website engagement, emails, and social media, demonstrate an increasing commitment to strategic communications

PEO maintains regional chapters, which are viewed as a "home base" for engagement between the organization and licence holders. Each chapter maintains its own website, some have a social media presence to update members, and many deliver presentations and host local events.

There is a dedicated PEO chapter office website, chapters.peo.on.ca, that provides resources and guidance to support local chapters in their communication efforts. The website includes various policies and procedures, including social media best practices and a communications policy, which encourages chapters to generate local media coverage, engage with elected officials and interact with external stakeholders. Only designated personnel may engage media.

Digital communications approach

PEO's websites

peo.on.ca

PEO provides several online resources for the public to obtain important consumer protection information. Its main website provides information about PEO, the regulatory process including a public register, information on filing a complaint and more.

For licence holders, applicants, and volunteers, the website provides resources and guidance, comprehensive information on the licensing processes, PEAK, volunteer opportunities, and key initiatives. The current website was last redeveloped in 2019.

The site CMS is Drupal, it is integrated with Google Analytics and includes links to:
- PEO directory
- PEO portal
- Engineering Dimensions magazine
- Social media platforms (LinkedIn, Facebook, X, YouTube)
- Chapter websites

The site also includes a link to the PEO portal, an online platform that facilitates applications for licensure, licence renewals, fee payments and more.

Public directory

By statute, PEO maintains a public register of licence holders. The register is an important regulatory tool to communicate vital information about licence holders including actions taken against them by the regulator.

PEO refers to the register as the directory, a searchable tool to verify the credentials and status of licence holders, EITs, certificate of authorization holders and consulting engineer designees.

Chapter websites

All chapters have their own designated websites. Their URLS are consistent including the region followed by the peo.on.ca (e.g., ottawa.peo.on.ca) however the site design and structure differs.

Eblasts

PEO delivers mass emails, or eblasts, to communicate important updates and regulatory changes. Typically, these emails are distributed to all licence holders, regardless of their practicing status. The organization uses Campaigner, an email marketing platform to develop, manage and distribute their eblasts.

Engineering Dimensions magazine

This is PEO's official publication, mandated by Section 9 of the Act[2]. *Engineering Dimensions* aims to provide information relevant to the practice of professional engineering and ensure that all important updates, notices, and decisions are communicated to licence holders.

Engineering Dimensions is a digital publication, is published quarterly. Past and current issues are accessible on PEO's website, and on the digital publishing platform, Issuu.

The publication is comprehensive, and the length varies from 40 to more than 60 pages. It typically includes some of the following sections and information:
- Editor's note
- President's message
- CEO/Registrar's report
- PEO news
- Summaries of decisions and reasons (also referred to as "the blue pages")

- Advertisements
- PEAK information
- Governance updates
- PEO Council updates
- Feature articles
- Bulletin board (events, podcasts, publications and more)

Social media

PEO maintains a social presence on:

- Facebook
- LinkedIn
- X
- YouTube

PEO's corporate social accounts are created and overseen by the communications department. The department tracks social media metrics including following, impressions, clicks, engagement rate and shares through their digital analytics tracking document.

PEO maintains an active presence on social media with posts focused on new regulations, policy changes, and important announcements relevant to professional engineers in Ontario (e.g., PEAK and the implementation of mandatory Continuing Professional Development (CPD) requirements). They also share relevant organizational news (e.g., office closures, job opportunities), information regarding licensing requirements and more.

PEO's Corporate Social Media Policy[3] allows designated representatives to publish content on PEO-branded and other social media platforms to engage and serve those interested in PEO and the engineering profession. The following individuals can publish on behalf of PEO:

- PEO President
- PEO Registrar
- Designated issue-specific spokespeople
- Designated PEO staff
- PEO chapter executives

Chapters can create and maintain their own PEO-branded accounts. Some chapters utilize social media (e.g., Ottawa chapter's Facebook https://www.facebook.com/OttawaPEO/) although they post infrequently. These accounts are managed by Chapter executives and must adhere to the corporate social media policy.

Traditional media

PEO prepares media messaging and FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions) in advance for key initiatives as it is best practice to ensure key messages and information are readily available and approved by leadership. The communications manager is the media contact and is identified on all PEO press releases.

The communications policy outlines the designated spokespeople, individuals authorized to represent PEO, including the President, Vice Presidents, and the Registrar/CEO. These spokespeople can delegate media responsibilities as required to support responsiveness.

PEO garners notable media coverage, specifically in response to enforcement notices on the use of a professional engineer's seal; and in 2023 there was significant media coverage focused on the removal of the Canadian experience requirement for licensure.

PEO branding

Brand messaging

PEO's brand messaging includes its mission statement to regulate and advance the practice of professional engineering to protect the public interest. It also includes its vision, to be a trusted leader in professional self-regulation.

Visual identiity

PEO's logo is a key component of its visual identity as it was created some 30 years ago. It is used across communication channels to ensure brand recognition. PEO also has an established colour palette of blue and white and some secondary colours are used including grey and neutral tones. The organization typically uses sans-serif fonts such as Arial.

Brand guidelines

PEO has a graphic standards manual from 1994 outlining the organization's visual identity, including the logo, official colours and typography, use of the organization's name, stationary standards and more.

The organization also maintains a more recent, 2017 PEO Editorial Style Guide guiding PEO's editorial style, abbreviations, and grammar.

