



The Role of Integrated Communication in Business Growth

Implementing Strategies at SmartHop

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Gratitude and Dedication

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Introduction

Integrated communication is one of the most critical strategic guidelines in organizational communication. As marketers, we must take full advantage of these emerging technologies and recognize the importance of developing digital techniques to optimize marketing communication planning.

Unfortunately, not all organizations recognize or consider the importance of integrated communication strategies and their impact on organizational objectives. This project aims to improve the organization's communication processes by identifying weaknesses through evaluation and diagnosis. Following a case study approach, I will analyze integrated communication strategies and their role in business growth. To conduct this study, information was gathered on the Venezuelan-American company SmartHop, headquartered in Miami, USA. SmartHop is a mid-sized trucking software-as-a-service (SaaS) company that has been operating in the U.S. market for approximately seven years.

For this project, a qualitative research method was selected. Using this approach, we analyzed the company's current communication strategies, including social media publications, website management, internal employee portals, and internal communication tools, among others. Without disclosing confidential information, this project aims to enhance current processes to improve efficiency and achieve positive results in brand positioning and stakeholder relations, both internal and external.

Data were collected on the company's current communication strategies across two key areas of integrated communication, internal and external, with a specific emphasis on marketing/product communication. The main goals of this project are to identify key areas for improvement in the company's current strategy and design a proposal for enhancements to increase the company's positive brand perception, improve employee morale, and enhance key digital marketing performance indicators. Throughout this document, we will present a literature review to define key concepts relevant to the project. This will be followed by a description of the selected methodology and the development of an integrated communication plan proposal. The proposal will include recommended procedures and visual representations of previously developed processes. Finally, the document will conclude with key insights and reflections on the project's development.

Keywords:

Digital Marketing, Integrated marketing communication, Internal communication, institutional communication.

Literature review

Marketing concept and evolution: From Marketing 1.0 to Marketing 6.0

Marketing has evolved from a transactional, distribution-focused concept into a comprehensive, strategic function central to organizational success. Initially rooted in economic theory, it has expanded over the last century through various schools of thought to include consumer behavior, social exchange, and integrated communication. Scholars like Kotler emphasize a holistic marketing approach, where all business functions align to create and deliver value. In the digital era, marketing must not only build strong stakeholder relationships but also communicate value consistently across channels, making integration and technology essential components of modern strategy.

For a long time, various academics have studied the evolutionary path of marketing, analyzing the changes it has undergone since it was formally recognized as a discipline. Based on the literature, we can affirm that marketing has evolved rapidly and is closely tied to digital advancements and technological developments.

Philip Kotler and other authors introduced one of the most significant studies that systematically explains the evolution of marketing and its emerging practices. Kotler was the first to outline the evolution of marketing from a perspective focused on its changing priorities.

The journey began with Marketing 1.0, which, as defined by Kotler et al. (2017), was product-centric. In this phase, companies focused on creating products and services that offered superior value to their competitors. During this stage, the famous 4Ps of marketing were also introduced: Product, Price, Promotion, and Place (Kotler et al., 2023; Lozada Contreras & Zapata Ramos, 2016). With the emergence of Marketing 2.0 in the mid-1960s and 1970s, the focus shifted towards consumer behavior studies. Understanding market segmentation and identifying target audiences became crucial. The product was no longer the sole priority; companies began to conduct a deep analysis of their potential customers (Kotler et al., 2023). The arrival of the new millennium, coupled with the financial crisis and the rise of Generation Y (born between 1981 and 1996), led to the emergence of Marketing 3.0. Increased access to information made previous approaches insufficient. Consumers began demanding that companies make a positive societal impact. In response, businesses started integrating values, ethics, and social responsibility into their marketing strategies (Kotler et al., 2023).

The following three phases of this project, starting with Marketing 4.0, are fundamental. These stages introduce us to new marketing practices during the digital era, along with the usage of digital tools, artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and other key technologies that enable marketers to establish a competitive advantage.

Marketing 4.0 emerged in the mid-2010s, driven by the rapid advancement of technology. With greater access to digital tools, social media, and e-commerce, businesses began digitizing their operations. The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated this transformation, compelling companies to adopt digital channels to remain viable. The arrival of Marketing 4.0 is particularly significant as it marks the transition from traditional marketing practices to a relatively new digital marketing approach (Kotler et al., 2017). Organizations began leveraging digital tools and online channels to strengthen relationships with existing customers, create new connections, personalize their messaging, and expand their reach to a broader audience. One of the most widely adopted strategies was content creation, facilitated through email marketing and social media platforms. Content creation quickly became a key competitive advantage (Kotler et al., 2017; Fernandes, 2024).

During this period, the rise of omnichannel strategies was influenced by digital inequality and the growing need to reach consumers through multiple platforms (Kotler et al., 2023). Omnichannel strategies are essential because some communities still lack access to digital channels, making a physical presence essential for businesses.

A few years later, Marketing 5.0 emerged, introducing what Kotler (2023, p.20) refers to as “Next Tech” - a set of technologies designed to mimic the capabilities of human marketers. This includes artificial intelligence (AI), natural language processing (NLP), robotics, sensors, blockchain, virtual reality (VR), and augmented reality (AR) (Kotler et al., 2023). These tools have become indispensable for marketing departments, not only in advertising and promotion but also in developing new products and services.

Eventually, Marketing 6.0 introduced immersive technologies to enhance customer experiences, marking a significant shift toward fully interactive and technology-driven engagement.

For this project, we will focus on Marketing 4.0 and 5.0, as defined by Kotler (2023). These phases encompass the initial transition into the digital world, requiring companies to strategically plan, define, implement, and monitor their digital marketing efforts before advancing into the immersive experiences proposed by Marketing 6.0. Based on the company's target audience and market, which will be defined later in this document, immersive technologies are likely to be better received by Generation Alpha and

Generation Z. However, since these groups do not represent the primary audience of this company, Marketing 6.0 will not be the focus of this study; instead, the focus will be on other digital techniques.

Digital Marketing

Technology and other factors have profoundly changed how consumers process communications, even when they choose to process them all...Consumers not only have more media choices, but they can also decide whether they want to receive commercial content. Marketers must be creative in using technology, but not intrude on consumers' lives (Kotler & Keller, 2012, pp. 497-498).

Over the past two decades, humanity has witnessed multiple technological and digital advancements that have significantly changed society. The arrival of the Internet, smart devices, the Internet of Things, and robotics, among other innovations, has transformed people's lives and compelled businesses to adapt to these new technologies to survive in this evolving landscape. In 2012, Kotler and Keller emphasized the importance of leveraging new technologies in a competitive environment (Kotler & Keller, 2012, p. 37). Five years later, in 2017, Kotler et al. introduced the concept of Marketing 4.0, which represents the transition from traditional to digital marketing. This marked a new era in marketing history, as communication and information technologies became essential tools for organizations, particularly for their marketing departments, ushering in the digital era.

The current landscape is vastly different from what it was 20 years ago. The impact of technological advancements on business operations, communication processes, and marketing strategies has been immense (Kitchen & Tourky, 2022). In today's global context, digitalization has shifted from an optional approach to a necessity for business survival. A clear example of this was the COVID-19 pandemic, which significantly accelerated the adoption of technology by organizations (Kotler et al., 2023). During this period, social distancing and business closures compelled companies to rely on digital channels and technological tools to sustain sales and foster relationships with existing and potential customers. The pandemic is gone, but the advances that emerged from it remain.

If there is one undeniable truth, it is that the pandemic accelerated digital transformation. Today's consumers increasingly use computers, mobile phones, and tablets. They rely on online channels, such as social media and blogs, to research products and services, read reviews from other consumers, and complete their purchases (Taiminen & Karjaluoto, 2015). In marketing, organizations now prioritize digital practices to enhance communication efforts, reach new audiences, improve performance, and gain a competitive advantage (Taiminen & Karjaluoto, 2015). These practices fall under the scope of digital marketing, which involves using technological devices and online channels.

Digital marketing allows companies to discover new audiences, attract potential customers, and connect more efficiently with existing ones (Taiminen & Karjaluo, 2015).

The term digital marketing is not new. Like many other organizational practices, digital marketing has evolved over the years, with numerous authors studying its importance in the corporate landscape. Järvinen et al. (2012) described digital marketing as “the use of all kinds of digital and social media tools that allow companies to foster interactions with customers” (p.4). In a more recent definition, Kotler (2017) defined digital marketing as a tool that allows companies to personalize their communication with their target audience. Chaffey Ellis-Chadwick (2019) aligns with these definitions, stating that digital marketing is “the use of technological tools to promote the sale of products and services, as well as the use of digital channels, such as social media, email, mobile apps, websites, and search engines, among others, to establish connections with current and potential customers” (as cited by Fernandes, 2024, p.13).

Digital marketing plays a crucial role in today's organizational environment and should be considered in companies' strategic planning. However, its impact extends beyond communication channels and commercial objectives. Through digital strategies, organizations can communicate the value of their products and services, strengthen relationships with their audiences, and increase brand awareness, ultimately influencing purchasing decisions (Kotler et al., 2017).

One of the primary goals of digital marketing is to strengthen consumer relationships by enabling real-time connections (Widodo et al., 2024). To achieve this, social media posts, branded content creation, personalized messages, and digital interactions have become essential components of an organization's strategy. These strategies are also crucial for enhancing brand awareness and brand equity, which are directly linked to brand positioning in consumers' minds.

“The merging of social networks and mobile devices has made it extremely easy and compelling for people to stay connected and, thus, influence one another's purchase decisions” (Kumar, 2015, p.5). In today's digital era, where social media and other online channels are thriving, consumers have shifted from passive information recipients to active communicators. These various channels can influence others' opinions and purchasing decisions (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019; Widodo et al., 2024). Therefore, digital communication must align with the messages conveyed across other channels, including face-to-face interactions (Kotler et al., 2017). That is why marketing professionals must be well-versed in the various digital tools that should be considered when designing, planning, and implementing digital marketing strategies, as well as in all aspects of integrated communication (Bautista et al., 2020; Fernandes, 2024).

By adopting digital marketing strategies, organizations can not only increase their online presence but also strengthen communication with internal and external audiences,

promote their products and services, enhance customer engagement, and keep stakeholders informed, ultimately differentiating themselves from competitors.

An additional advantage of digital marketing is that, thanks to technological advancements, marketing professionals and organizations can easily monitor and control the results of their digital strategies and campaigns. "...with social media sites now enabling businesses to gather statistics on the impact, reach, and progress of a product/service, the opportunity to gain insights on customer behavior, customer preferences, product penetration, and branding is tremendous" (Kumar, 2015, p.5).

Nevertheless, digital marketing does not aim to replace traditional marketing; rather, it complements it. Organizations must adopt omnichannel strategies and maintain a presence across all media where their target audience is active while ensuring message consistency across all communication channels.

Among the primary digital tools and strategies are SEO (Search Engine Optimization), paid advertising, email marketing, social media marketing, and content marketing (Fernandes, 2024).

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) refers to the strategy of using keywords to increase an organization's website visibility in search engines. This technique encompasses content creation strategies, link building, and website optimization, all of which contribute to increasing organic traffic (Bautista et al., 2020; Fernandes, 2024).

Email marketing is one of the most essential tools for transmitting information and promoting activities (Bautista et al., 2020; Dias, 2023; Fernandes, 2024). Since email is one of today's most widely used communication channels, organizations and marketing professionals have become content managers and editors (Neves & Zilmar, 2017), delivering information to external audiences. Beyond its use as a digital marketing tool, email has also been widely recognized as one of the most crucial internal communication channels (Neves & Zilmar, 2017). According to Roman (2001), email exchanges enhance idea sharing and strengthen employee relationships (as cited by Neves & Zilmar, 2017).

Another widely used digital strategy is paid advertising. Paid advertising involves developing digital ad campaigns on these platforms, where brands and organizations (advertisers) bid to display their ads in preferred spaces. Paid advertising increases the visibility of online advertisements, allowing organizations to promote their products or services on social networks, Google, or relevant websites, helping them reach potential customers (Amazon Ads, n.d.; Fernandes, 2024). This tool can be utilized on various platforms, including search engines like Google, the most commonly used, and social media, with Meta platforms being the most widely used (Ntousi et al., 2025). In recent years, Meta ads have become essential tools for marketers, providing brands and organizations with access to vast audiences, along with advanced tools to effectively

segment and target specific audience groups, as well as personalize messages for them (Ntousi et al., 2025). However, paid advertising is only one of the three types of media available on these social platforms.

The literature presents us with three types of media that can be developed on social platforms: paid media, which includes paid advertising with targeted tools; earned media, which refers to organic user-generated engagement; and owned media, which covers brand-created content on official profiles (Ntousi et al., 2025; Kitchen & Tourky, 2022).

Accordingly, we have a broader path to explore regarding social media than paid advertising alone, as the latter is not the only way to leverage social media's benefits. Social media has evolved from being one of the most essential marketing tools to also become a crucial component of strategic communication. Studies also highlight its role in crisis communication (Neves & Zilmar, 2017), institutional and internal messaging, and as a driver of employer branding (Fernandes et al., 2023). Accordingly, we can today use social media as strategic tools for all types of communication. On the same note, not all types of communication are ideal for social media platforms, or at least not for specific ones. This is one of the most challenging decisions for marketers, as it involves determining which platforms are best suited for a brand or organization to achieve its objectives (Kitchen & Tourky, 2022).

Next, we will discuss social media and content marketing techniques in more depth, including common channels and success metrics, topics that hold special relevance in the integrated communication plan proposed in this project.

Social Media and Content Marketing: Game-Changing Tools for Marketers

Social Media has transformed society (Neves & Zilmar, 2017). “More recently,...it...has become a game changer in several industries. Its increasing prominence has influenced companies to increase their social media budgets to rapidly create or promote their brand through viral content, social media contests, and consumer engagement efforts...Social networks have gained rapid momentum and adoption because of their ability to instantly identify and connect with users, speed of communication, and ease of use in influencing user experiences” (Kumar, 2015, p.5). Recognized as the second most important digital marketing tool (Fernandes, 2024), social media continues to reshape the way brands interact with consumers, fostering engagement and brand loyalty on an unprecedented scale.

This is why a strong digital presence on social media is essential for brands and organizations. Today, social media serves as a powerful tool that not only allows brands

to share their content and messages but also enables them to gather, analyze, and strategically utilize audience responses and reactions to their digital strategies. To make the most of social media, it is crucial to understand the types of messages that can be conveyed, the formats that can be used, and how to identify the most effective communication channels.

According to Ntousi et al. (2025), three different types of media can be developed on social platforms: paid media previously mentioned, which includes paid advertising where social media platforms provide companies with space to advertise their products or services, together with tools to target specific audiences and direct their ads with greater precision; earned media, which refers to organic publicity generated by users through reactions, comments, and shares on brand-related posts; and owned media, which encompasses **content** created by the brand and posted on its official social media profiles (Ntousi et al., 2025).

