

CIPR Specialist Diploma (Digital Communications)

Syllabus

The aim of the CIPR Specialist Diploma (Digital Communications) is to enable candidates to develop knowledge and expertise in how social media and digital communication are integrated into strategic public relations planning and management.

The CIPR Specialist Diploma (Digital Communications) will be of interest to PR practitioners working in public relations, corporate communication, marketing communication, internal communication, public affairs and media relations, who have experience or responsibility for digital communication, in consultancy or in-house, or in a related discipline within the strategic management framework. This qualification will equip the candidate with the knowledge and tools to contribute effectively to the organisation's strategic management of digital communication and social media, while meeting what is expected of an ethical practitioner in complex situations.

Candidates will research and develop ethical digital communication and social media management strategies and plans that assist organisations to enhance and protect their reputation and to achieve their strategic objectives.

Candidates would be awarded the CIPR Specialist Diploma (Digital Communications) on successful completion of the assessment.

Syllabus

The CIPR Specialist Diploma (Digital Communications) provides a sound theoretical and practical knowledge of digital communication management within the context of strategic public relations, based on an understanding of current and emerging technologies, digital strategies and social media platforms. It includes research and identification of strategic objectives, stakeholder relationship management, community building and management, content creation and curation tools, platform selection and principles of evaluation; all within the ethical practice of public relations.

An analytical perspective is applied to enable candidates to take a reflective approach in examining their own experience alongside case studies of organisations and scenarios.

Qualification objectives

Successful candidates will be able to:

1. Explore the disruptive and transformative impact of digital technologies on society, business, organisations and individuals:
 - Examine the effect of existing and emerging digital technologies on communications functions and operations including ethical implications and sustainable development of digital literacy and leadership capabilities.
 - Examine the impact of trends in digital communications usage including media convergence, citizen journalism, social media influencers and stakeholder activism on organizational communication.

- Use relevant frameworks, tools and techniques to analyse trends in online behaviour, media consumption, online user profiling, and the formation of network communities.
2. Understand the concepts and tools employed in strategic public relations planning with specific emphasis on the role of social media and digital communications management:
 - Examine the range of concepts, models and tools to research external and internal environments to identify stakeholders and influencers and the issues affecting an organisation;
 - Identify digital and social media tools, technologies, and platforms to improve stakeholder engagement, issues management and crisis responsiveness;
 - Explore how to develop and manage audience-centred content and the role of owned, third party and user-generated multimedia content.
 - Match communication strategies to specific platforms, technologies and channels (for example, Enterprise Social Networks).
 3. Manage, plan, monitor, measure and evaluate digital and social media activities and engagement with stakeholders and online communities, and consider legal and ethical implications:
 - Determine appropriate integrated digital communication management approaches across platforms and technologies (including resource requirements);
 - Assess relevant methods of evaluating digital communication strategies and plans (including outputs, outcomes, impact, data analytics, insights and reflective practice);
 - Critically reflect on privacy and security issues and legal responsibilities in areas such as online tracking, behavioural profiling, data protection, digital security, and social media usage;
 - Evaluate the ethical implications of the use of digital communications in developing, implementing and evaluating PR strategies and tactics.

Assessment: Executive report and summary situation analysis

Aim: To enable candidates to demonstrate competence in undertaking an analysis of a case study situation/issue.

Topic of inquiry:

Candidates will be required to evidence professional judgement in identifying a suitable case study as their chosen topic of inquiry. This could be based on the candidate's own organisation, a client, or another organisation of the candidate's choice that can be associated with social media and digital communication activities.

Before candidates start work on the assignment, tutors should discuss and agree topics. Some topics may involve matters that are strategically or commercially sensitive for the organisation concerned, in which case it is the responsibility of the candidate to obtain their agreement. It is acceptable to resolve confidentiality issues by using a fictitious name for a genuine organisation, so long as the tutor's approval has been gained before work on the assignments begins.

Submission: The assignment will comprise:

1. 3,000-word (+/- 10%) executive report comprising:
 - a) A clear and concise statement describing the case study situation/issue, justifying its relevance as a problem or opportunity facing a specific organisation and/or sector, and verifying that it can be addressed by a digital communications strategy;
 - b) Overview of the methodology, i.e. the approach, tools and techniques used to collect and analyse evidence regarding the situation and provide insight into its current or potential impact on the organisation and/or sector and its stakeholders;
 - c) Discussion and substantiation of the key findings and outcome of the research and analysis which will advise the development of a communications strategy. Where possible this should include a graphical representation of digital communications evaluation comprising both channels and engagement data, as well as the current and potential impact on the organisation and/or sector and stakeholders;
 - d) Analysis of the research and development of a digital communications strategy, which should form a substantial part of the report and include a set of measurable digital communications objectives (based on the findings and outcome of the research and analysis conducted) and a brief statement of how these objectives can be measured.
2. Supporting 2,000-word (+/- 10%) statement of reflection including critical examination and evaluation of:
 - The research methods (including digital tools and techniques) used to analyse and gain insight into the case study situation;
 - Concepts, models and frameworks relevant to digital communication and social media used to inform recommendations;
 - Ethical concerns and responsibilities that emerge for PR practitioners using digital communications and social media to address the case study situation.
3. A reference list of sources using an appropriate, consistent method of referencing.

Completion of the assignment involves the following activities:

- Reflection – candidates are required to use problem identification concepts and approaches to identify a relevant topic of inquiry. This will be a current issue of concern (or opportunity) for a specific organisation and/or sector, and may relate to the candidate's own experience.
- Fact finding – candidates are required to undertake data collection using a range of secondary research methods (literature, archives, published surveys, reports, etc.) to examine the chosen topic of inquiry.
- Insight – candidates are required to use a range of appropriate models, tools and methods to analyse the external and internal environment, the organisation or societal issue and relevant stakeholder groups.
- Communication – candidates are required to review and structure their analysis of a situation in the form of an executive report.

Example topics

- Increasing engagement with online patient support groups
- Establishing an effective social listening function
- Developing an online reputation management strategy

Word count

A substantive response to both Components is necessary to meet the requirements for a Pass.

The word count for each task, and the total word count, must be recorded in the appropriate spaces provided on the cover sheet and at the end of the relevant text in the main documents.

Bibliographies and footnotes, if any, are not included in the word count. Footnotes must not contain appendices or be used to include additional text that should have been in the main body of the work.

Candidates are allowed a +/- 10% leeway on the **total** word count for the assignment and must ensure they **DO NOT** exceed the +10% tolerance. Anything above this allowance will result in the indicative mark being reduced by one grade. No grading reduction will be implemented if they are below the -10% word tolerance but remember that it is very likely that the paper will fail because the tasks will not have been adequately addressed.

Referencing

Teaching centres must provide guidance to candidates on appropriate methods of referencing that are suitable for a business document.

Further information:

- CIPR Course Regulations
- CIPR Specialist Qualifications Student Handbook