ENGAGEMENT

I. Stakeholder engagement

We collected insights and feedback from a variety of PEO stakeholders to ensure their needs and perspectives were reflected through this audit report. We gathered feedback through one-on-one meetings, surveys, and focus groups. The engagement process helped us identify PEO's external communication strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities.

Stakeholder mapping

We met with senior leadership at PEO in a stakeholder mapping exercise to determine organizations and individuals to engage in this consultation process. This exercise helped us gain a comprehensive understanding of who PEO's stakeholders are and their importance to the organization's communication efforts. It also helped to inform our stakeholder engagement approaches as we aimed to ensure our methods aligned with the level of stakeholder influence and interest.

The parties involved in the consultation and evaluation process were selected based on the stakeholder assessment that was conducted.

Stakeholder engagement methods

After conducting the comprehensive stakeholder identification exercise to further understand stakeholders and their level of influence and interest, we collaborated with PEO to map the recommended engagement approaches for the purpose of informing the audit. We aimed to ensure that our engagement efforts were strategically focused and efficient.

We worked with PEO's Directors of Communications and External Relations to streamline the list of stakeholders, focusing on collecting quality feedback while maintaining our 360-degree audit approach.

II. Stakeholder feedback (internal)

Consultations and focus groups

We consulted with PEO's Council and staff (internal stakeholders).The following are key messages and takeaways extrapolated from each internal stakeholder group:

PEO Council

1. *Engineering Dimensions* magazine

- Considerable concern was expressed about the magazine's transition from print to digital publication. A longstanding traditional asset mailed to licence holders, PEO's decision to produce a digital-only version, in line with PEO's commitment to modernize, has caused concern from licence holders who prefer hardcopy issues.

- Council also noted the need to implement surveys and tracking engagement metrics to continuously improve the magazine's relevance.

- Council recommended that PEO communications explore the possibility of offering both a print and digital format of Engineering Dimensions.

2. Need for greater transparency in PEO's communications

- Transparency in PEO's communications was a common theme that emerged through our conversations with Council. Council raised concerns noting that important information on why decisions were made is not always fully communicated to licence holders.

3. Difference of opinions about PEO's role as a regulator

- There was considerable conversation about the role of PEO, and several members of Council steadfastly asserted the existence of and need for PEO to advocate on behalf of the profession, citing an overlap of mandate and responsibilities with OSPE.

Senior leadership

1. Need for significant website improvements

- The website is a considerable communication weakness as highlighted by leadership and revisions are needed so the content is clear, concise, and reinforces PEO's regulatory role to support PEO's digital transformation efforts.

2. Weakness in messaging about PEO

- There's notable misalignment of internal and external communications that is contributing to significant stakeholder confusion regarding PEO's mandate, mission, vision and values.

3. Misalignment of communications and external relations divisions

- There is a need to clearly define the roles of PEO's communications and external relations divisions and establish processes for ongoing and meaningful collaboration.

4. Confusion surrounding PEO's public interest mandate

- Communication with licence holders needs to continue to reinforce PEO's public interest role and regulatory changes. Public communication is also critical to building trust and credibility, reinforcing PEO's work as a modern and transparent regulator.

5. Need to prioritize strategic communications

- PEO's communication needs to be more strategic and integrated with the organization's policy work and external relations efforts. Aiming for a more integrated, measurable communications approach will improve the effectiveness of PEO's communication strategy.

Communications staff

1. Need for increased communications to the public

- Staff stated that 80% of current communication is directed towards licence holders and applicants, with limited public communication. A balanced approach to communications with greater focus on public communication is necessary to support PEO's commitment to modernization. They also identified that there is a need to diversify communication channels to increase reach to the public.

2. Need for a crisis communications plan

- Staff cited the needs for more plans in communications including a crisis plan. At present, crises are managed reactively without the benefit of set guidelines and processes.

3. Need to improve chapter engagement

- To ensure alignment with PEO HQ, there is a need to improve engagement with chapters. Opportunities exist to provide chapters with consistent messaging on issues, monitor chapter communications to ensure alignment, and limit advocacy influenced communication.

4. Recognize the importance of diversity and inclusion in communications

- With an increasing diversity of applicants and licence holders, there is a need to develop communications materials accordingly. While attention to diversity is evident in graphics within publications, written communications should be simpler.

5. Time to be bold

- The communications team expressed eagerness to lead in communications, take risks, be bold, and try new things.

Additional PEO staff

1. Internal communication is impacting external communication

- There are internal communication challenges impacting PEO's external communication. Staff highlighted confusion and not always being aware of what has been communicated externally.

2. Improve diversity in PEO's communication

- PEO should aim to ensure inclusive language and clear, concise communication that considers the diversity of backgrounds among stakeholders.

3. Stakeholder confusion and negative perceptions

- There's notable stakeholder frustration as cited by staff due to slow response times, confusing website content and the need for clear explanations. Without clear, timely communication, stakeholder frustration and confusion will continue to exacerbate the negative perceptions of PEO. PEO's regulatory communications should aim to explain the "what" but also the "why" to help improve stakeholder understanding and if needed, improve compliance.

III. Stakeholder feedback (external)

Applicants

1. Lack of responsiveness

- Applicants are not confident in PEO's ability to oversee the profession due to its lack of responsiveness. Many applicants cited considerable confusion in the application process with limited resources for supports available.

2. Enhance international applicant communication

- Applicants trained outside Ontario and whose first language is not English struggle to comprehend PEO's communications.