As previously mentioned, paid ads are widely used on social media due to the ease with which these platforms allow marketers to target audiences based on demographic and geographic data (Ntousi et al., 2025). Content marketing, while not limited to social media (encompassing various traditional and digital channels), is responsible for planning, designing, and distributing content across social media platforms and other marketing platforms, both digital and traditional.

Accordingly, beyond advertising, social media platforms such as Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), TikTok, Threads, and YouTube have become powerful spaces for the creation, distribution, and popularization of user-generated content. This content spans a wide range of topics, fostering the development of online communities where users can share their opinions about products and services in real-time (Ntousi et al., 2025). These opinions, in turn, significantly influence consumer behavior toward brands and their offerings. Then, the messages that brands decide to manage and share with their publics must always be carefully planned and strategically managed.

To fully leverage social media as a marketing tool, it is essential to incorporate it into digital marketing strategies that extend beyond paid advertising. This includes content creation and distribution, community building, and communication with both internal and external audiences. Briefly, internal audiences refer to the company's employees and members (Brandolini et al., 2009), while external audiences encompass "all those with whom the organization has some form of relationship, without them being part of the company" (Brandolini et al., 2009).

It is also essential to highlight from an strategic view what can and needs to be communicated through this channels and the ways how it will be communicated, to successfully reach business goals, keeping always in mind the IMC principal premise: “Every brand message must be consistent, not just for advertising and promotion, but for every form of traditional, as well as digital, media (Kitchen & Tourky, 2022, p. 154).

Content Marketing

Today's challenge for companies is to attract and draw customers' attention to view brand advertisements and posts, and convince them to share and comment on these posts (Naseri et al., 2023, p. 79). As digital marketing has gained greater relevance in companies, it has also brought the challenge of attracting and maintaining the attention of potential consumers.

Today's consumers increasingly seek information about the products and services they intend to purchase, as well as the brands behind them. For this reason, marketers must plan, design, and implement communication strategies that not only provide this information but also facilitate consumer feedback and encourage interactions with the brand (Pulizzi & Barrett, 2009).

As the growing need for brands to provide more information about their products, services, and values (and, more importantly, to connect with consumers) emerged, content marketing emerged. Pulizzi & Barrett (2009) define it as “the art of understanding exactly what your customers need to know and delivering it to them in a relevant and compelling way” (p.8). According to the authors, content marketing has become an essential strategy for companies to maintain public interest, educate consumers about the industry and their brand or organization, and demonstrate how their products or services can provide the best solutions for their needs. As a result, by the time potential customers are ready to make a purchase, they already have sufficient information to make informed decisions and, most importantly, they may have already established a connection with the brand.

In essence, **content marketing** consists of various strategies for creating and managing branded or non-branded content that educates target audiences while fostering relationships with both potential and existing customers. Brand content creation is one of the most crucial inbound marketing techniques, which focuses on attracting the attention of potential customers who are actively seeking information before making a purchase (Holliman & Rowley, 2014). Through various content creation techniques, content marketing captures the interest of these consumers and influences them to choose a brand over its competitors.

As previously defined, content marketing encompasses a range of strategies for developing and managing content (Fernandes, 2024). Unlike traditional marketing strategies, which aim to influence consumer actions and directly encourage them to purchase products or services, content marketing “is based on the premise of a genuine, sincere desire to add value to the consumer's life in some relevant way” (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019, p.28). This value can be delivered through education, problem-solving, entertainment, or by helping consumers make informed decisions (Koob, 2021, p. 2).

While maintaining a strong digital presence is essential, brands must strategically identify the platforms where their target audiences are most active to maximize engagement.

Choosing the correct content format is a crucial factor when designing a communication plan. By 2023, videos and short-form reels emerged as dominant content formats (Israeli et al., 2023). However, not all audiences prefer video, and it is not the only way to drive engagement. From brand websites to mobile apps, multiple digital spaces offer opportunities for content distribution. Some content marketing techniques are best suited for written formats, such as blogs, digital newspapers, email marketing, and magazines for customers or employees. On the other hand, video content is more effective in formats like vlogs, podcasts, and social media posts. Then, the format in which the content is created represents an important strategy, and this can only be guided by the brand marketing objectives.

Additionally, brands are not always the sole creators of content. While brands can hire professional content writers and journalists for content creation, user-generated content can be a more cost-effective and practical option. User-generated content (UGC) and consumer-generated content (CGC) play significant roles in shaping audience perceptions and influencing purchasing decisions. UGC refers to content created by general users rather than paid professionals and is shared through online channels (Ntousi et al., 2025). CGC, on the other hand, is produced by actual customers who have experienced a brand's products or services and share their feedback through content creation and distribution.

Secondly, it comes to the distribution. Due to their wider reach and lower costs, digital channels have become the most potent ally for content creation and distribution (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019, p. 29). However, not all customers are the same. They use different platforms and engage with content in distinct ways. Kitchen and Tourky (2022) identify 12 of the most popular and widely used social media platforms: “Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, Snapchat, Pinterest, Periscope, LinkedIn, WhatsApp, WeChat, MeetUp, and TikTok” (p.168). While all of these platforms are popular, they cater to different audiences and content formats.

For example, Facebook and Instagram support multiple content formats, including images, videos, and text-based posts. In contrast, YouTube and TikTok are video-centric, with YouTube favoring long-form content and TikTok specializing in short-form videos (Kitchen & Tourky, 2022). LinkedIn is primarily a professional network where users engage with written content, as well as images and videos. Meanwhile, WhatsApp and WeChat function primarily as messaging apps but also offer "news" channels where users can receive live updates and share content, including posts from platforms like TikTok or YouTube.

Next, we will explore some performance metrics that can help us, marketers, make informed decisions and effectively guide our communication strategies.

Social media and content marketing metrics: How to measure success

Digital content can take multiple formats, including videos, online articles, blogs, expert panels, digital newspapers, social media posts, mobile apps, podcasts, and downloadable content, among others (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019). The brand's mission is to identify the correct content marketing strategy that will allow the organization to achieve its goals successfully.

Marketing is a combination of art and data. Therefore, to evaluate the success of a campaign, it is essential to measure results from two integrated dimensions: qualitative and quantitative (Rose, 2023). Rose (2023) argues that the success of content marketing is reflected not only in numerical metrics such as clicks, interactions, and conversions but also in the direct impact on audience behavior and perception.

From a financial perspective, marketing objectives are typically related to return on investment (ROI), increased sales, and cost reduction, among other factors (Kitchen & Tourky, 2022; Rose, 2023). Ultimately, regardless of the strategy implemented, the key questions within organizations revolve around how content contributes to increasing sales, expanding the audience, reducing costs, or improving customer retention (Pulizzi, 2013).

Rose and Pulizzi (2011), in their work **Managing Content Marketing: The Real-World Guide for Creating Passionate Subscribers to Your Brand**, introduced the Content Marketing Pyramid, a model designed to help marketers measure the success of their strategies. This model is based on the premise that, first and foremost, organizational objectives must be clearly defined.

Pulizzi (2013) describes three levels within the content marketing pyramid:

- Primary indicators: These refer to key performance indicators (KPIs), such as retention rates, return on investment (ROI) increase, sales growth, and cost savings.
- Secondary indicators: These support the primary indicators, including the number of blog subscribers, lead quantity and quality, cost per lead, among others.
- User indicators: These are audience-based indicators that influence secondary indicators, such as web traffic and customer engagement (interactions with the brand, such as likes, comments, reactions, and website visits).

Image 1 - The Content Marketing Pyramid



Source: Epic Content Marketing: How to Tell a Different Story, Break Through the Clutter, and Win More Customers by Marketing Less. McGraw-Hill Education (2013)

These indicators help measure the success of planned, designed, and implemented strategies and campaigns. For example, one key objective of content marketing is to increase customer engagement. To achieve this, brands become educators for their audience by creating valuable content related to their products, services, or industry-specific topics. Through this strategy, they strengthen consumer trust and enhance brand perception (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019; Koob, 2021).

According to the literature (Naseri et al., 2023; Pulizzi, 2013; Rancati & Gordini, 2014), there are four main types of metrics that marketers should focus on:

- Consumption metrics: These indicate the number of people who have consumed the brand's content. Some examples are:
 - Number of page views.
 - Number of video views.
 - Downloads of digital content.
 - Podcast listeners.
- Sharing metrics: These reflect the level of audience interaction with the content and its distribution. Some examples are:
 - Number of times the content was shared.
 - Number of likes, comments, or retweets.
 - Instances of an email or message being forwarded.
- Lead generation metrics: These measure the number of content consumers who have converted into potential leads. Some examples are:
 - Blog or email subscriptions.
 - Completed forms.
 - Exclusive content downloads.
 - Conversion rate.
- Sales metrics: These determine the financial impact of content campaigns. Some examples are:
 - Online and offline sales.
 - Revenue increase generated by the campaign.
 - Customer acquisition cost.

Although content marketing is not a new strategy, it is essential to strengthen its implementation in all organizational communication plans. For both internal and external audiences, as previously defined, the use of digital tools is crucial for achieving effective communication.

With the help of the presented models, indicators, and metrics, we can effectively measure the success of the campaigns developed within organizations. Additionally, digital tools provide real-time feedback, allowing us to make strategic adjustments that help achieve the organization's primary objectives.

Integrated Communication

“In an age of increasing similarities between competing brands, where price strategies and distribution channels are fairly uniform, communication is becoming the sine qua non of the heart and soul of marketing. Many scholars have stipulated **that all organizational communication must be integrated...**” (Kitchen & Turkey, 2022, p. 74). Today's consumers

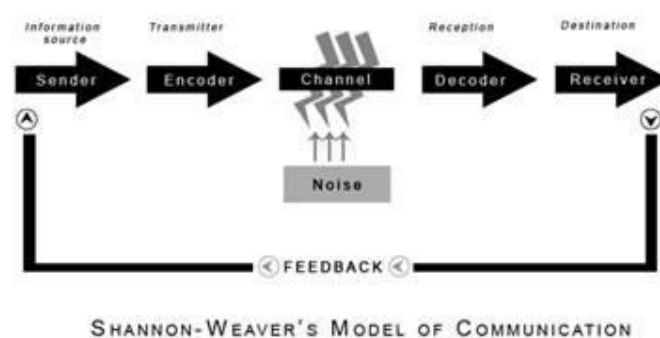
look beyond the transactional process to make purchasing decisions. With access to unlimited information and the ability to communicate virally, share their opinions, and view the opinions of other consumers, they have gained significantly greater power to decide which companies and messages they choose to support with their purchases. With this, every brand becomes meaningful to them, and every action, internal or external to the company, becomes a message (Kitchen & Tourky, 2022).

This new reality has underscored the importance of organizations recognizing communication as a vital component in their overall strategic planning and a crucial factor in achieving their organizational objectives successfully. As a result, organizations have begun to place greater emphasis on strategic communication (Grigorescu & Lupu, 2015; Kotler, 2012; Dinamarca, 2011; Núñez et al., 2010), also known as integrated communication (Grigorescu & Lupu, 2015), which is how we will refer to it throughout this text.

To understand the concept of integrated communication and its significance, we must first define communication and clarify what we mean by integrated (organizational) communication.

The communication process has evolved since the first models were created. In 1949, Shannon and Weaver proposed a basic communication model consisting of six elements: source, encoder, medium (or channel), decoder, receiver, and noise (Núñez et al., 2010). Just as many other business areas have evolved, the concept of the communication process has undergone significant changes over time.

Image 2 - Shannon and Weaver Model of Communication



Source: <https://www.communicationtheory.org/shannon-and-weaver-model-of-communication/>

Kotler (2012) describes the communication process through a macro model comprising nine components, incorporating two crucial elements: **feedback** and the response from message recipients. In an organizational context, these two elements define the objective

of any corporate communication effort, what kind of feedback is received, and, more importantly, how audiences respond to the company's communicative actions in terms of behavior, brand relationships, and engagement with the organization (Kotler, 2012; Fernandez, 2002).

This concept serves as the foundation for organizational communication. Fernandez (2002), as cited by Núñez, defines organizational communication as:

“A set of techniques and activities aimed at facilitating and streamlining the flow of messages between members of the organization, between the organization and its environment, or even influencing the opinions, attitudes, and behaviors of both internal and external audiences, all to help the organization achieve its objectives more efficiently and effectively” (p.12).

Moreover, in a cyclical manner, organizational communication...“should smoothly and strategically integrate all the communicative processes and their elements, aiming at synergy and harmony in seeking internal, corporate, and external, market-oriented goals” (Sueldo, 2016, p.121).

In the pursuit of this organizational alignment, the concept of Integrated (Organizational) Communication emerges. With a primarily organizational focus, integrated communication refers to strategies designed to enhance the efficiency of internal and external communication processes (Lupu, 2015; Núñez et al., 2010). Its ultimate goal is to ensure that messages are consistently planned, developed, and delivered across all departments, fostering cohesion within the organization (Grigorescu & Lupu, 2015).

Once the concept of integrated communication has been explained, it is also essential to understand the distinction between two concepts that have often been closely linked and sometimes conflated in academic discussions: Integrated Communication and Integrated Marketing Communication. This confusion has affected how organizational teams perceive these concepts and their success in executing strategic communication plans (Grigorescu & Lupu, 2015).

While often confused, these two approaches serve distinct purposes within an organization. Understanding their differences and scopes is essential for developing cohesive and effective communication strategies. We will explore their key differences and implications below.

Integrated Communication vs. Integrated Marketing Communication

Various authors have highlighted the critical role of communication in overall organizational success (Batra & Keller, 2016; Dinamarca, 2011; Kotler, 1972; Grigorescu & Lupu, 2015; Juska, 2021). However, there has been ongoing confusion between integrated communication (IC) and integrated marketing communication (IMC). While these concepts are closely related, they are not identical. To better understand their connection, it is essential to explore how and why they are interlinked.

From a historical perspective, integrated communication within organizations emerged as a result of integrated marketing communication practices initially adopted by marketing departments. This shift was also a response to the growing impact of globalization on business operations (Lupu, 2015). Observing the effectiveness of IMC strategies, organizations expanded these practices beyond external communication, incorporating them into their internal communication processes (Lupu, 2015).

Indeed, both disciplines are undeniably connected. However, Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) primarily focuses on external communication, targeting audiences such as potential consumers, customers, and the general public (Dinamarca, 2011; Kotler & Keller, 2012; Juska, 2021; Kitchen & Tourky, 2022; Grigorescu & Lupu, 2015).

In contrast, Integrated Communication (IC) extends beyond marketing-related communication. It encompasses the strategic planning of both external and internal communication, with a focus on corporate and organizational communication (Dinamarca, 2011; Lupu, 2015; Kitchen & Tourky, 2022).

While IMC focuses on product and service communication, with objectives related to brand awareness and consumer engagement, IC takes a broader organizational approach, ensuring consistency in communication across all departments. Additionally, as previously discussed, IC is primarily associated with business management and organizational communication, whereas IMC remains a core concept within marketing.

We can gain a better understanding of the distinction between these two concepts through prior research. Despite their similarities, they involve different strategies and areas of communication. While integrated communication emerged as a broader strategic approach influenced by integrated marketing communication, it encompasses all organizational communication processes, making IMC a subdivision of this overarching strategy. Later, we will examine the subdivisions of Integrated Communication, its key areas of interest, and the positioning of Integrated Marketing Communication within this framework.