3. Misunderstanding of PEO's role

- Most applicants (62%) believe that the role of PEO is to regulate and serve as the voice of the profession.

Engineering interns (EITs)

1. Strategically communicate change
- EIT feedback underscores the need for PEO to communicate change strategically. To ensure understanding and buy-in during key changes, like licensing process changes, PEO should implement a communication strategy providing multiple touch points for communications with impacted stakeholder groups.

2. Lack of responsiveness

- EITs are frustrated with the delays in receiving responses to their inquiries and applications. Many reported waiting for weeks or even months without any communication from PEO.

Employers

1. Enhance communication for employers

There is a small gap in how PEO engages with employers, who may require more targeted or relevant communication.

2. **Include communication about limited licence**

There is a strong emphasis on acknowledging all licence types, including limited licence holders, highlighting how PEO should aim to communicate and clarify this licence type.

III. Consultations with other stakeholders

Committee members

1. Need for PEO to clarify its regulatory role

- Much more could be accomplished if PEO clarifies its role as a regulator to volunteers and other stakeholders.

2. Enhance engagement

- Ensure the delivery of clearer and more timely information to licence holders.

Chapter leaders

1. Need for PEO to clarify its regulatory role

- The role of PEO is not clear, and it creates confusion at the chapter level that limits effective communication to licence holders.

2. Need for PEO to clarify its relationship with chapters

- Chapter leaders are eager to participate and support PEO and welcome the opportunity for further discussion to determine a modernized scope of work.

3. Collaborate to create and maintain communication with licence holders

- Chapter leaders can collaborate with PEO HQ to create and deploy consistent and effective messaging to licence holders.

Associations

1. "Regulate, don't advocate"

- PEO needs to adopt messaging that clearly identifies itself as the regulator of the profession. Advocacy roles, the role of associations, should cease to end public, licence holders, and other stakeholder confusion.

2. Increase communication with the public

- PEO's communication to the public is limited to demonstrate itself as the authority mandated to protect the public interest.

3. Continue proactive stakeholder engagement

- When significant changes occur to licensing rules or PEO's operations, a strategic communications plan should be created and followed – and perhaps shared with associations to ensure maximum reach.

Licence holder survey

To gain further insight into PEO's external communications, the regulator's 90,000 licence holders were invited to participate in a survey.

Below are the key messages we received from respondents:

Licence holders

1. Confusion about PEO's role

- Considerable disagreement and confusion exist about PEO's role. Some survey respondents criticize the regulator for failing to uphold its advocacy mandate (noting it does not have one), and others strongly believe that PEO should be more vocal about its single-mandate obligation.

License holders cont'd.

2. Chapter communications misrepresenting PEO's role

- PEO chapters' tendency to advocate may be confusing licence holders. Some survey respondents suggested that chapters should be moved to OSPE to align their intentions and enable PEO to focus on regulation.

3. Room to improve and enhance communication channels

- Email: PEO should consider exploring segmenting email communication, particularly based on practising status, to ensure emails remain relevant.

- Social media: Licence holders, particularly newer licence holders, prefer receiving updates and information from PEO on LinkedIn.

- Website: The website's navigation is highly complex and outdated. Respondents suggest improving the site's user experience and interface to improve its effectiveness.

4. Balancing print and digital communication for accessibility

The digitization of Engineering Dimensions has caused concerns. Many licence holders, especially self-declared older licence holders, emphasize the importance of the print version.

As an organization striving to modernize, embracing limitations of licence holders should be recognized. Aging licence holders, especially, see value in printed copies for ease of reading and comprehension.

5. Confusion around PEAK

PEO's PEAK program requirements are confusing. Communication can be improved by clarifying requirements, mandatory activities, and deadlines.

6. Bilingual communication

Non-native English-speaking licence holders would prefer a bilingual website and other communications from PEO in English and French.

ANALYSIS

I. Channel analysis

We evaluated PEO's primary communication channels by examining a combination of quantitative metrics and qualitative feedback. We analyzed data provided by PEO, including website analytics, email open and click-through rates and other platform-specific analytics. We also gathered direct feedback through the comprehensive stakeholder survey and structured focus groups with staff, Council, and key external stakeholders and leveraged MDR's knowledge of best practices in regulatory communications.

PEO website

PEO provided us with their 2023 digital analytics, including a compilation of website, email and social media analytics. It included four months of the website's top pages based on views and unique visitors.

Our analysis examines the PEO website as a channel inclusive of the portal and directory noting that the portal and directory are used as communication tools integrated with the website:

Regulatory communications content

- Comprehensive regulatory information on licensing, CPD, and professional standards.
- The site is regularly updated with discipline decisions, news related to key initiatives and changes, and press releases.
- There are multiple department email contacts available (complaints, applicants, financial services etc.). There are limited direct staff emails.
- PEO's phone numbers are easily accessible through contact page including toll free and enforcement hotline.
- There is access to multiple learning modules on a variety of topics including how PEO regulates.

- There are searchable FAQs to support answers to common inquiries.
- There is a section linked in navigation dedicated to public protection outlining how PEO serves and protects the public interest.
- The 'About' information section including direct links to the Act, strategic plan, and Council information.
- Link on homepage to PEO's directory.

Performance metrics

- High engagement on key pages like the homepage, directory, and application process.
- Slight decrease in views from August to October, followed by an increase in November, indicating possible seasonal fluctuations related to renewal season.
- Second most preferred channel by stakeholders for PEO updates and information.