Different authors have proposed various models for categorizing integrated communication. Kitchen and Tourky (2022), for example, examine integrated communication sustaining a more brand-centric approach through two distinct brand dimensions: the corporate brand, encompassing corporate and organizational communication activities and identity development strategies, and individual brands, focusing on brand loyalty and equity-building activities.

Mateus (2013) categorizes communication into three distinct areas: internal, external, and institutional. The model was also supported by Júnior et al. (2023). Dinamarca (2011) adopts a similar approach, presenting four areas of integrated communication: institutional or corporate communication, communication directed towards stakeholders (limited to Community Management), internal communication, and marketing communication. Lupu offers a similar framework that emphasizes the convergence of external and internal communication, further breaking these down into three key dimensions: marketing (external), public relations (both internal and external), and management and organizational communication (internal), while in a similar but slightly different approach, Cortés et al., (2024), Núñez (2010) and (Fernández Collado et al., 1991) categorize the communication only in two fronts: Internal and external, being the marketing and product communication a subdivision of the external front. It is paramount that these two fronts are appropriately integrated to ensure the success of the planned communication strategy. External communication largely depends on how internal communication is carried out (Cortés et al., 2024).

At this point, the model presented by Núñez and supported by Lupu is the most objective and comprehensive, as it encompasses the different areas of communication as subfields of integrated communication.

For this project, we will conduct a deeper review of integrated communication, considering two main fronts: Internal and External, along with their respective subdivisions.

Internal communication

Communication is an essential tool in any organization, enabling it to operate as an integrated whole (Jiménez Peñarreta et al., 2021). Complementarily, internal communication plays a crucial role in integrating communication, procedures, and strategies throughout the company.

Internal communication is a key component of internal marketing (Proctor, 2010). Kotler and Keller (2012) identify internal marketing as one of the elements of holistic marketing, defining it as:

“The process of hiring, training, and motivating capable employees... to ensure that everyone in the organization understands the basic principles of marketing and the organization as a whole” (p.42).

From an organizational perspective, internal communication is directed toward internal audiences, including employees, shareholders, owners, and other stakeholders (Ramírez et al., 2017). This concept has been widely discussed in business as a key factor for organizational success (Cortés et al., 2024; Dueñas & Garcia, 2013). However, internal communication has evolved, including integrated communication and all other communication processes. Just as advancements in communication technologies reshaped general communication processes and facilitated the emergence of bi-directional communication, they also influenced internal communication within organizations.

The literature confirms that by the beginning of the 1990s, internal communication was described as “the processes, strategies, and tools used for the exchange of information within an organization.” However, as was the case with the communication model of that time, previously discussed in this document, information was transmitted from sender to receiver with no opportunity for feedback (Dueñas & Garcia, 2013). Internal communication was primarily understood as the transfer of information and instructions to employees to ensure that processes were carried out correctly (Dueñas & García, 2013).

As time progressed, and by the early 21st century, internal communication had become one of the core activities within organizations, shifting toward a more strategic approach focused on building organizational culture among employees (Ramírez et al., 2017). Supported by Martín (1995), internal communication is described as a set of activities that promote good relationships among an organization's internal members by facilitating communication to inform, integrate, and motivate them.

Terren (2004) defined internal communication as a process of delivering instructions either vertically (aligned with leadership and management roles) or horizontally (among colleagues at the same level) with the sole purpose of ensuring that organizational tasks are completed. By then, internal communication was already recognized as a critical factor influencing employee productivity and satisfaction with the organization (Kaur & Kaur, 2024).

A later definition by Brandolini, González, and Hopkins (2009) described internal communication as:

“Communication specifically directed at the internal audience—the company’s employees and all its members—emerging from the need to create a harmonious and participatory productive environment” (as cited by Melo, 2021, p.25).

This definition remains closely aligned with how internal communication is understood today. Internal communication refers to the set of organizational tools, strategies, and communication processes targeted at internal audiences, particularly employees (Dinamarca, 2011; Kaur & Kaur, 2024; Lupu, 2015; Sueldo, 2016). This involves managing information, communication channels, and the content of messages. However, the role of internal communication extends beyond simply transmitting information.

The primary goal of internal communication is to ensure that all employees and stakeholders within the organization are aligned with its mission, vision, values, policies, processes, and objectives, among other key aspects (Cortés et al., 2024; Júnior et al., 2023; Núñez et al., 2010). These elements define the organization’s identity, and employees’ understanding of them is directly linked to achieving organizational goals. Ultimately, internal communication serves as a tool for building relationships among employees, fostering engagement with the organization’s objectives (Dueñas & Garcia, 2013; Febrial & Herminingsih, 2020; Ramírez et al., 2017) as well as promoting the strengthening of employee-based brand equity (Santos et al., 2023).

According to Guță (2023), communication within an organization serves two main functions:

- “Unifying organizational activities – Through communication, individuals become united within the organization, enabling cooperation toward common goals. In this context, communication fosters positive change by influencing individual actions that support the organization’s success.
- Management integration function – Communication integrates managerial functions, making it vital for the organization’s internal operations. It also serves as a bridge between the organization and its external environment” (Guță, 2023, p. 112).

Brandão (2018) presents a similar idea from a more strategic perspective: promoting relationships through strategic communication is, in itself, a key approach to building shared goals among all members of the organization. Most importantly, fostering both internal and external relationships contributes to the “humanization of the organization” (Brandão, 2018, p. 93).

For internal communication to be successful, it must meet specific characteristics that ensure its effective execution:

- Clarity and transparency: Ensuring that messages are understood correctly;
- Open and equal: Information should be accessible to all employees—better-informed employees are better prepared to complete tasks, understand priorities, and take actions that benefit the organization.
- Unrestricted: With the development of new technologies, leadership teams must leverage these tools to ensure all employees have unrestricted access to information.
- Bidirectional and horizontal: Internal communication should encourage constructive feedback and the sharing of ideas and opinions;
- Informal: Providing informal communication channels increases employee comfort, making them more willing to give feedback, share ideas, and discuss potential risks for the organization.
- Consistency: A key element of integrated communication, consistency in messaging should be a priority across all organizational touchpoints;
- Innovative: Finding new ways to communicate information effectively helps capture employees' attention and strengthen their engagement with the organization (Santos et al., 2023).

The subareas corresponding to internal communication include internal institutional communication, responsible for disseminating aspects related to corporate image, philosophy, and values; business communication, which manages communication between employees, facilitating the flow of information for collaboration and goal achievement; management communication, which handles communication at leadership and management levels, ensuring that executive teams effectively convey strategies, decisions, and objectives; communication with human resources, focused on transmitting relevant information about policies, benefits, professional development, and employee well-being; and employee relations, which promote interaction, teamwork, and organizational culture, fostering an open and collaborative communication environment (Kalla, 2005; Lupu, 2015).

Effect of internal communication on employee engagement

One of the most valuable assets of any organization is its human capital. Human resources can be considered the most critical part of an organization (Fernandes et al., 2023). Without them, an organization cannot function. For this reason, every employee must have clarity on four key questions: What are they doing? Why are they doing it? How should it be done? Moreover, for whom is it being done? (Jiménez Peñarreta et al., 2021, p. 100).

Ensuring that 100% of the workforce understands these questions is fundamental to the success of any organization.

Effective internal communication is a core driver of organizational success (Brandão, 2018; Santos et al., 2023). It not only enhances employees' knowledge of the organization but also strengthens their sense of purpose within it. Recent studies have increasingly highlighted the importance of fostering positive communication among employees as a means to boost commitment and employee engagement (Santos et al., 2023). Furthermore, continuous employee training and transparent access to organizational information have been shown to yield positive outcomes, enabling employees to understand their organization better while increasing their identification with and commitment to it.

As previously discussed in the digital marketing chapter, digital tools also play a key role in internal communication. They serve as essential channels for building relationships between internal and external audiences, as well as for enhancing employee engagement.

Following a significant societal shift brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, one of the most significantly impacted aspects of business was how companies manage their workforce. In response to the need for social distancing, and later, with goals such as increasing employee comfort, reducing operational costs, enabling more flexible work arrangements, and improving efficiency, many organizations adopted remote work models. These models allowed employees to perform their duties from locations of their choice.

While this shift was positive for many, it also introduced new challenges for organizations. Companies had to rely heavily on digital tools, which may have previously played only a minor role, but are now becoming their primary means of communication (Santos et al., 2023). Fortunately, technological advancements have enabled the development of increasingly effective communication strategies, allowing organizations to maintain flexibility in employee location without compromising performance or cohesion.

Among the most widely used tools are email, chat platforms like Slack and Microsoft Teams, and video conferencing tools such as Zoom. Beyond tools used for operational communication, the literature also highlights the use of digital platforms in fostering employee engagement. These tools can support not just day-to-day business communication but also broader strategies to strengthen workplace culture, recognition, and internal community building.

Social media platforms, for example, have been widely discussed in the literature (Fernandes et al., 2023; Santos, 2024) as valuable tools for publicly recognizing employee contributions, skills, and achievements. Such practices help strengthen employee loyalty and pride, encouraging them to take on greater responsibility and stay committed to the organization (Jiménez Peñarreta et al., 2021).

External communication

On the other hand, we have external communication. While internal communication directly affects employees' brand equity, productivity, workplace environment, and organizational processes, external communication impacts all brand-related matters outside the organization. These include the general perception of the company, brand equity, and reputation, as well as relationships with external stakeholders such as clients, potential customers, and society as a whole.

Fernández Collado et al. (1991) define external communication as the set of messages transmitted by an organization to its external audiences, such as shareholders, current and potential clients, suppliers, distributors, authorities, and media outlets, aimed at maintaining or improving relationships, projecting a favorable image, or promoting its products and services (p.12).

Similarly, Brandolini et al. (2009) describe external communication as "directed toward the organization's external audience, meaning all those with whom the organization has some form of relationship, without them being part of the company."

External communication encompasses all communicative processes directed toward audiences outside the organization, including suppliers, current and potential clients, and the general public. This aspect of communication is strongly linked to marketing communication and integrated marketing communication (Cortés et al., 2024; Oscco et al., 2022).

The literature emphasizes the significance of external communication in fostering relationships with external audiences and influencing both the corporate image and its perception by consumers (Dias, 2023; Fernández Collado et al., 1991; Finocchietti, 2011). This is only achievable through the careful planning and effective execution of communication strategies that ensure the consistent creation and dissemination of that image in the minds of both external and internal audiences.

Other sub-areas of external communication include advertising and marketing communication, direct marketing, promotions, public relations, and any other form of

communication targeted at external audiences (Dinamarca, 2011; Lupu, 2015). Some recent studies also emphasize that external communication management oversees all communication across media channels (Tesařová et al., 2020).

Product and marketing communication

An essential part of branding strategies is creating, transmitting, and monitoring feedback on an organization's messaging (Santos, 2024) for both internal and external audiences. Marketing communication (MC) plays a significant role in reaching these external audiences.

Kotler and Keller define marketing communication as “how firms attempt to inform, persuade, and remind consumers (directly or indirectly) about the products and brands they sell. In a sense, marketing communications represent the voice of the company and its brands; they are how the firm can establish a dialogue and build relationships with consumers” (2012, p.498).

As marketing and its practices evolved, so did the concept of marketing communication. The emergence of the Internet and the World Wide Web in the 1990s, followed by technological advancements in the early 21st century, including computers, mobile phones, smartphones, social media, and blogs, quickly rendered previous strategic marketing plans obsolete (Kitchen & Tourky, 2022; Schultz & Patti, 2009).

With new communication technologies shaping the digital era, organizations have adapted their strategic planning, resulting in innovative approaches to marketing communications (MC). Companies now have access to multiple communication channels, allowing them to maximize the impact of their messaging. These technological advancements offer new tools for effective communication, underscoring the need for an integrated communication perspective that ensures consistency across all channels (Kotler, 1972).

In its early years, marketing communication focused on four key disciplines: advertising, sales promotion, direct marketing, and public relations. At this stage, MC was closely tied to business management, following a traditional approach: identifying target markets, crafting a message, and using outbound distribution to transmit that message, without personalization (Schultz & Patti, 2009).

Over time, Kotler & Keller (2012) introduced four additional disciplines to consider:

- Events and Experiences are all activities and events organized or sponsored by companies to promote brand-consumer interactions.

- Interactive Marketing is a group of online activities or programs designed to promote customer engagement and increase brand awareness.
- Word-of-mouth marketing, described as the exchange of opinions or recommendations between consumers, has grown in relevance as customers increasingly share information and influence others' perceptions of products or services (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019; Widodo et al., 2024).
- Personal Selling embraces all Face-to-face interactions designed to answer questions, provide information, or offer customer support (Kotler & Keller, 2012).

The last discipline is especially relevant to internal communication, which is a key component of internal marketing. Kotler & Keller (2012) define internal marketing as “the process of hiring, training, and motivating capable employees... to ensure that everyone in the organization understands the basic principles of marketing and the organization as a whole” (p.42).

Looking back, the last three disciplines were understandably absent from early MC definitions, as their strategies emerged directly from technological advancements over time.

In a more updated model, complementing Kotler & Keller (2012), Juska (2021) presents different marketing communication disciplines, briefly defined as follows:

- Advertising: Any paid form of “persuasive communication created for a specific purpose, targeted at a specific audience” (Juska, 2021, p.34; Kotler & Keller, 2012).
- Sales Promotion: Activities that offer additional incentives to customers beyond the product’s value, such as discounts, economic incentives, or extra rewards, usually for a limited time.
- Public Relations: Programs or activities aimed “to develop, maintain, protect, and improve the perception of the brand, company, or organization” (Juska, 2021, p.35; Kotler & Keller, 2012). This includes media relations, governmental affairs, and employee communication (Juska, 2021).
- Brand Visibility: Activities that indirectly promote brand exposure, such as product placements in movies, music videos, and events. This category also encompasses events and experiences outlined in Kotler and Keller's (2012) model.

- Digital Platforms: One of the most significant changes from previous models is the emphasis on digital marketing tools, including social media, SEO strategies, and content marketing (Juska, 2021).
- Personal Contact represents the human dimension of communication, including word-of-mouth marketing, employee interactions, and salesforce communication (Juska, 2021). As mentioned earlier, this area is closely tied to internal communication since achieving an integrated communication approach is only possible through effective internal communication practices.

It is essential to emphasize the importance of an integrated approach across various communication channels within an organization. In response to the need for planning, consistency, and coherence across messages and communication channels, integrated marketing communication (IMC) emerged.

Integrated marketing communication (ICM)

An integrated marketing communication strategy aims to “deliver a consistent message and achieve a strategic positioning” (Kotler & Keller, 2012, p. 501) regarding competitors. To fully grasp this concept, it is essential to analyze its evolution.

Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) was introduced between the late 1980s and mid-1990s. One of the first authors to define IMC was Schultz, in his book *Integrated Marketing Communications: Putting It Together & Making It Work* (Schultz et al., 1993). Kitchen & Tourky (2022) identify key events that marked the beginning of IMC, including the proliferation of new media types, the development and diffusion of digital technology across business operations, the increasing emphasis on branding as a competitive differentiation tool, and the growing focus on multinationalization and globalization (p.81).

Today, the American Marketing Association (AMA) defines Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) as “the planning process designed to assure that all brand contacts received by a customer or prospect for a product, service, or organization are relevant to that person and consistent over time” (American Marketing Association, n.d.).

Kitchen & Tourky (2022) provide a more comprehensive definition and describe IMC as a marketing communication planning concept that “...evaluates the strategic role of several communication disciplines... (Examples: general advertising, sales promotion, public relations)... and combines these disciplines to provide clarity, consistency, and maximum communication impact” (p.84). This definition clarifies the meaning of IMC and introduces its functions and role in strategic communication planning within organizations.

Juska (2021) analyzes these marketing communication categories in-depth, emphasizing their unique purpose and strategic advantages. As organizations face an increasing number of communication channels, the need for strategic guidelines grows. These guidelines ensure that the messages organizations convey remain consistent and aligned across all channels, ultimately helping them build stronger relationships with stakeholders, including current and potential customers and employees. Juska's model will be the reference for developing Integrated communication and integrated marketing communication digital strategies to implement on this project.

Institutional communication as a whole: Integrated internal and external focuses

It isn't easy to provide a single, universally accepted definition of institutional communication. Historically linked to the political sphere, institutional communication has been defined by various authors as "the set of verbal, visual, and non-verbal elements and messages used by institutions (of any type; political, private, nonprofit, etc.) to establish an identity in the eyes of their audiences or consumers" (Sánchez et al., 2025). Based on this definition, institutional communication can be understood as a strategic communication process through which organizations design their internal corporate identity and then, through carefully planned efforts, shape a corresponding image in the minds of their audiences.

Building on the perspectives proposed by Kotler (Kotler et al., 2023), particularly from Marketing 3.0 onward, consumers no longer focus solely on the quality of products or services; they now expect organizations to operate under clear ethical standards and to invest in social responsibility initiatives (Balmer & Greyser, 2006).

For this reason, it is crucial to take an integrated approach across all organizational fronts.

Two factors become especially relevant in institutional communication:

1. The clarity of the message the organization wants to convey, tailored to both internal and external audiences (Jiménez Peñarreta et al., 2021).
2. The consistency between what the organization communicates and what it does (Jiménez Peñarreta et al., 2021).

Institutional communication, therefore, draws on various communication areas and strategic tactics to shape a positive and coherent image in the minds of its audiences.

However, an integrated approach requires institutional communication strategies that are designed for both external and internal audiences. Organizations must develop strategies

to ensure that their intended messages are clear and that, through effective communication, training, and preparation, internal audiences become ambassadors of those same messages when interacting with external stakeholders.

Corporate Brand as a Reflection of Organizational Identity

The identity of an organization is essential to its communication strategy. It is through this identity that the organization attracts, fosters, creates, and strengthens positive associations with its audience. This identity is built on two key components:

- Brand identity, which includes logo, colors, typography, tone of voice, brand values, storytelling, and brand personality.
- Corporate identity, which includes mission, vision, corporate philosophy, organizational behavior, internal policies, and public relations.

The American Marketing Association defines a brand as “any distinctive feature like a name, term, design, or symbol that identifies goods or services” (American Marketing Association, n.d.). Kotler et al. support and complement this definition by describing the term brand as “a set of elements—often a name, a logo, and a slogan—that distinguishes a company's product or service offerings from those of its competitors” (2017, p.39).

A brand is one of the most essential tools for marketing professionals in creating a competitive advantage (Levin et al., 1996; Panwar & Khan, 2020), as well as in fostering consumer loyalty, increasing brand awareness, and enhancing brand recognition (Santos, 2024). It is essential to develop strong and integrated branding strategies to effectively use a brand as a differentiating factor and stand out from competitors. Briefly, branding encompasses all activities aimed at creating a strong and coherent brand (Fernandes, 2024). It is also included in the branding scope to create an aligned and concise message and tone that represents the brand identity (Santos, 2024).

However, more than just the brand itself, consumers choose “to support (or not) images (positive or negative)” (Kitchen & Tourky, 2022, p.77). To differentiate themselves from competitors and establish a positive brand image in the minds of consumers, organizations must work not only on their brand but also on brand attributes, including brand identity and brand image (Panwar & Khan, 2020).

Corporate identity is defined as the set of elements through which an organization seeks to generate positive associations and distinguish itself from competitors in the minds of consumers (Kitchen & Tourky, 2022; Neves & Zilmar, 2017). These elements include visual aspects, such as logos and colors, as well as non-visual but identifiable aspects, such as

vision, mission, and values (FEAPS, Confederación Española de Organizaciones en favor de las personas con discapacidad intelectual, n.d.). This corporate identity is internally created by the organization and is conveyed to the public, shaping what ultimately becomes the corporate image.

Understanding that corporate image is defined as “the picture people have of a company” (Kitchen & Tourky, 2022, p.79), this image is formed through the organization’s actions and the messages it conveys (Febrial & Herminingsih, 2020; Kitchen & Tourky, 2022). Corporate image is directly linked to consumer perception of the brand, making external communication a key differentiating factor in a competitive market.

Miranda, Pessanha, and Moreira define corporate identity as the concept that the organization, referring to internal stakeholders, has of itself. In contrast, corporate image refers to the meanings external stakeholders develop from the organization (Miranda et al., 2009).

The literature confirms how external communication is closely connected to shaping a positive image of the organization in consumers' minds (Dias, 2023; Fernández Collado et al., 1991; Finocchietti, 2011). Hence, even though this image is closely tied to corporate identity, managing integrated strategies becomes even more critical. This is achieved by maintaining coherent and aligned messages across all organizational entities, thereby creating consistency for all stakeholders.

To maintain a positive image, organizations continually develop and refine their strategic approaches. Among these, digital marketing serves as a powerful tool, reaching both internal and external audiences. However, two specific areas will be considered key to the organization’s current situation and its efforts to strengthen its image among stakeholders: social marketing, which involves promoting products or services through social relationships built by the organization’s actions (Walsh, 2025); and crisis communication, defined as the set of communication strategies implemented in response to a crisis, directed toward both internal and external audiences (Santos et al., 2023).

The following sections will provide a closer examination of each of these areas, as they will be crucial to developing and proposing effective communication strategies later in this project.

Social and cultural marketing:

*“Social marketing is the process of **marketing** goods and services through the relationships that people use to create and recreate **their social relations**...Marketing can insert itself in these processes by various means in the hope that the marketed goods will be trusted and*

accepted much more easily if they appear to be coming from known people” (Walsh, 2025, p.1).

Social marketing is a relatively recent concept within the broader field of marketing. In 1971, Kotler and Zaltman defined it as *“the design, implementation, and control of programs calculated to influence the acceptability of social ideas and involving considerations of product planning, pricing, communication, distribution, and marketing research... Thus, it is the explicit use of **marketing skills** to help translate present social action efforts into more effectively designed and **communicated**”* (Kotler & Zaltman, 1971, p. 3). At the time, it was mainly applied within non-business institutions to achieve institutional goals.

While the concept remains fundamentally the same, its use has evolved significantly. Since the emergence of Marketing 3.0 (1981–1996), consumers have increasingly expected companies to make a positive societal impact. As a response, businesses began to integrate values, ethics, and social responsibility into their strategies (Kotler et al., 2023). Social marketing shifted from influencing ideas to also influencing behaviors, building stronger connections between organizations and their audiences.

McKenzie-Mohr et al. (2012) provided a more strategic definition from a business and management perspective, describing social marketing as techniques to *“create, communicate, and deliver value to society to influence the behaviors of specific target audiences.”*

Within institutional communication, social marketing can be viewed as a non-verbal form of communication, where organizations convey their commitment to social issues through actions rather than words, thereby transmitting messages. These actions contribute to building a positive public image, as highlighted by Oliveira (2023).

Strategically, organizations can implement social marketing through programs or events that support social causes aligned with their audience’s values. These initiatives aim to inspire behavioral change that benefits both society and the organization. As a result, social marketing becomes a powerful tool not only for strengthening relationships with stakeholders but also for reinforcing a coherent, authentic, and positive brand image.

Crisis communication:

A successful integrated communication strategy should aim to build and sustain strong relationships with all of the organization's stakeholders, while also fostering trust across its audiences. From an integrated communication perspective, maintaining transparency in both messaging and delivery is crucial (Santos et al., 2023). Although crises are

sometimes unavoidable, the way an organization responds can significantly influence how both internal and external audiences perceive the brand and shape their future behavior toward it.

The primary goal of crisis communication is to ensure open and timely communication across all available channels during times of disruption or change (Verčič & Špoljarić, 2023). For an effective crisis communication strategy, organizations must not only commit to transparent communication with employees but also proactively prepare internal stakeholders to support external audiences when needed (Losada et al., 202; Santos et al., 2023; Verčič & Špoljarić, 2023).

Methodology

According to Rajasekar et al., the term research can be defined as the process of investigation carried out by an individual or group when seeking answers or solutions to social and scientific problems or questions. The research process begins with identifying a problem. It follows a systematic analysis of data and information collected from various sources to achieve clearly defined objectives (2003).

Before starting the process of planning our integrated communication plan, it is essential to study and analyze several vital points. On the one hand, it is necessary to understand the brand we will be working with, including its current processes, areas for improvement, and other relevant details. On the other hand, we must also deepen our understanding of the audiences to whom the communication will be directed (both internal and external), including their behavior and reactions to current communication strategies. This helps us to determine how we can improve in their eyes and have a positive impact on their behavior. For this purpose, before developing our integrated communication plan, it is necessary to conduct in-depth research that allows us to identify the message we want to convey and the strategies we must employ to make a real impact on our audiences.

To conduct successful research, we must first determine which research method will be employed in this project. A research method encompasses all the various procedures, schemes, algorithms, and other techniques that researchers employ during the research process to collect samples and data, ultimately aiming to find a solution to the problem (Rajasekar et al., 2003).

The literature presents us with two methods: quantitative and qualitative.

“Quantitative research... *method*... is all about collecting data that accurately reflects and describes the situation with numbers” (Kitchen & Tourky, 2022, p. 62).

It investigates the what, where, and when of decision-making. This method involves quantities and measurements. It is numerical, non-descriptive, and applies statistics; most importantly, the results are conclusive. These results are usually presented in tables and graphs (Rajasekar et al., 2003).

“Qualitative research... *method*... focuses on gathering information about... attitudes, feelings, likes, emotions, beliefs, and behavior. Marketers can gather feedback, comments, and opinions from both existing and potential customers using a variety of methods. The purpose is to gain a better understanding of buyer behavior, including a perspective of how, when, and why purchase decisions are made.” (Kitchen & Tourky, 2022, p.63).

This method involves non-numerical data, is more descriptive, applies reasoning, and uses words. In this research method, graphs are not used, and the core goal is to describe situations (Rajasekar et al., 2003).

According to Kitchen and Tourky (2022), there are four categories to study within the field of marketing: industry, product, communication, and consumer. Conducting research that encompasses these four categories enables marketers to make informed decisions and develop integrated communication strategies, including message creation, channel selection, promotional programs, and other key elements. These categories are primarily focused on marketing aimed at external audiences and can assist in developing techniques targeting those groups.

Although all four research categories will be included in this project, special importance and emphasis will be placed on the communication category. In communication-related research, it is essential to observe the actions of competitors and other organizations in the industry, whether they are direct or indirect competitors. Kitchen and Tourky (2022) introduce a set of guiding questions that can help in this category, such as: What media do our competitors use? What communication strategies do they apply to convey their messages? What types of promotions are they offering?

Kitchen and Tourky (2022) also introduce six subcategories of communication research that must be taken into account when creating an integrated communication plan: brand

websites, social media, video content, legacy media, sales promotions, and other communication strategies (p.64).

Once the problem and objectives of this project were identified, a qualitative method was chosen. First, we analyzed the case study of the North American Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) startup SmartHop. This case study will focus on identifying the current communication techniques and strategies used by the company's marketing and human resources teams. The reason for this is that the communication plan aims to propose improvements on both fronts (internal and external); therefore, it is necessary to identify the current strategy, areas for improvement, and which techniques can be continued to enhance communication.

Secondly, research was also conducted on the communication strategies of both direct and indirect competitors across the six communication sub-categories, as well as consumer reactions and behaviors in response to these communication stimuli, including messaging, channels, content techniques, and other relevant factors.

Data collection

First, we must conduct a literature review that allows us to identify key terms, strategies, and techniques that will support the planning and development of this communication plan. To achieve this, various marketing literature articles were carefully analyzed, compared, and presented in the previous literature review. The search for these articles was conducted using keywords based on the objectives of this project, which will be given later in the document.

Based on these objectives, a literature review was conducted focusing on the key points, including various authors who proposed different theories related to integrated communication, the role of integrated communication within the marketing discipline, and the evolution of integrated communication from a purely managerial and organizational concept to a strategic element that connects the organization as a whole, where the marketing team plays a crucial role in the implementation of communication strategies. To this end, over 300 sources were analyzed, including academic articles, books, opinion columns, and other types of content. Articles that focused solely on organizational approaches were excluded, while those that explored integrated communication as a broader organizational connector, encompassing both external and internal communication, were retained.

Second, an analysis of relevant information about the organization was conducted, including publicly available information about its vision, mission, and values, as well as its

current marketing and communication strategies. Additionally, internal documentation provided by the organization will be used to help define and understand the organization's goals and the messages it aims to communicate to its audiences. The company voluntarily provided this documentation, and authorization was granted for its use strictly for academic purposes in the context of this project.

Thirdly, an analysis of the company's current strategy, along with a final diagnosis, was conducted. This will focus on the techniques and methods currently used in the field of integrated communication, as well as the projects expected to be developed shortly.

This analysis was first conducted by evaluating the frequency of content and social media strategy actions, followed by an assessment of audience engagement levels in response to these marketing efforts. Also, together with the organization's marketing team, we evaluated which channel needed the most attention, and we identified social media as a priority.

Lastly, research was conducted on the company's main competitors (both direct and indirect), focusing on their key communication strategies and visible external policies related to internal communication and human capital management.

This project includes a significant amount of confidential information voluntarily provided by the company SmartHop. This information was collected both during my employment with the company and afterward, as part of a collaborative effort to support the development of this academic project.

Please find in Appendix 26 the signed authorization form from the company's Marketing Director, confirming and approving the use of this information for academic purposes only.

Company Analysis: Case Study - SmartHop

SmartHop is a mid-sized Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) startup headquartered in Miami, FL, United States. Established in 2018, SmartHop is a Venezuelan-American company that developed an AI-driven online platform and mobile application. The SmartHop platform is designed to help truck drivers and fleet managers in the United States make better decisions regarding routes and efficiently manage their businesses (SmartHop, n.d.).