Usability, navigation and interactivity

- Navigation and layout issues, especially for international applicants.
- The site is text-heavy and can be challenging to find relevant information quickly.
- Website was described by most stakeholders as disorganized and difficult to navigate.
- The site is integrated with social platforms.
- The site is responsive.
- The site uses photos but there are limited visual aids like graphics or process maps to outline key processes.

ACHIEVEMENTS

- High website traffic.
- Notable visits to the PEO directory.
- Central information hub.
- Second most preferred channel for stakeholders seeking PEO updates and information
- Includes comprehensive, extensive information.
- High engagement on key pages like the become a professional engineer page.
- Integration of the PEO directory and portal.
- Is a hub for PEO-related information so stakeholder scan access information from a single platform.
- Responsive on desktop and mobile.
- Clearly outlined website policies and terms of use.
- Links to other key communication channels including PEO's social platforms.

CHALLENGES

- Navigation with users reporting difficulties accessing relevant information.
- Described as overly text heavy.
- Lacking bilingual or multilingual support.
- Limited usage of key web analytics to optimize the site and inform communication strategies.
- Limited insights into website accessibility compliance.
- Some stakeholders, particularly older demographics, may resist change and PEO's digital transformation efforts.
- Poor user experience and navigation issues lead to stakeholder frustration.
- Advances in technology and user experience expectations advance quickly. PEO needs to regularly update the site to avoid the risk of falling behind modern standards.

Effectiveness rating ★ ★ ★ ★ ☆

PEO eblasts

We reviewed and analyzed stakeholder feedback, PEO's digital analytics document outlining performance metrics, and a sample of ten emails focused on a variety of key initiatives and changes including practice guidelines, Council elections, PEO's centennial celebrations, public consultations on equity, approval of anti-racism policies, changes to PEO's licensing processes, and PEAK/CPD report reminders.

We reviewed email content for clarity, consistency, tone, structure, alignment of focus with PEO's mission, vision, values and overall best practices in email communication including clear calls to action (CTA) as applicable, and effective use of links:

Alignment with PEO's mandate
- The emails are regulatory focused as they communicate regulatory requirements and compliance deadlines, provide updates on key organizational initiatives and changes and offer resources and information to licence holder professional development.

Clarity, structure, and design
- Most emails were clear and concise, providing essential information in a straightforward manner.
- Some emails were text-heavy (e.g., public consultation on ARE[WU1] code and licensing process change email).
- The emails followed a logical flow, starting with key information and including relevant links for further details.
- The emails subject lines and introductory paragraphs establish the context for the email content.
- Some emails included banners with a simple photo (e.g., voting credentials email) while most others included a header with text indicating the focus of the email, either Regulatory or News.
- Most emails included PEO's logo, however some did not.
- Stakeholder feedback highlighted that the content is generally clear but there is noted room for improvement by making emails more concise and visually appealing.

Voice and tone
- The tone was generally formal and informative.
- The voice of the emails was professional and authoritative.
- Some stakeholder feedback suggested that PEO utilize a more engaging and personalized tone.

Stakeholder preferences

- Stakeholders said they prefer email to receive updates and information from PEO.
- Stakeholders highlighted a desire for more personalized emails.
- Most stakeholders were satisfied with the frequency of the emails.
- Staff and external stakeholder highlighted the need to segment emails (e.g., practising vs non-practising engineers) to ensure they remain relevant.

Performance metrics

- Email open rates and click-through rates indicate strong engagement.
- Emails with regulatory updates generally had higher engagement rates.

ACHIEVEMENTS

- Emails align with PEO's mandate and communicate regulatory requirements.
- Engagement rates including open rates.
- Consistent voice and tone.
- Frequency of emails.
- Utilized as a primary channel which aligns with stakeholder preferences
- Links to other key communication channels including PEO's social platforms.

CHALLENGES

- Some emails are text-heavy, which can impact readability and engagement.
- Not all emails consistently include PEO's logo.
- Limited use of visual elements and graphics, making some emails less engaging.
- Formal tone which may be perceived as impersonal.
- Stakeholders report becoming overwhelmed from content overload or over emailing leading to lower email engagement.
- Digital communication changes and expectations.
- Stakeholder resistance to change.

Effectiveness rating ★★★☆☆

Social media

PEO utilizes LinkedIn, X (formerly Twitter) and Facebook to share updates and information with stakeholders, primarily focused on mandatory CPD (PEAK), promoting job opportunities, events, links to the magazine's articles. PEO maintains a YouTube channel for video upload and sharing.

In addition to the 2023 social media metrics shared in the digital analytics document, we reviewed the corporate social media policy, the organization's profiles and related stakeholder feedback.

LinkedIn as a primary platform
- LinkedIn is PEO's most active platform, with a steady increase in followers across the months examined. By November 2023, PEO had 51,929 followers, gaining over 1,000 new followers each month.
- LinkedIn is primarily used for professional and regulatory updates, communicating primarily to engineering professionals and related engineering stakeholders.
- Stakeholders acknowledged PEO's active presence on social media, particularly on LinkedIn.
- Stakeholder said they prefer LinkedIn as the top social platform for receiving updates and information from PEO.

Facebook and X
- PEO has an active presence on X and as of November 2023, PEO had 4,184 followers.
- Facebook had a similar number of followers at 4,470 followers.
- X had modest growth, gaining 21 to 30 new followers per month. Facebook growth was similar.
- Engagement rates were lower on these platforms compared to LinkedIn.
- Some licence holders suggested PEO explore other platforms like Instagram to reach younger demographics.