Company Name & Logo

The company name and logo, along with brand imagery, are among the most essential elements of branding (Legateaux, 2024; Song et al., 2022). These elements play a crucial role in shaping consumer perception (Song et al., 2022).

Nombre: SmartHop

The name is one of the most essential elements of branding (Legateaux, 2024). It should be easy to remember, simple to pronounce, and relevant to the industry and products (Legateaux, 2024). The name *SmartHop* is a combination of the words “Smart” (in Spanish and Portuguese, “Inteligente”) and “Hop” (in Spanish and Portuguese, “salto”), representing the intelligent leap that truckers take into the digital era, leveraging increasingly advanced technologies to streamline their work. The name was initially chosen in English, as the company is based in the U.S. and primarily serves an English-speaking audience.

Logo

Logos have become essential parts of companies' brand identity... making a significant impact on consumers' perception of the companies" (Song et al., 2022, p. 1610).

Aside from the name, the logo is the second most crucial element of a brand (Legateaux, 2024). It serves as a visual tool that allows organizations or companies to distinguish themselves from competitors and other entities (Legateaux, 2024). Furthermore, logos have become a crucial part of brand identity and can represent a competitive advantage by influencing consumer perceptions (Machado et al., 2015; Song et al., 2022). According to Machado et al. (2015), logos not only differentiate a brand from its competitors but also, through their design alone, can convey positive meanings and evoke favorable emotions in consumers' minds.

SmartHop's logo consists of the brand and company name, accompanied by a symbol above it that represents a "jump," aligning with the brand's meaning of "Smart Jump."

The brand features three primary colors: white, orange, and blue, which are used in various formats depending on the digital context, such as social media, websites, digital ads, and other platforms.

Image 3 - SmartHop Logo blue and orange/ Image 4 - SmartHop Logo white and orange



Source: <https://www.smarthop.com/>

History

After founding a successful trucking company in Venezuela, Guillermo Garcia moved to the U.S. and built another fleet in Miami. Teaming up with computer scientist Miguel Sucre, they launched SmartHop in 2020 to make trucking operations easier and more efficient. Initially offering dispatching and back-office services, SmartHop later transitioned to a tech-driven platform with a monthly subscription model, providing small fleets with digital tools to run and grow their businesses.

Mission, Vision & Values

Mission: “SmartHop is on a mission to help fleets perform better. Personalized spot market strategies enhance profitability, while driver and dispatcher tools simplify daily tasks. Moreover, performance management and goal-setting capabilities make it possible to dream bigger than ever before” (SmartHop, s.d).

“At SmartHop, we believe in working together to improve the lives of our customers. We are committed to achieving our goals, holding ourselves accountable for them, and encouraging constructive feedback to fuel innovation. Most importantly, we do it all with the best interests of truckers at heart, and we have fun along the way” (SmartHop, s.d).

SmartHop's mission is intensely focused on empowering its customers to make better decisions that drive their businesses toward success.

Vision: “To transform the way and carriers make a living by providing access to better opportunities.” (SmartHop, s.d).

SmartHop's vision is to drive the trucking industry forward by becoming the leading tool in the American market, helping carriers and dispatchers leverage technology to streamline their operations. The company aims to empower carriers and dispatchers by enabling them to use technology to their advantage.

Value Proposition: “SmartHop makes it easier and more profitable to run a trucking business by combining forward-looking market research and financial data with TMS and

load board capabilities...We put fleets in a position to make informed decisions that will lead them to run more profitably. (SmartHop, s.d).

Core Values

SmartHop operates under core values that ensure the right employees join the team, driving the company toward success:

- **Be Authentic** - SmartHop encourages employees to be themselves, bringing their unique experiences and personalities to the workplace.
- **Have Fun** - Success is worth celebrating. SmartHop fosters a culture where every milestone is recognized and enjoyed.
- **Fall Forward** - Mistakes are part of growth. At SmartHop, learning from setbacks and moving forward is key to continuous improvement.
- **Be Bold & Innovative** - Employees are encouraged to think big, share their ideas, and challenge the status quo.
- **Unity** - Success comes from working together. SmartHop promotes collaboration and teamwork to achieve greatness.

Additionally, SmartHop embodies values that, while not explicitly listed on its website, are deeply embedded in its culture and message:

- **Empathy & Customer Commitment** - The logistics industry is tough, and SmartHop understands the challenges that carriers, drivers, and dispatchers face. The company is dedicated to providing full support to its community, ensuring they feel valued and empowered.
- **Innovation** - Leveraging cutting-edge technology to enhance efficiency, optimize operations, and drive the future of trucking.

Products & Services

SmartHop is an innovative TMS platform built to help fleets make better, faster decisions and boost profitability. It streamlines dispatch and driver operations, supports performance tracking, and offers tools for data-driven goal setting.

Features Included in the Platform:

- **Loadboard:**

SmartHop connects users to real-time loads through direct broker integrations, including DAT. Unlike proprietary systems, this approach expands options through a strategic "coopetition" model.

- **Market Analysis Tools:**

Tools like MPI (Market Profit Index) and heat maps help identify the most profitable regions and trends for smarter load booking.

- **Trip Creation and Management:**

Users can upload or email load confirmation docs to automate trip setup and maintain accurate records for invoicing and payroll.

- **Performance Reporting:**

The platform delivers analytics on fleet, driver, and dispatcher performance over selected timeframes.

- **Payroll Management:**

Automates payroll calculations, tracks bonuses and deductions, and generates reports for tax purposes.

- **Profit Optimization:**

Analyzes cost and trip data to highlight areas for revenue improvement.

- **Market Analysis:**

Identifies hot regions for load demand, helping carriers find better-paying routes.

- **Customer Support:**

A dedicated success team supports users with customized strategies and high-quality service.

SmartHop serves three main profiles: owner-operators, dispatchers, and fleet managers. It empowers independent truckers and carriers by simplifying operations and improving decision-making through integrated tools and insights.

Business Model & Revenue Streams

SmartHop offers different subscription levels to its platform. Each subscription tier provides access to an increasing number of tools, meaning that the higher the subscription level, the more features are included. SmartHop subscription tiers go from \$50.00/month up to \$1,250.000/month.

To see the comparative chart of the plans currently offered by the company, please check Appendix 1.

SWOT Analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats)

Image 5 - SmartHop SWOT



Source: Self creation

Communication and brand tone

SmartHop's brand tone is designed to create a strong emotional connection with its audiences and the public. The brand's messaging is built around three key pillars:

- Reimagining the Trucking Industry

SmartHop is committed to empowering truck drivers and small carriers by helping them retain control over their businesses.

- For Truckers, by Truckers

The SmartHop community understands what it is like to work in trucking. The brand's message is built on authenticity: "We have walked in your shoes.

- Innovating for Good

SmartHop is not a tech company for innovation's sake. The focus is on developing technology that truly benefits truck drivers and carriers, easing their daily challenges and

serving their best interests. The SmartHop community seeks to be perceived as human and humble, building trust with its audience through a message that says:

“We come from trucking roots. We understand how hard it can be. We feel your pain, and we are here to solve it.”

Brand Values and Personality

SmartHop is grounded in three core brand values: Integrity, Passion, and a Customer-First focus.

The tone of SmartHop’s messaging follows four distinct characteristics:

- Forward-thinking – Lead with solutions, not confusion.
- Respectful – Avoid control; provide support.
- Direct – Be clear, concise, and use simple language.
- Trustworthy – Communicate empathetically, in a conversational tone.

While SmartHop's brand voice is intended to remain consistent across all communications, the tone should be adapted based on the context, communication channel, and specific situation (SmartHop, s.d, P. 15).

Later in this document, we will conduct a more in-depth analysis to evaluate how effectively these brand pillars are being applied in practice. Although clearly defined on paper, these pillars must be consistently reflected in all brand messaging and communication efforts.

Market Research

Target Customers & Market Segments

“Brand communication is not designed to reach everyone” (Kitchen & Tourky, 2022, p. 55). While SmartHop’s core audience is fleet owners or managers of 2 to 20 trucks, the strategy also includes Owner-Operators and Dispatchers, high-potential users who benefit from its services. To ensure complete alignment, an internal persona was also included, recognizing employees as key to delivering a consistent brand experience.

Persona	Patrick (Fleet Owner)	Jorge (Owner-Operator)	Maria (Dispatcher)	Diego (Internal - CX Lead)
Age / Gen.	52 / Gen X	45 / Gen X	37 / Gen Y	36 / Gen Y
Location	Miami, FL	Atlanta, GA	El Paso, TX	Bogotá, Colombia
Role	Fleet Owner / Manager	Owner-Operator	Independent Dispatcher	Customer Experience Lead
Business Size	5 Trucks	1 Truck	Manages 5–25 trucks	Internal stakeholder
Tech Usage	High (email, phone, apps)	High (apps, audio tools)	High (loadboards, apps, email)	High (Slack, CRM, video, email)
Motivations	Profit / Simplicity / Team Support	Growth / Time Control / Paperless	Efficiency / Fast decisions / Org.	Visibility / Leadership / Clarity
Challenges	Market crisis / Load finding	Deadhead miles / High costs	Emergencies / Real-time coordination	Info silos / One-way comms
Objections	"Too complex" / "Other load boards"	"Don't need all features"	"Learning new tool takes time"	"Not relevant to my team"
Core Message Need	Simplified tech, all-in-one system	Mobile-first, control + insights	Centralized dispatch & compliance	Internal alignment & transparency
Marketing Angle	"We're truckers too" / Empathetic	"Your command center" / Control	"Simplify your day" / Built for you	"Your voice matters" / Community-led

More information about the personas can be found in the appendices 2, 3, 4, and 5.

Social Media consumption habits

By 2023, approximately 80% of the trucking community had adopted social media (Kuder, 2023). Facebook was the most widely used platform, with 60% of truck drivers reporting that they have and actively use an account (Len Dubois Trucking Inc., n.d.; D&D

Transportation Services, 2025). YouTube ranked as the second most-used platform (Kuder, 2023).

Social media has become not only a source of entertainment for truck drivers but also a vital part of their daily lives. Beyond watching videos, viewing images, or engaging with posts, truck drivers now use social media to share their on-the-road experiences, manage their businesses, connect with digital communities of fellow professionals, and even as a key tool in recruitment within the industry (Kuder, 2023; Smith, 2023).

According to D&D Transportation Services (2025), other platforms commonly used by the trucking community include YouTube (54%), Instagram (15%), LinkedIn (14%), Twitter/X (13%), and Pinterest (11%).

For more information about the customer journey, please go to Appendix 6.

Competitive Landscape

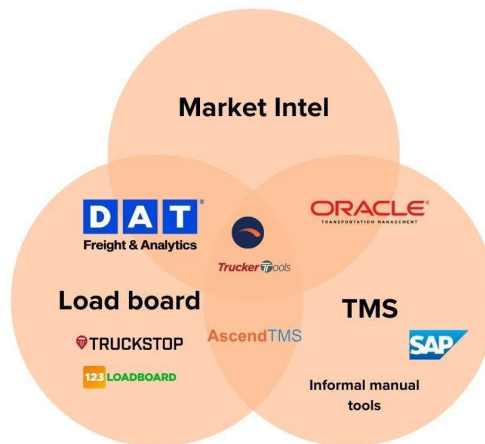
Unique Selling Proposition: “We put fleets in the position to make informed decisions that will lead them to running profitability, more often” (SmartHop, 2023).

Main Competitors & Market Differentiation

Trucker Tools is likely SmartHop’s most direct competitor, as it offers a similar value proposition with integrated tools.

Additionally, due to its value proposition, which heavily relies on the integration of multiple tools (TMS, Load Board, and Market Intelligence features), SmartHop faces intense competition in each of these categories, with some competitors even integrating two of them.

Image 7- SmartHop Unique Value Proposition



Source - Self-elaboration in Carva

Trucker Tools

Description: Trucker Tools, a sub-product of DAT, is likely the competitor most similar to SmartHop's services.

Services: Described by the company as an “all-in-one digital suite providing powerful, flexible tools to fuel the freight network of the future” (Trucker Tools, n.d.), Trucker Tools offers services such as a free Load Board, TMS, Invoicing, Route Optimization Tools, Truck Tracking, and more. Unlike SmartHop, Trucker Tools does not offer subscription tiers; instead, it customizes its pricing based on users' needs, considering factors such as business size and the tools required.

DAT, Freight and Analytics

Description: DAT can be considered SmartHop's most significant competitor in terms of Load Board and Market Intelligence tools. With nearly 50 years in the industry, DAT is currently a key reference point in the logistics sector for load board marketplace solutions and market analysis in the United States.

Services: Like SmartHop, DAT offers different subscription levels that provide access to various features. Among the most relevant, and in direct competition with SmartHop, DAT offers unlimited load board searches and the ability to post available trucks for users who prefer to bid on their truck availability. Starting at USD 199, DAT also includes market conditions tools, allowing users to identify which regions in the country offer better load

opportunities and higher profitability. DAT's price range spans from the cheapest subscription tier, costing USD 49, to the highest one, priced at USD 299. To find more information about DAT plans and price tiers, please see Appendix 7.

Truckstop

Description: Following DAT, we have Truckstop, founded in 1995. Truckstop is one of the most popular load board marketplaces in the United States and holds significant recognition in the American market.

Services: Like SmartHop and DAT, Truckstop offers three subscription tiers, ranging from USD 42 to \$159. Among its most relevant services are access to its load board marketplace and additional tools that help users filter out loads with unfavorable rates. In their highest plan, they also include filtering solutions, as well as access to the US market zones heatmap, load comparison, and rate insights, all essential tools for market intelligence analysis. To find more information about DAT plans and price tiers, please see Appendix 8.












Ascend TMS

Description: Ascend TMS, developed by InMotion Global Inc., is currently one of the most popular and widely used transportation management software solutions worldwide. Since entering the market in 2015, its ease of use has contributed to its growing popularity within the logistics industry.

Services: Its most notable service is its Transportation Management System (TMS), which currently includes over 230 internal tools (Choose Your Growth Plan, n.d.). Key features include GPS-based truck tracking, intuitive load management, load financials monitoring, route review and optimization, load documentation, invoicing, and carrier management, among others.

Online marketing and presence on social media

Image 8- SmartHop and competitors, Online marketing and presence in social media

						
	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗

Source - Self-elaboration in Canva

Market Trends

Digital behavior shift

Compared to millennials, Gen X, and baby boomers, Gen Z is less prominent in trucking and transportation (although some Gen Zers are still under 18 years old). For fleets and other trucking-related businesses, there is an opportunity to recruit from this generation, especially at a time when many Gen Zers are rethinking college in the face of student loans” (Hume, 2025).

The organization’s target audience is broad, encompassing multiple age groups. The average age of a truck driver is around 45 years old, typically part of Generation Y. While this generation may be more familiar with technology than Gen X or Baby Boomers, the rapid advancements in technology in the trucking industry can still present challenges for them.

However, this is beginning to shift. As previously mentioned, truckers and logistics companies are actively seeking to attract younger talent, particularly Generation Z, also known as the digital natives, whose tech-savvy skill sets are well-suited for driving innovation and digital transformation in the industry.

What is behind this behavioral shift? The integration of technology into nearly every aspect of the trucking industry is no longer a distant future; it is already happening (Heavy Weight Transport Inc., n.d.). This rapid digitalization requires truckers to deepen their technological knowledge to stay competitive in an increasingly demanding and technology-driven market.

Industry trends affecting communication

- **Younger Generations Joining the Trucking Industry:** While the average age of truck drivers today is around 41 years old, younger generations are increasingly entering the industry (Platform Science, 2024).
- **Technology in Trucking:** Today, technology is an integral part of the trucking industry (Miller, 2024). However, only a small portion of the trucking industry actively utilizes technology to enhance the efficiency of their businesses. Beyond the essential tasks—such as using apps for communication, GPS and route planning, or finding more profitable loads—there is limited adoption of technology for more advanced operational improvements. For this reason, and to align with the audience's current capabilities and behaviors, the implementation of advanced marketing approaches, such as Marketing 5.0 or 6.0, is not yet entirely feasible for this particular target audience.

Integrated Marketing Communication Diagnosis: Evaluating the Current Strategy

Marketing & Communication Strategies

SmartHop has a primarily digital presence, with limited traditional media exposure and participation in events. As a technology company, its operations are mostly online, and its communication channels are fully digital, including its website, social media platforms, website chat (currently available only for sales), phone contact, and email.

Branding & Positioning Strategy

SmartHop positions itself as a platform designed to assist carriers and independent drivers with their daily tasks. They do not aim to be perceived as a tech company seeking to disrupt the industry.

Digital marketing

SmartHop utilizes digital marketing as its primary marketing channel, employing multiple strategies, including email marketing, to send promotions to its consumers regularly.

SEO: SmartHop also employs search engine optimization (SEO) strategies on its website and digital ads, utilizing targeted keywords to increase impressions and effectively reach its audience.

Keywords identified: Loadboard, Loads, Trucking, TMS, among others.

Please find some samples of their web page, together with the written content and keywords used in Appendices 9 to 10.

Social Media & Content Strategy

SmartHop currently has a presence on the following social media platforms: Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and LinkedIn. On average, only two content posts were published per month, with the duplicate content shared across all platforms. As part of the project's initiation, the company requested support in managing its social media to increase content generation and enhance audience engagement. Please find some samples of their social media posts, written content, and keywords used in social media in Appendices 13 to 18.

For approximately three months, I was responsible for creating, editing, and publishing content across SmartHop's social media channels, with prior approval from the organization's marketing supervisors. The goal of this activity was to assess audience reactions to the introduction of new content. Later, I will present the content that was designed and posted, the results obtained, as well as other strategies that were planned but not yet implemented.

Content marketing:

Blog: Regarding content strategy, although SmartHop has a blog, it rarely publishes new content. The last post was made in April 2024.

Videos: With the help of a third-party tool, SmartHop implemented a User-generated content (UGC) video campaign in 2024, consisting of three videos created by users, promoting the usage of the platform and its all-in-one tools. Please find some samples of their video content on the YouTube channel in Appendices 15, 17, and 18.

Webinars: SmartHop implemented a webinar strategy in 2024, with one seminar directed at current platform users. The goal was to showcase the different platform tools and advantages, along with an open Q&A session, where users were allowed to ask questions about platform tools they were not familiar with. The assistance rate averaged 15-20 people.

Interactive content: SmartHop developed a tool that helped users calculate their estimated profit by inputting their actual load information. By inputting this information and adding their truck expenses, users can estimate the profit they will earn per their assigned or desired load. Please find some samples of interactive content in Appendix 19.

Social media storytelling: One of the strategies included in this project for developing social media content, and what the organization aimed to introduce, was the creation of storytelling narratives that create a connection between the organization's audiences and potential consumers. I will later explore this project in more depth, as well as the introduction of social media content within the organization. Please find a sample of their social media posts, written content, and keywords used in social media in Appendix 20.

Email Communications: In addition to social media, the company uses email to share updates and run advertising campaigns. These emails are sent on a campaign basis, so there may be periods without any outgoing messages, aside from automated nurture flows. Email and discount campaigns are typically implemented around national holidays, celebrations, and key seasons. Please find a sample of SmartHop email marketing communication in Appendix 21.

Internal & External Communication

Internal Communication Tools

Internal communication is primarily written, utilizing tools such as Slack for messaging and email for general correspondence.

Meetings are primarily held virtually through Google Meet and are announced in advance. There are three main types of meetings:

- All-Hands meetings: These involve 100% of employees and are held monthly.
- Departmental meetings: Held at least once a week within each department.
- Team meetings: Held at least once a week, these meetings are used to align goals, evaluate strategies, and provide feedback.

Some of the most significant events related to team engagement include the opening of the main office in Miami, FL, and a company-wide in-person meeting held in Cartagena, Colombia, in 2023. During the Cartagena event, employees participated in conferences, networked with colleagues from different departments, and attended various training sessions. While the Miami office opening was utilized as content for social media, the Cartagena event, despite its high engagement potential, was not leveraged in any external communication channels. Please find some samples of SmartHop social events in Appendix 22.

Additionally, employees have access to an internal portal where they can complete training, review company policies, request time off, and more.

There is also an Employee Resource Center, where employees can access videos and study materials related to the platform.

External Communication Tools

As external communication tools, SmartHop uses:

- **Social Media:** SmartHop maintains a presence on various social media platforms, including Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and LinkedIn. On average, only two content posts were published per month, with duplicate content used across all platforms.
- **Support option on the website:** Users can contact internal teams via phone, email, or live chat (currently available only for sales-related inquiries).

Message consistency across channels

The organization typically uses duplicate content across all social media platforms, without tailoring it to each channel, except for the YouTube channel, which is only video formatted. En comparación con el mensaje proporcionado en la página web, el mensaje se mantiene consistente.

Brand voice and identity coherence

As previously mentioned, the literature highlights the importance of creating an organizational identity as a tool to build competitive advantages, foster positive associations in consumers' minds, and strengthen relationships with stakeholders (Kitchen & Tourky, 2022; Levin et al., 1996; Neves & Zilmar, 2017; Panwar & Khan, 2020). A key component of an organization's identity is its corporate identity. Elements such as vision, mission, and values are fundamental for shaping that identity (FEAPS, Confederación Española de Organizaciones en favor de las personas con discapacidad intelectual, n.d.).

The founding message of SmartHop was based on the premise of transforming the trucking industry by empowering **independent truckers and carriers** to succeed while maintaining control. Built **by truckers for truckers**, the company understood their challenges and offered more innovative, easier ways to work. Driven by meaningful innovation, SmartHop created technology that served the real needs of its customers, always keeping their best interests at the core (SmartHop, n.d.).

Closely tied to its brand pillars, SmartHop's original message centered on empathy and the strong connection that truckers have with one another. Over time, however, independent truckers stopped being the company's ideal customer, and one of its main pillars was no longer part of its mission. Following this shift, no strategies were implemented to create a new identity. The company's mission and vision were not updated, creating a gap in its identity.

Message coherence became disconnected from the company's identity, and the original premise of "truckers for truckers" shifted towards concepts related to "Fleet Managers."

Renewing the corporate identity is crucial not only for external stakeholders but also for internal communication. Remember one key principle of successful internal communication: employees should have clarity on four key questions: What are they doing? Why are they doing it? How should it be done? Moreover, for whom is it being done? (Jiménez Peñarreta et al., 2021, p. 100). Ensuring that 100% of the workforce understands these questions is fundamental to any organization's success.

Diagnosis: Key Findings

After conducting a thorough analysis of the organization's current strategies - including message consistency, use of corporate and brand identity, and communication channels the following key points were identified:

- Gaps in Message Consistency and Strategy

SmartHop's message has weakened over time. Its once-strong brand pillars, focused on empathy, community belonging within the trucking industry, and empowering small, independent truckers, have faded. The original identity has been overshadowed by a new approach targeting different audiences, but without a clear renewal of the brand narrative. It is essential to update and communicate the brand's new identity. This shift should go beyond sales objectives and aim to foster a strong, connected community around the brand.

- Underutilized Communication Channels

Communication on social media is largely one-way. User questions and comments receive no responses, missing an opportunity to boost engagement, improve customer experience, and drive sales. Furthermore, social platforms are not used as active touchpoints, which limits their potential as strategic communication tools.

- Low Engagement and Unclear Positioning

A well-defined repositioning strategy has not supported the shift in target market. There is a lack of clarity about how the brand wants to be perceived going forward and whether new corporate identity pillars need to be reinforced. In the current communication strategies, at least in public-facing channels, there is minimal to no engagement from the audience, reflecting a disconnect between the message and audience expectations.

- Missed Audience Segments

The trucking community is broad and diverse, with significant variation across age groups. It is essential to analyze and understand the behaviors of both older generations and newer ones entering the market. For example, Generation Z exhibits entirely different digital behavior compared to the average truck driver. Developing communication strategies tailored to this age segment could greatly benefit the organization in the medium to long term.

- Strengths to Leverage

SmartHop has a powerful foundational message, centered initially around community, support, and industry transformation from within. This message can and should be revived, adapted, and strengthened to resonate with new audiences without losing its authenticity. Proposed strategies will emphasize reconnecting emotionally with the audience, under the premise of celebrating everyone in the trucking industry.

- Low Employee Engagement

Internal engagement is currently limited. The organization must ensure that all employees have a clear understanding of the company's mission and their role within it. This requires implementing internal training and development strategies that align employee actions with organizational goals, ensuring coherent, effective communication from the inside out.

- Limited utilization of channels for internal stakeholders

There is limited utilization of communication channels directed toward internal stakeholders, which weakens internal alignment and employee engagement. Strengthening these channels is essential for reinforcing the organizational mission, improving transparency, and fostering a more cohesive internal culture.

Strategic Recommendations: Implementing an Effective IC Framework

Throughout this project, I have made special emphasis on the importance of integrated communication as a fundamental element for the growth and success of an organization.

This project aims to develop an Integrated Communication Plan that incorporates various marketing techniques currently used and recommended by experts, to enhance the selected company's existing integrated communication strategy and its relationship with its audiences. To achieve this, different proposals will be presented in this document, supported by relevant literature to justify their implementation.

One of the key elements of effective communication is understanding the target audience and tailoring the message as much as possible. For this reason, the proposals will be structured according to the specific audience segments they are intended for, based on the four "personas" previously identified.

I will begin with internal audiences, focusing on the fourth persona (Employee), which represents one of the internal stakeholders to whom the organization must also direct its communication efforts.

Next, we will address external audiences, covering the first three personas: two already defined by the company as its ideal customer profiles, and one as a potential perfect customer profile.

Internal communication

Objectives for internal audiences

This Integrated Communication Plan is divided into two components, each focused on a different target audience. For internal audiences, the objective is to increase employee morale and improve internal communication by establishing a long-term action framework that clearly defines communication parameters. These will be measured through employee perception metrics related to their experience within the company.

According to the literature, an effective internal communication plan is a core driver of organizational success (Brandão, 2018; Santos et al., 2023). To achieve effective integrated communication, it is mandatory that messaging be straightforward, educational, and transparent (Santos et al., 2023). This approach should result in employee clarity regarding four key components:

What is the organization doing? Why is it doing it? How should it be done? And for whom is it being done? (Jiménez Peñarreta et al., 2021, p. 100)

To evaluate the effectiveness of the plan and the organization's ability to retain and engage one of its most valuable assets, its human talent, we propose the following measurable outcomes:

- Employee retention;
- Employee branding (a key outcome of effective internal communication) (Santos et al., 2023);
- Employee satisfaction and loyalty;
- Employee alignment with organizational identity, including knowledge of company culture and values.

Integrated Marketing Communication Plan

Core Brand Message

Many companies are now recognizing the importance of hiring employees whose values align with those of the organization. This makes internal communication a crucial tool for ensuring that the brand message is not only communicated to customers but also deeply understood by employees.

SmartHop's internal messaging should prioritize the diffusion of internal culture, mission, vision, and values. Operational procedures are necessary, but it is even more essential that internal stakeholders understand why they are doing what they do, who they are doing it for, and how their work contributes to the company's larger goals.

Proposed Message:

"Our mission as an organization is to use technology to make the logistics and trucking industry a better, more manageable space. In today's landscape, many unpredictable variables make it difficult for our customers to manage their businesses. SmartHop exists to simplify their journey.

We empower our customers by turning technology into a competitive advantage, helping them make better, smarter decisions. We do this through innovation, transparency, professionalism, and empathy. Truckers, more than anyone, understand the challenges of starting and growing a business. We're here to support them, to help them adapt, and to thrive in a rapidly changing industry. But first, we must make them believe in SmartHop, our technology, and our team."

- **Tone and voice adjustments**

Organizations are often compared to families, and in today's work culture, where people may spend more time with colleagues than with their families, cultivating a healthy workplace culture is vital. Employees should feel aligned with the company's mission and proud of its success.

To ensure this, messages from leadership must effectively share and reinforce the company's culture, mission, vision, and values. If these evolve over time, the new foundations must be communicated across the organization.

To accomplish this, educational tools, internal communication platforms, and team-building strategies play a key role.

Tone: Educational, transparent, supportive, and friendly

Voice: Collaborative and motivational, encouraging shared ownership and team identity

- **Emotional and rational appeals**

Internal communication should foster employee connection to the company's mission and values. It should promote a team culture where people feel free to share ideas, opinions, and feedback. Transparency is key; employees must be kept informed about what's happening across the organization.

This open communication fosters respect, appreciation, and commitment, all essential elements of long-term engagement and loyalty (Santos et al., 2023).

Strategies to develop

- **Identity manual update**

The primary goal of internal communication is to ensure that all employees and stakeholders are aligned with the organization's mission, vision, values, policies, processes, and overall objectives (Cortés et al., 2024; Júnior et al., 2023; Núñez et al., 2010). To achieve this, it is essential for the organization to have a clearly defined mission, vision, and core values—and to share this information with every team member.