Frequency and timing
- PEO follows a consistent posting schedule across its social media platforms.
- PEO posts several times a week, with more frequent updates on LinkedIn and X compared to Facebook.
- Posts are strategically timed to maximize visibility and engagement.

Multimedia content
- Across all platforms, PEO utilizes images and videos to support their messaging,
- Visuals include stock imagery, some as graphics with text, event photos, and video content (e.g., PEAK video).

Social media

Social media policy
- The communications department manages corporate PEO accounts, while chapters may manage their own accounts with the PEO manager as a co-administrator.
- The policy references obsolete social platforms (MySpace), no reference to current platforms like Instagram and TikTok.
- States that content must be accurate, clear, topical, and relevant. Content should reflect PEO's official position on issues.

Relevance and alignment of content
- Stakeholders recommended that PEO leverage social media to enhance public understanding of its mandate and emphasize its role in public protection.
- PEO's social profiles all clearly state the organization's regulatory role.
- PEO's social content shares regulatory updates and licensing process updates.
- The content is educational, highlighting professional standards and ethical practices and the overall importance of maintaining high standards within the engineering profession.
- The content is aligned with the organization's current strategic goals. Notably, there is content that focuses on:
    - Providing updates and highlighting changes to licensing processes, demonstrating PEO's commitment to improvement in this area.
    - Providing governance updates and information on consultations or policy changes, supporting PEO's efforts to implement continuous governance improvements.

ACHIEVEMENTS

- LinkedIn as a primary platform.
- LinkedIn aligns with a professional audience and is appropriate for PEO to share key updates and information.
- Stakeholders prefer LinkedIn as PEO's primary social platform.
- Regular posts.
- Appropriate timing of posts.
- Use of multimedia content.

CHALLENGES

- Lack of a formal strategy clearly aligned with communications plan and organizational strategic goals.
- Limited reach.
- Lower engagement on X and Facebook.
- Outdated social media policy.
- Changes in social media platforms and stakeholder preferences.
- Algorithm changes impacting visibility.

Effectiveness rating ★ ★ ★ ☆ ☆

Engineering Dimensions magazine

Engineering Dimensions is PEO's widely recognized publication, and one of PEO's dedicated communication channels. It aims to share information relevant to the practice of professional engineering and promote awareness of the Act and PEO's activities.

 We examined PEO's 2023 issues (Winter, Spring, Summer, Fall), available analytics and stakeholder feedback including:
- 2020 Reader Survey Analysis [4]
- 2023 Digital Edition Analytics
- 2017-2020 Survey Comparative
- 2023 professional practice matters survey

Compared to PEO's other primary channels, PEO collects in-depth analytics and feedback to help evaluate and assess its effectiveness as a channel:

Readership and engagement

- PEO shifted to a digital only publication, however, 2020 survey data highlighted a total audience of 117,376, with a print circulation of 19,311.
- In 2020, most readers were male with a significant portion being over the age of 60.
- Analytics based on the digital version show significant engagement, with unique page views averaging 273,117 per edition and an average time spent of over 4 minutes per visit.
- Email distribution for the digital edition shows consistent open rates averaging approximately 28.26%.[5]

Content quality and relevance

- PEO's reader surveys highlighted that a high percentage of readers find the articles well-written (98%), understandable (98%), and informative (97%). This was an improvement from reader feedback in 2017.
- Reader survey respondents praised the magazine for having a good balance between visuals and editorial content (96%) and attractive covers (96%) that encourage readership.
- Reader survey respondents highlighted key areas of interest including professional practice issues, ethics, environmental issues, and technical topics such as new technology and career-related issues.
- Audit stakeholders highlighted the need for more valuable content in the magazine, including success stories, technical updates, and features on new engineering disciplines and projects.

- There was a call for the magazine to better communicate the value and impact of PEO's work, particularly in promoting transparency.
- Association stakeholders said the magazine sometimes blurs the lines between regulatory focus and advocacy, contributing to confusion about PEO's role versus OSPE's role. They emphasized that the magazine needs to clearly communicate PEO's regulatory role.
- Audit survey respondents agreed that the magazine provides information that is relevant to professional engineering.

Impact and actions

- Reader survey respondents said they frequently visit websites (50%), discuss content with colleagues (37%), and investigate or purchase products mentioned in the magazine (35%).
- Staff said the magazine is impactful and recognizable as a PEO communication channel.

Transition to digital

- Many stakeholders, particularly PEO Council members and licence holders, expressed their preference for the print version of Engineering Dimensions.
- Council also recommended exploring the option of offering both print and digital versions of the magazine to accommodate varying preferences.
- Licence holders frequently highlighted concerns with the magazine's reach and accessibility.
- There was notable resistance to the shift to digital, and Council said they felt excluded from the decision-making process regarding this shift. Council also stressed the importance of involving licence holders and using the magazine as a platform to foster open dialogue and build trust.

ACHIEVEMENTS	CHALLENGES
- Wide reach and engagement. - Well-known PEO communication channel and recognized brand. - Quality content. - Good balance of visuals and editorial content, overall attractive design. - Solid foundation of in-depth analytics and reader survey insights.	- Resistance to digital-only format. - Concerns about digital accessibility. - Confusion about magazine's role in communicating PEO's regulatory mandate. - Resistance to change as PEO updates the publication to ensure it aligns with digital communication expectations.