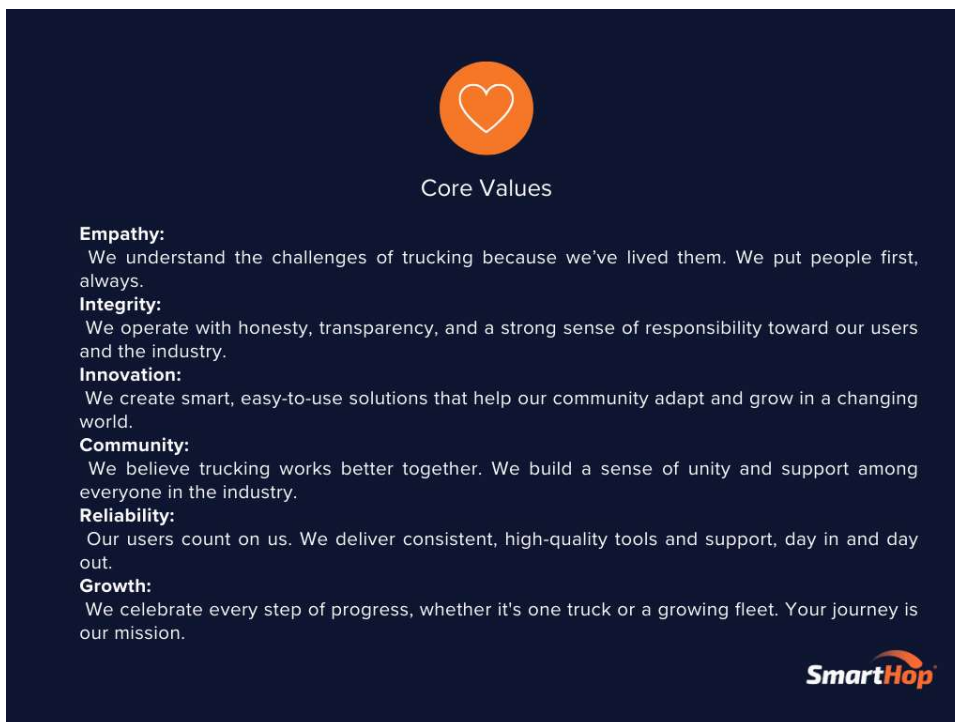
For this reason, I propose the creation or update of the organization's Brand Identity Manual, reflecting the changes the company has undergone in recent years. This updated manual should be shared with all current and new employees and made available on the internal employee portal to ensure accessibility and consistency in internal communications. While this document is not a direct deliverable of this project, which focuses on other outputs, it is recommended that the organization work collaboratively with the Human Resources and executive teams to develop this new identity manual. Once completed, it can be shared with both internal and external stakeholders.

Image 9 - SmartHop identity manual mockup



Source - Self-elaboration in Canva

Image 10 - SmartHop identity manual mockup



Source - Self-elaboration in Canva

- **Social media strategies**

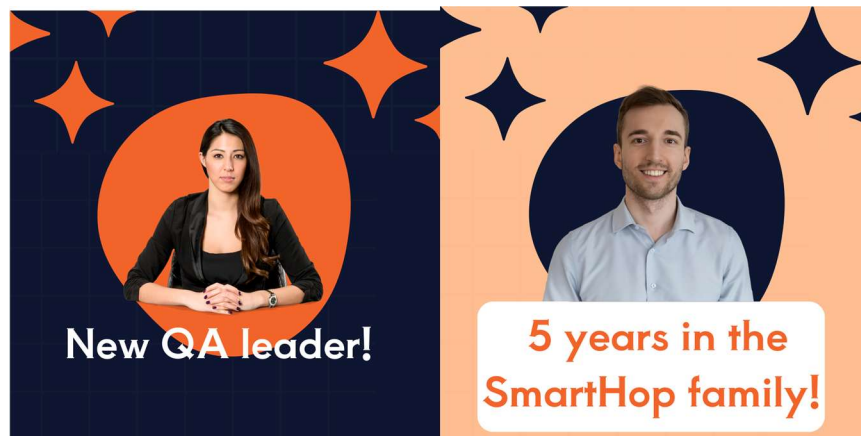
Although often seen as external tools, social media platforms can also be powerful for internal communication, especially in recognizing employee contributions. Research highlights their effectiveness in promoting employee branding and organizational pride (Fernandes et al., 2023; Santos, 2024).

Platforms like Instagram, LinkedIn, and Facebook can be used to celebrate team members' accomplishments publicly, highlight key skills, and showcase organizational values. These efforts inspire employees to take greater ownership and also help potential recruits get a better sense of company culture (Jiménez Peñarreta et al., 2021).

Use platforms like Instagram, LinkedIn, and Facebook to feature SmartHop team members, sharing their stories, achievements, and milestones. In consequence, this:

- Boosts employee pride and engagement
- Reinforces internal culture and team spirit
- Humanizes the organization for external audiences

Image 11- Image 12 - SmartHop social media creatives for employee recognition



Source - Self-elaboration in Canva

Please find some samples of developed posts in Appendix 23.

- **Personalized email marketing for internal audiences**

Email is one of the most widely used tools for internal communication. Alongside platforms like Slack, Microsoft Teams, and Zoom, email remains a cornerstone of day-to-day

operational communication. However, email can and should serve purposes beyond logistics—it can become a tool for engagement and recognition.

Just as personalized emails are highly effective in building external customer relationships, the same approach can strengthen internal relationships. Personalized emails for special occasions such as birthdays, work anniversaries, promotions, or personal milestones (e.g., graduation, weddings, or becoming a parent) can have a profound emotional impact.

A simple gesture, such as a congratulatory message, can foster loyalty, increase motivation, and create a sense of belonging, reinforcing the idea that the company values employees not only for their work but also as individuals.

Image 13- SmartHop internal congratulations email mockup



Source - Self-elaboration in Canva

Content Strategies

Just as with external audiences, content creation for internal stakeholders can take many different formats. Below, we outline several proposed initiatives for developing internal content that, when approached from an integrated communication strategy, will not only strengthen internal culture but also positively influence how the organization communicates with external audiences.

- **Internal-User-Generated Content**

As highlighted throughout this document, internal audiences play a fundamental role in an organization's success. Pulizzi (2013) encourages companies to transform their employees

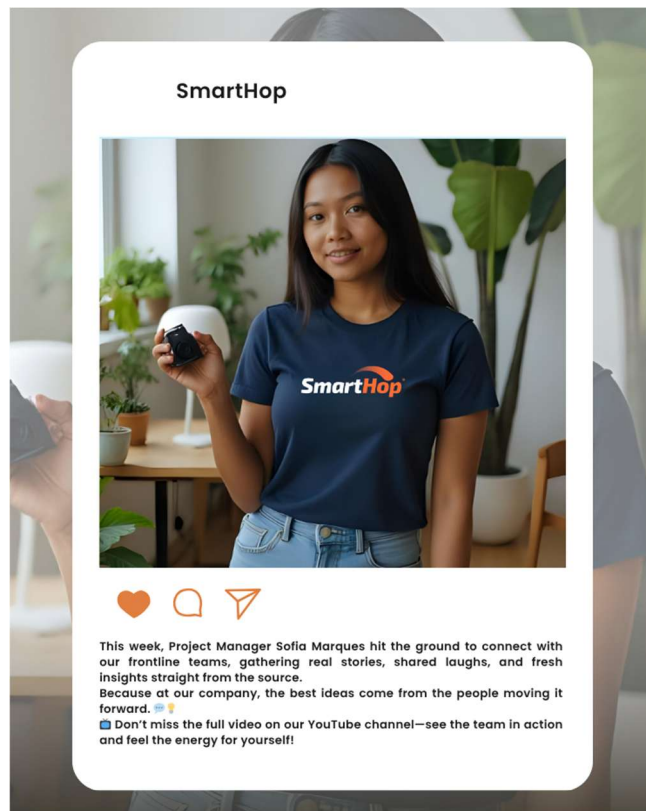
into content creators and brand ambassadors (Kaur & Kaur, 2024). After all, who better to promote a company's products and services than those who know them best: its employees?

I propose that the company actively collaborate with its employees to promote the creation of authentic, employee-led content. One example could be a series of short videos in which employees interview one another to explain their roles within the organization. This type of initiative not only strengthens interpersonal relationships within the team but also promotes internal training, knowledge sharing, and product understanding.

These videos could initially be published on internal platforms, and, if the content is relevant to external audiences, later shared through social media channels, the company website, or blog.

In addition to fostering stronger internal relationships, increasing brand credibility, and enhancing the company's position relative to competitors, Pulizzi & Barrett (2009) also note that this type of content strategy has a direct positive impact on organizational profitability. When employees become the storytellers of the company's success, their voice humanizes the brand and builds trust across all audience segments.

Image 14- SmartHop UGC from employee mockup



Source - Self-elaboration in Canva

- **Written Content Creation Program**

Secondly, I propose the creation of a program that encourages employees to contribute written content, which can later be polished and optimized by the marketing and editorial team (Pulizzi, 2013). In this program, employees would be rewarded for investing time in content creation, receiving incentives such as additional time off, small salary bonuses, or gift cards.

While employees often have deep insights into the company and the industry, their written contributions may require editing and refinement. Therefore, this initiative must be carried out in close collaboration with the marketing team, ensuring quality and alignment with the brand's tone and voice.

This initiative not only builds a sense of ownership and recognition among staff but also leverages internal expertise to generate authentic, valuable content. Over time, it fosters a culture where employees view themselves as active contributors to the brand's narrative, reinforcing internal identity and external credibility.

- **Employee Magazine and Internal Newsletter**

The newsletter is one of the most traditional and longstanding written communication tools (Santos et al., 2023). With the advent of digital tools, their use has also expanded to online formats, where external audiences can subscribe to stay updated on industry news and organizational developments. However, this is also a highly effective tool for internal communication.

Proposal:

We propose the creation of a monthly digital magazine or newsletter designed exclusively for internal audiences. This internal publication will serve as a centralized source of information, helping employees stay informed about what's happening across the organization. It will include key updates such as:

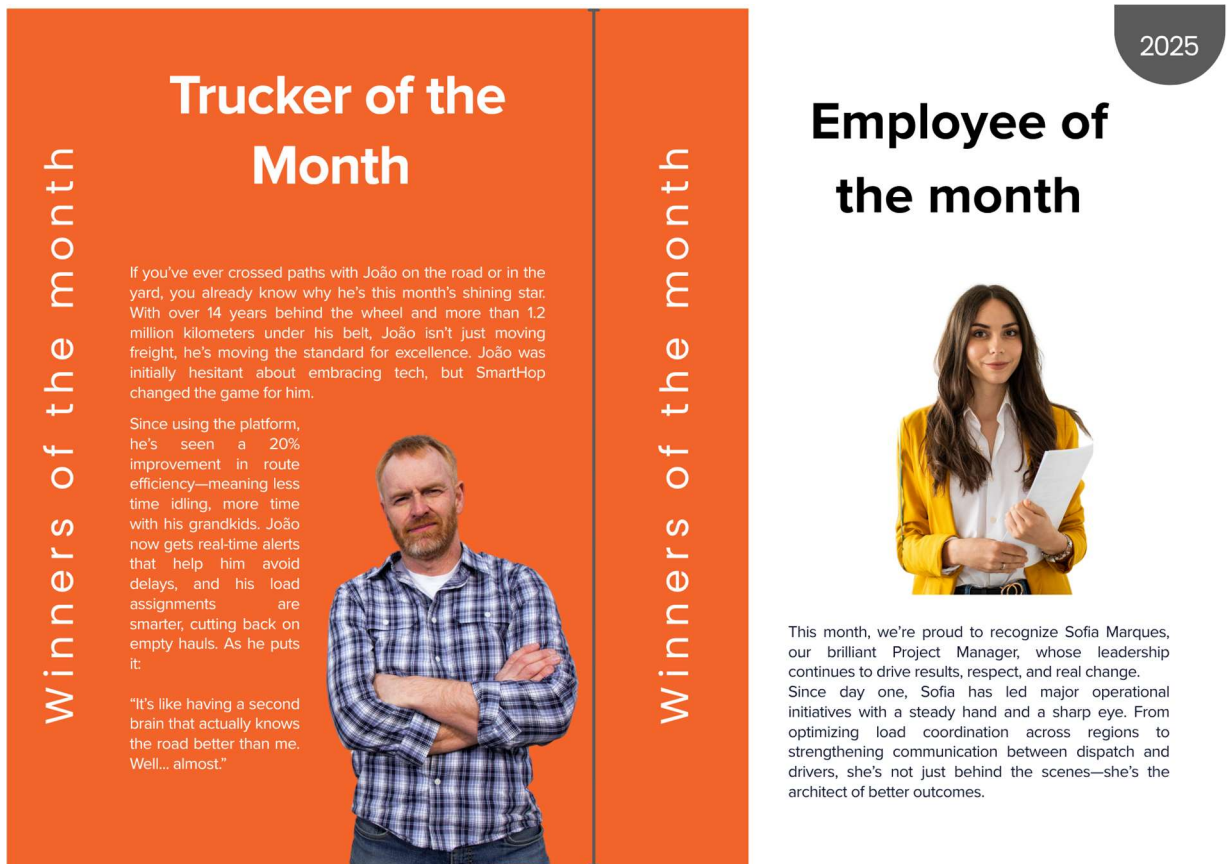
- Company news and milestones
- Employee birthdays and work anniversaries
- Employee of the Month recognition
- Promotions and team changes
- Policy updates or structural changes
- Product or platform launches
- Highlights from industry news relevant to our work

The format will be simple, engaging, and distributed via email once a month. This initiative will support transparency, foster a sense of belonging, and encourage greater alignment and engagement among employees.

Image 15- SmartHop Internal Newsletter mockup



Source - Self-elaboration in Canva



Source: Self-elaboration in Canva

○ Internal Events – Celebrations and Team-Building Activities

Face-to-face interactions remain one of the most traditional and effective communication channels within organizations (Santos et al., 2023). With the evolution of communication technologies and the shift toward remote work environments, face-to-face interactions have transformed to include virtual tools that foster connection even across distances. In today's reality (where many workplace relationships are built digitally), it is crucial to encourage in-person events that strengthen employee bonds, reinforce shared goals, and offer space to clarify doubts and align on team efforts.

Proposal: The SmartHop Day

I propose the creation of SmartHop Day, an annual event celebrating the foundation of the company and its collective journey. This celebration can serve as a high-impact engagement initiative, bringing together employees to reflect on the company's history, celebrate achievements, and reaffirm its mission and long-term objectives.

This event would ideally involve:

- Optional in-person meetups for employees based in the same city or region, held at a physical office or offsite location.
- Hybrid components that incorporate digital tools to include remote or internationally based employees.
- Interactive elements such as trivia games about the company, the logistics industry, or team members to encourage participation from all employees, regardless of location.
- Time dedicated to acknowledging milestones, hearing from leadership, and sharing upcoming company goals in an informal, celebratory setting.

This type of event not only humanizes the workplace but also reinforces internal culture, strengthens employee relationships, and boosts motivation across teams.

- **Employee Educational Portal**

One of the key objectives of organizational communication is to educate employees and keep them updated on the company's developments.