Effectiveness rating ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Media relations

A critical ingredient to protect and manage the organization's brand, effective media relations and monitoring practices provide the necessary baseline for proactive engagement, social listening, and media relationship building and management. We sought resources to evaluate PEO's use of the following:

Media Monitoring services

- PEO does not currently utilize media monitoring and social listening as proactive tools to monitor its brand and reputation.

Crisis communications plan

- PEO does not have a crisis communication plan
- PEO does not provide media training to its spokespeople

Communications policies

- PEO's Communications Policy was last updated in April 2012.

Standard boilerplate explaining the role of PEO
- There is no recognizable boilerplate explaining the mandate and role of PEO for the organization and stakeholders to express.

Relationship with the press
- There is no evidence that PEO has a proactive relationship with media.

ACHIEVEMENTS	CHALLENGES
• Strongly expressed desire by the communications department to build a strong media relations plan. • The need for media relations has been expressed in the communications department's draft communications strategy.	• Established media monitoring services. • Crisis communications plan. • Wide ranging communications policies to protect the brand. • PEO has no relationship with the press.

Effectiveness rating ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Chapter communication

PEO chapters are a communication channel that function as mediums through which PEO can convey messages and information to professional engineers, applicants and EITs within specific regions.

Chapters have dedicated websites with varying levels of information, providing local chapter information and resources for engineers within the 36 chapters. Some chapters manage social media accounts to share information with their members.

We had limited insights into the inner workings of these chapter websites and social platforms as they are not managed hands-on by PEO's communication team. However, we aimed to broadly examine chapters as a communication channel and their effectiveness in supporting PEO's regulatory communications.

Stakeholder confusion

The role of PEO chapters and their alignment with PEO's mandate is not clearly communicated. This lack of clarity poses the risk of stakeholder confusion and inconsistent messaging. Without clearly communicated alignment, chapters may not consistently reflect and communicate PEO's regulatory objectives.

Decentralized communication

Chapters may unintentionally share outdated, inaccurate, or conflicting information, which can confuse stakeholders and in turn damage PEO's credibility. It would be burdensome for PEO's communication team to manage 36 separate websites and additional social media channels effectively.

To leverage chapters as a channel, PEO must ensure that they have the correct messaging, support, guidance, and dedicated oversight. This includes providing clear, updated communication policies, regular training, and resources to maintain consistent and accurate information across all chapter platforms.

ACHIEVEMENTS	CHALLENGES
- Chapters can be an effective vehicle to increase the reach of PEO's communications. - Chapter personnel are eager to communicate. - Licence holders trust chapters.	- No communications plan. - Chapters wrongly promote that PEO has an advocacy role. - Chapter websites are ineffective. - Limited communication from PEO HQ.

Effectiveness rating ★★☆☆☆

II. Content and message analysis

We reviewed PEO's external communications comprehensively and provided a high-level overview of message consistency, clarity, language and terminology, visual identity, and voice and tone below:

Message consistency

- Consistency is noted in some communications department-driven messaging. However, no organization-wide messaging guideline exists.
- There is no boilerplate (agreed upon language to describe) messaging about PEO, its mandate, and role.

Message clarity

- Depending on the topic, PEO's communications tend to be quite complex and written with a legal lens. This causes confusion for the audience whose first language is not English or have other challenges with comprehension.

Language and terminology

- PEO struggles to adopt relevant regulatory vernacular when it comes to describing the regulator and its role. This language misuse is confusing to registrants, the public, and other stakeholders. For example, the Professional Engineers Act refers to PEO as the "Association" and licence holders as "members". This language is a legacy of PEO's prior combined advocacy and regulatory role, and our research conclusively demonstrates language is a contributing factor to widespread confusion about the role of the regulator.

Voice and tone

- Our engagement with stakeholders suggests PEO' voice is perceived as authoritative, unfriendly, and unwelcoming. This contradicts PEO's commitment to become a modern and leading regulator that is trusted.

III. SWOT analysis

We conducted a SWOT analysis following the comprehensive evaluation of PEO's communications. The Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats below are based on our review, stakeholder feedback, and the pillars and principles of the MDR Regulatory Communications Evaluation Scorecard.

- Strengths indicate well performing aspects of PEO communications.
- Weaknesses identify underperformance that requires actionable steps for correction.
- Opportunities are identified solutions to further build on strengths and address weaknesses to improve overall performance of PEO communications.
- Threats are serious challenges, typically out of PEO communications control, that require a structural adjustment of the organization. Unaddressed, the threats can pose a risk to the organization's reputation and sustainability.

The complete SWOT Analysis diagram follows this page.

STRENGTHS

- Dedicated, well-trained communications team.
- Strong regulatory communications leadership.
- Engineering Dimensions as a recognized and respected communication channel.
- High email open rates.
- High engagement with key web pages.
- Growing LinkedIn channel.
- Recognition of importance of strategic communication.
- Commitment by senior leadership to modernize regulatory communications.
- Acknowledgment of limits to and deficits in regulatory communications excellence.
- Established social media channels and presence.
- PEO is well known. The foundation of its brand is solid.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Leverage CEO/Registrar's thought leadership in communications.
- Develop segmented, targeted communication to addresses specific stakeholder needs.
- Leverage the public directory.
- Implementing regulatory communications education for staff, Council, and volunteers to ensure understanding and message alignment.
- Provide media training to spokespersons.
- Introduce social listening and media monitoring tools.
- Leverage data and communication metrics.
- Implement an EDI strategy in external communications.
- Create a highly effective and efficient relationships with chapters to optimize stakeholder communications.
- Enhance visual communication (graphics to convey complex processes, videos etc.).
- Introduce bilingual communications.

WEAKNESSES

- Website navigation, clarity of content and overall user-experience.
- Lack of understanding of the role of PEO.
- Limited understanding of the regulator's "public".
- Lack of clarity of the role of PEO chapters.
- Internal confusion and understanding roles and responsibilities (including communications vs external relations).
- Public directory is confusing.
- Lack of standardized communication responses or standard timeframe for responsiveness across the organization.
- Inconsistent language, terminology (using "association" to describe PEO) and messaging.
- Available data oftentimes not used for decision-making.
- Overreliance on email as a communication channel.
- Limited ability to communicate to/with diverse communications.
- Stakeholder disengagement.
- Reactive, ad hoc communication.
- No proactive media communications and relationship management.
- Unilingual communication.
- Limited engagement to students in universities – focus on Deans.
- No EDI lens on external communications.
- No streamlining chapter communications.
- Lack of updated, comprehensive communications policies.
- Lack of proactive strategic communications to stakeholders of PEO's changes and transformation activities.
- Disagreement about PEO's commitment to digitize (accepting Engineering Dimensions as a digital publication).

THREATS

- Limited public communication.
- Functional risks due to the absence of a crisis communications plan or procedures, leading to potential damage during emergencies or crises.
- Advancements in digital communication making it difficult for PEO to become a modern regulator.
- Organization-wide alignment on role of PEO, leading to confusion, anger, apathy, activism, and stakeholder frustration.
- Resistance to change from stakeholders accustomed to yesteryear.
- Misaligned chapter communications leading to inconsistent messaging and stakeholder confusion.
- Frustration from stakeholders about PEO's lack of proactive communications, leading to damaged relationships and trust.

IV. Comparative analysis

Several factors, namely legislation, demographics, performance measurements, the size of regulatory bodies, and the varying number of registrants prevent us from determining one specific organization to recognize as the best practice regulator from a communications perspective.

However, applying the pillars of the MDR Regulatory Communications Scorecard, we researched other Canadian regulatory bodies and determined the best in the following categories:

Pillar I: Communications infrastructure

Website excellence:

- College of Immigration and Citizenship Consultants
- College of Health and Care Professionals of British Columbia
- College of Complementary Health Professionals of British Columbia

Social media excellence:

- College of Opticians of Ontario
- Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers

Pillar II: Stakeholder identification and relationship management

The regulator specifically sought to identify stakeholders that have been historically overlooked/excluded such as equity deserving communities, and those most vulnerable:

- College of Health and Care Professionals of British Columbia
- College of Complementary Health Professionals of British Columbia
- Nova Scotia College of Social Workers

Pillar III: Communication channels

- Unable to identify best practices in licensing and professional regulation.

Pillar IV: Alignment with regulatory and communications trends and best practices

The regulator evaluates its communications
- College of Alberta Dental Assistants
- Professional Engineers Ontario

RECOMMENDATIONS

I. Recommendations and execution tactics

Based on our analyses of the organization's communications, we make the following recommendations to PEO. Each recommendation includes tactics to achieve success, and each tactic is aligned with one of the four pillars of the MDR Regulatory Communication Scorecard:

Recommendation 1: Clearly define PEO and its role

1.Create and adopt language that clearly describes PEO's legislative mandate and activities.	Include messaging in PEO external communications stating that PEO advocates for compliance and excellence in the profession but does not represent the interests of or serve as the voice of the engineering profession.
	Strive to amend language in the Professional Engineers Act, R.S.O. 1990 to replace "association" with relevant regulatory terminology.
	Clearly describe PEO and its role on the organization's website and in all external communications.
2. Adopt consistent language describing PEO and its role	Develop document on key messaging.
	Carry out pesentation coaching & media training for PEO's official spokespeople.
3. Engage chapters in promoting PEO, its mandate, and role	Develop communication plan with a goal to strengthen strategic alignment between PEO & chapters

Recommendation 2: Implement standard communication structures, protocols, and practices

1. Implement strategies to communicate to the public.	Determine your "public".
	Identify your public's preferred communication choices.
	Conduct a public protection marketing campaign to promote PEO, its mandate, and role.

2. Create and update necessary communications policies governing public relations, public affairs.	Communications & media policy
	Social media policy
	Accessible communications policy
	Canada Anti-Spam Law (CASL) policy
	AI policy

| 3. Establish crisis communications protocols. | Develop and test crisis communications plan. |
| | Coordinate media training (every two years) for PEO spokespersons. |

| 4. Refresh style guides. | Refresh brand guidelines. |
| | Produce style guidelines (to reflect accessible, inclusive and plain language principles). |

5. Create a formal working relationship with chapters.	Establish communication parameters by drafting necessary policies.
	Centralize websites on one site & manage in-house.
	Approve major external communications from chapters.
	Ban use of social media beyond sharing HQ's messages.

Recommendations

6. Include media monitoring in daily operations.	Subscribe to media monitoring platform for daily press and social media coverage reports.

7. Align communications strategy with PEO's next three-year strategic plan.	

Recommendation 3: Commit to greater openness and transparency

1. Strategically communicate change and transformation.	Establish a robust communication planning framework to strategically outline and implement key changes, ensuring clear, consistent, and transparent communication to prevent confusion, miscommunication, and mistrust among license holders and other stakeholders.
	Highlight the purpose, explaining how changes contribute to PEO's public protection mandate, provide examples of how the changes will enhance public safety, improve professional standards, or streamline processes.
	Emphasize how the changes align with PEO's mandate and align with strategic goals.
	Ensure that the information is accessible and easy to understand, avoiding technical jargon where possible.

2. Establish service standards.	Create realistic, but short response to reply to the public, licence holders, and all stakeholders, and encourage an organization-wide commitment to communication turnaround time.

3. Leverage associations to share PEO's messaging to licence holders.	Formalize working relationships to ensure messages are efficiently delivered to associations' stakeholders.

Recommendations

Recommendation 4: Support PEO's commitment to modernize

1. Communicate with an ongoing commitment to Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion.	Adopt plain language in all internal and external communications.
2. Recommit to producing a print version of *Engineering Dimensions* magazine.	Maintain a digital publication as the primary format and provide licence holders with an option to opt-in to receive a print version.
3. Develop a plan to communicate externally in both of Canada's official languages	Research the benefits of bilingual communication and draft an implementation plan
4. Adopt principles of kindness in regulation to improve tone in communication to licence holders.	
5. Commit to two-to-three-year plan to rebuild PEO's website.	

CONCLUSION

Final thoughts

The invitation to conduct a comprehensive review of PEO's communications underscores the organization's commitment to improvement and modernization.

This evaluation revealed strengths within the communications department and the organization while concurrently exposing challenges and obstacles. While some identified weaknesses are mild and require minimal action to correct, others are critical and significant intervention is needed.

Ultimately, the communications team is to be commended for its dedication, achievements, and perseverance in attaining new heights in public affairs and communications. While our analyses indicate that considerable work remains, we applaud what exists. Indeed, the PEO brand is well-known, and its stewardship is safe with this team. The current drafting of a strategic communications plan, the team's social media efforts, and the publication of *Engineering Dimensions* demonstrate a tiny slice of what the department can achieve.

Our concerns lie with the need for PEO to clearly articulate its mandate to licence holders, the public, and other stakeholders. While differences of opinions persist regarding advocacy, clarity is key. Building on the advice of Harry Cayton's report on PEO in 2018, it is crucial to focus on the sole mandate: to regulate and protect the public. It's absolute.

We are pleased to have included our proprietary regulatory communication scorecard, enabling us to identify achievements and gaps in the communications department's activities. We encourage a full second-round audit exclusively using the scorecard in one year to recognize achievements following this report.

We are grateful for the opportunity to collaborate with you on this critical project.

Thank you for your confidence in MDR Strategy Group.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Abbreviations

CEO   Chief Executive Officer

CPD   Continuing Professional Development

DEAR   Discover, Engage, Analyze, Report evaluation model

EIT   Engineer in Training

FARPACTA   Fair Access to Regulated Professions and Compulsory Trades Act

FAQ   Frequently Asked Questions

OSPE   Ontario Society of Professional Engineers

PEAK   Practice Evaluation and Knowledge

PEO   Professional Engineers Ontario

PEO HQ   Professional Engineers Ontario Headquarters

SWOT   Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats

Appendix B: Audit team

Collette Deschenes
Chief Auditor

Collette is MDR's Director, Communications Strategy and oversees all strategic and technical aspects of our client-facing deliverables.

In addition to providing strategic communications support to more than a dozen regulatory clients at MDR, Collette previously held communications roles at the Nova Scotia Barristers' Society, Nova Scotia College of Social Workers, and the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta.

Melissa Peneycad
Analyst and regulatory communications scorecard architect

Melissa is an internationally renowned designer of environmental and social impact evaluation methodologies, and a world leading authority in sustainable infrastructure. Currently MDR's Director of Public Engagement Strategy, she also serves as a member of Executive Board of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe's Working Party on Public-Private Partnerships, based in Geneva, Switzerland.

Nawaz Pirani
Stakeholder mapping, research, and analysis

Nawaz's professional background is overseeing complex human-centered design initiatives to solve complex multidimensional governance and operational challenges. He was MDR's Managing Director of Strategy and previously held roles at the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario and College of Massage Therapists of Ontario.

Daniel Roukema
Consultations, executive oversight, and quality assurance

Daniel is an award-winning and industry leading regulatory communications strategist recognized in Canada and abroad for his innovation and thought leadership. He is CEO of MDR Strategy Group and previously held senior roles at the Immigration Consultants of Canada Regulatory Council and the Real Estate Council of Ontario. He also led the establishment of communications units at the Condominium Authority of Ontario and the Condominium Management Regulatory Authority of Ontario.

Appendix C: Endnotes

(1) Professional Engineers Ontario. Communications Policy. April 11, 2014. https://chapters.peo.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Communications-Policy-App-A-Apr-11.pdf.

(2) Government of Ontario. Professional Engineers Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. P.28. https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/90p28.

(3) Professional Engineers Ontario. Corporate Social Media Policy. April 2015. https://chapters.peo.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/PEO-Corporate-Social-Media-Policy-2015.pdf.

(4) Survey conducted when PEO still circulated a small number of print magazines.

(5) Based on 2023 Digital Edition Analytics.

Appendix D: Bibliography

Government of Ontario. Professional Engineers Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. P.28. (1) Professional Engineers Ontario. Communications Policy. April 11, 2014. https://chapters.peo.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Communications-Policy-App-A-Apr-11.pdf.

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