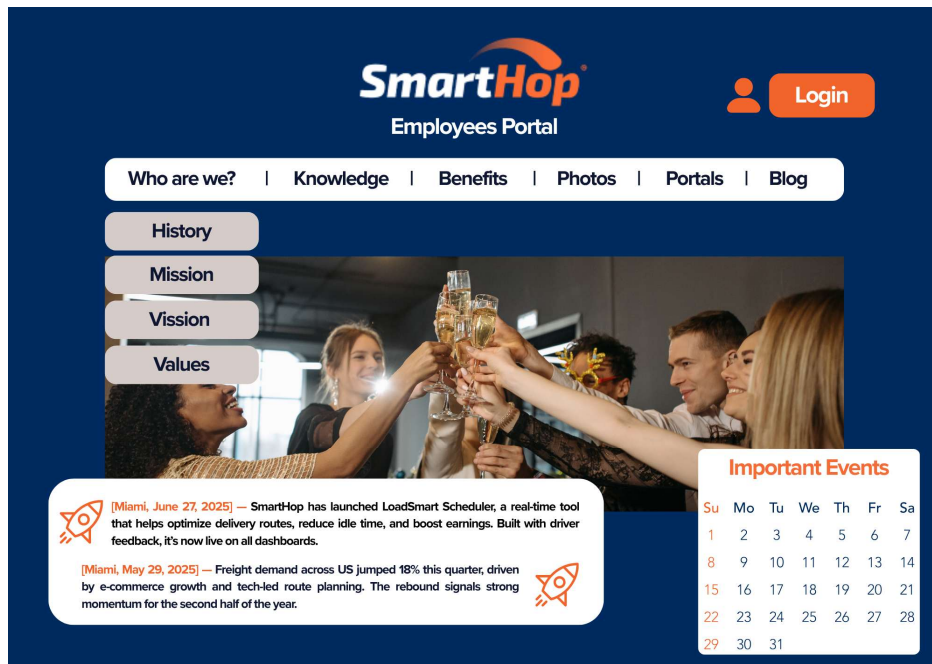
Proposal:

To develop and expand the use of an internal employee portal that provides access to training materials, industry insights, company updates, and educational content. This platform would also enable employees to contribute their content (collaborating with the marketing department) and engage in discussions to resolve common questions or share constructive feedback.

It is important to note that the company already has an internal intranet focused primarily on HR matters and policies. This proposal aims to enhance the existing platform by incorporating an educational component. The goal is to support employees in gaining a deeper understanding of the company's mission, operations, and industry context, while promoting ongoing learning and engagement across departments.

By integrating this educational layer, SmartHop will foster a culture of transparency, empowerment, and shared knowledge, essential elements for sustainable growth and internal alignment.

Image 17- SmartHop employees portal Mockup



Source - Self-elaboration in Canva

Measurement & Evaluation

To measure the success of the proposed strategies, we will monitor employee retention metrics along with a quarterly survey system to evaluate employee satisfaction with internal communication efforts.

External communication:

Objectives for external audiences

As the second focus of this integrated communication plan, this section centers on SmartHop's external audiences. External audiences are represented by three of the four SmartHop personas, and the content proposed here will be carefully tailored to engage each distinct audience segment effectively.

To strengthen integrated marketing and product communication, this project proposes a set of marketing communication techniques aimed at enhancing the organization's competitive positioning, increasing organic lead generation through strategic content, and improving audience engagement (particularly on social media) through targeted content development.

The achievement of these objectives will be measured through the following key metrics:

- Increase in website traffic
- Growth in organic leads
- Engagement levels with social media posts
- Quantity and quality of social media content
- Enhanced consistency and strategic alignment of messaging across platforms

Through a variety of content strategies outlined in this plan (especially those focused on social media growth and integrated brand storytelling), I aim to improve these performance indicators by aligning internal messaging with external brand expression.

This approach involves cross-functional communication coordination to ensure message consistency, optimize customer touchpoints, and harness internal insights to develop content that resonates with the company's key audiences.

Integrated Marketing Communication Plan

Core Brand Message

SmartHop's messaging is evolving in step with the company's growth. While it initially focused on supporting truck owner-operators, it is now expanding to serve a broader audience (larger fleets, dispatchers, fleet managers, and others across the logistics landscape).

The trucking industry is going through challenging times, and these challenges don't just affect small fleets; they impact everyone. SmartHop recognizes this reality and sees an opportunity to serve as a unifying force. The brand should stay true to its roots (built by truckers, for truckers) while broadening its scope to stand with the entire industry as a supportive partner.

SmartHop's message must reflect both resilience and inclusivity. While not every service will suit every segment of the industry, SmartHop can position itself as the bridge between various audiences, offering technology, insights, and empathy to all.

Proposed message:

"We know it's not easy. We know that making the right decisions becomes harder as our industry changes. But we want you to know: we're here. SmartHop is here. SmartHop is a platform built by truckers, for truckers. We understand the road

you're on, and that's why we've adapted our technology to meet your specific needs.

Maybe you started with just one truck. Then came the second, the third, or perhaps that's still ahead of you. Wherever you are on your journey, SmartHop is here to help you grow.

We're not just a load board. We're a technology solution that brings everything you need into one place. No more juggling multiple tools. With SmartHop, it's all in one platform.

We know you have big dreams. And we're here to help you bring them to life."

- Tone and voice adjustments:

SmartHop's tone should reflect the realities and spirit of the trucking industry: authentic, empathetic, and solution-driven.

Tone Characteristics:

- Empathetic: Show deep understanding of what truckers face: long days, tough decisions, isolation, and stress.
- Motivational: Celebrate growth, recognize effort, and encourage perseverance.
- Supportive and Professional: Act as a trusted advisor, with a real-world understanding of operations.
- Friendly and Human: Speak plainly and honestly. Be warm and conversational, like a fellow trucker would.

SmartHop's voice should sound like a helpful friend who's been there before and who knows how to help you keep moving forward.

Emotional and rational appeals

The SmartHop team knows that trucking is more than just a job: it's a way of life. Behind every truck, every route, and every delivery, there's a story. People are chasing their dreams, providing for their families, and working hard to grow something of their own. That's why their message should always speak to the heart of that journey.

On the emotional side, SmartHop should make truckers feel seen and understood. Life on the road can be challenging and often lonely. Starting a business, managing a fleet, or keeping things running isn't easy, especially in an industry going through so many changes. SmartHop needs to show our audience that we understand their needs. They've

been there. And they're here to support them. Whether someone just got their first truck or they're managing a growing fleet, SmartHop is a partner that walks with them every step of the way.

On the practical side, SmartHop also offers fundamental tools that make a difference. With SmartHop, truckers and fleet managers can find loads, plan better, get paid faster, and avoid juggling tons of apps. Everything they need is in one place, saving them time and helping them stay focused on growing their business.

By combining both the emotional and practical sides of the message, SmartHop builds a real connection. They're not just a tech company. They're a team of people who care about truckers, their goals, and their future.

Strategies to implement

- **Social media**

Social media is currently considered the second most important tool in digital marketing (Fernandes, 2024). Today, platforms like LinkedIn, Instagram, and Facebook allow organizations not only to communicate with their audiences but also to receive real-time feedback and strategically gather, analyze, and apply insights based on audience engagement and behavior.

As part of this project, an agreement was reached with SmartHop to allow me to manage the creative process for social media content for three months, under the supervision of the company's marketing team. During this time, I was responsible for:

- Selecting content themes and planning the editorial calendar
- Writing all copy
- Designing creative assets and visuals
- Participating in review sessions with the marketing team
- Publishing the content on SmartHop's social media channels, with oversight

An average frequency of 2–3 posts per week was maintained, with topics tailored to each promotional or seasonal opportunity. Below, you'll find a summary of the content produced during this period, including copy and creative assets that were reviewed and approved.

Key Recommendations for Improvement

In addition to ongoing efforts, the following proposals were incorporated into the published posts and shared with the organization to strengthen social media performance further:

- Increase posting frequency and expand content themes beyond product-focused messaging. Include broader industry-related topics relevant to the trucking and logistics community.
- Increase the frequency of product-related posts.
- As outlined in the internal communications strategy, use social media to recognize employee achievements publicly.
- Include industry updates, regulation changes, best practices, and operational tips as part of the content calendar.
- Create targeted content for each of SmartHop’s key customer personas, ensuring each audience segment is engaged.

Suggestions for Future Implementation

While not yet executed, the following initiatives are recommended:

- Extend customer service capabilities to social media, allowing part of the support team to respond directly to inquiries and comments across platforms.
- Increase the use of social media as a recognition tool, highlighting employee contributions and humanizing the brand’s culture online.

Tab 1 - Social Media content created and posted under project scope

Date	Topic	Copy	Persona
09/16/2024	ELD feature	<p>🌟 We're excited to introduce our new ELD connection, offering SmartHop customers increased efficiency and time savings! 🔥</p> <p>✅ Real-Time Tracking: Effortlessly monitor your fleet's location and status</p> <p>✅ Enhanced Productivity: Streamline tracking processes and reduce manual work</p> <p>✅ Data Analytics: Improve routes through comprehensive insights</p> <p>👉 Ready to try it yourself? Schedule a demo 👉 [Link]!</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fleet Manager - Dispatcher

Image 18 - Post #1



Source: Self-elaboration with Adobe Express. Published on: https://www.instagram.com/p/C_k95jtElv/?hl=es

09/18/2024	National Truck Driver Appreciation Week	<p>☀️ Happy National Truck Driver Appreciation Week! 🚛 This week, we're celebrating the important role that truck drivers play in our industry. 🚀 SmartHop was built by truckers for truckers, and we're grateful for the opportunity to support you on your journey! 🌟 🎉</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Owner Operator - Fleet Manager
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Image 19 - Post #2

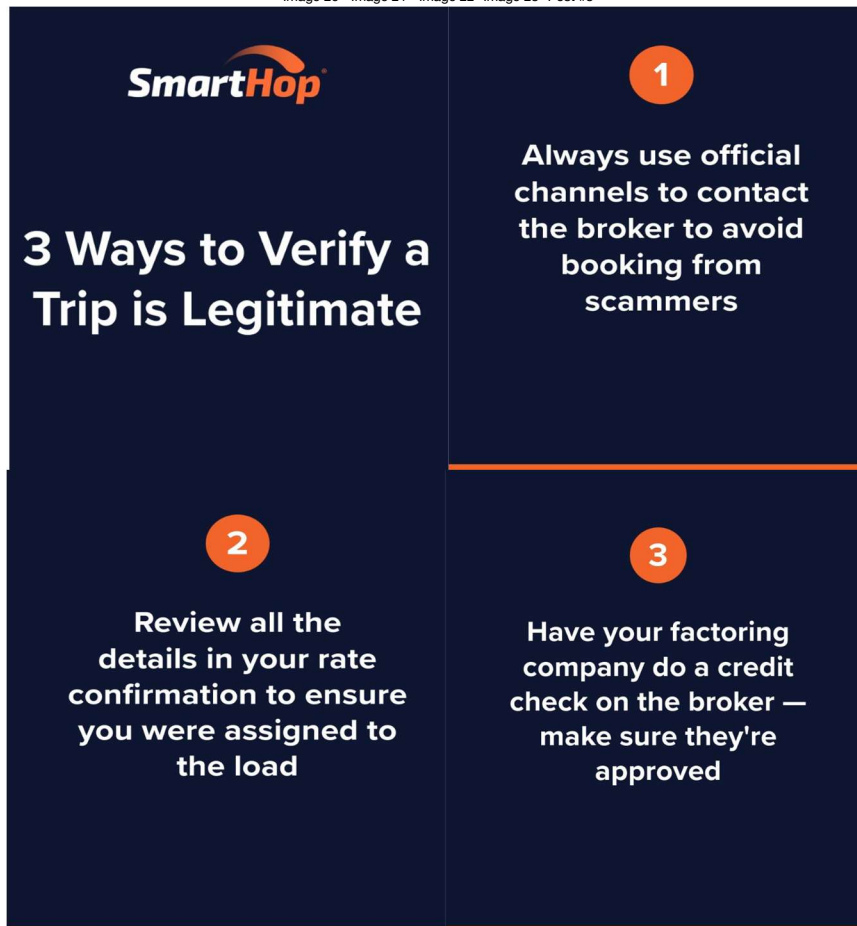


Source: Self-elaboration with Adobe Express. Published on: <https://www.instagram.com/p/DAEwwAmM0iK/?hl=es>

09/22/2024	Security tips	<p>🚨 Unfortunately, we all know someone who has been scammed in the trucking industry. Luckily, there are things you can do to make sure it doesn't happen to you! Here are three tips for making sure a load is legitimate, so you don't get scammed. 🚀</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Use official broker communication channels 2. Review all rate confirmation details 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Owner Operator - Fleet Manager - Dispatcher
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		<p>3. Check with your factoring company before booking a load 🤖 Interested in how SmartHop can help you earn more while simplifying your day-to-day? 🤖</p> <p>Click the link to schedule a demo! → [Link]</p>	
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Image 20 - Image 21 - Image 22- Image 23- Post #3



Source: Self-elaboration with Adobe Express. Published on: https://www.instagram.com/p/DAO6NJ1MG9M/?hl=es&img_index=4

<p>09/26/2024</p>	<p>Storytelling for dispatchers</p>	<p>Primary Text Slide #1: ✨ Meet Sarah, a mom who dispatches loads for 3 drivers simultaneously! 📦 Between taking care of her family and managing her business, she has a lot on her plate. That's why she relies on SmartHop as her go-to dispatching software. 🤖</p> <p>Primary Text Slide #2: 📊 With Sarah's hectic schedule, she needs to have a system that allows her to manage all aspects of her business efficiently. 🤖 SmartHop not only helps her</p>	<p>- Dispatcher</p>
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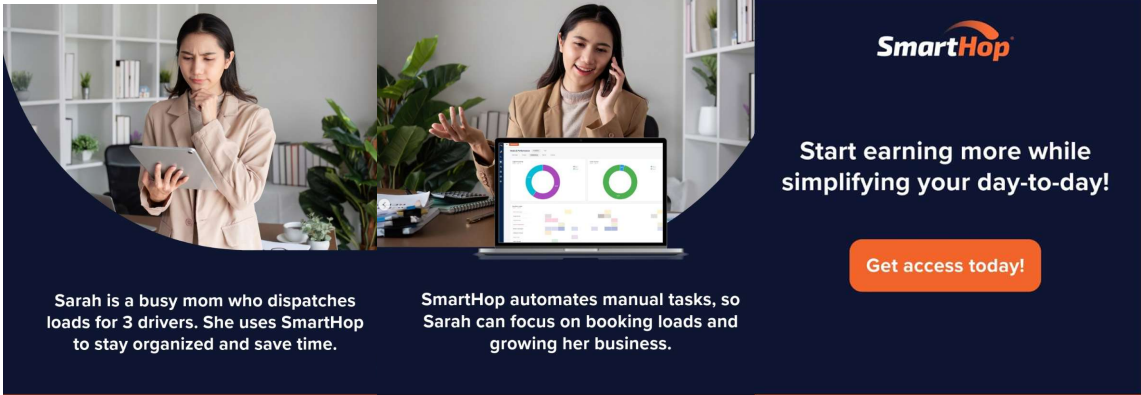
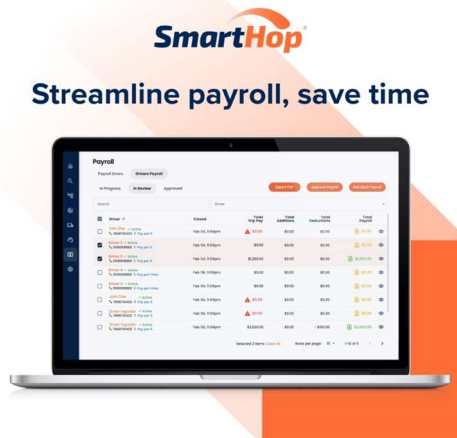
		<p>stay organized, but also saves her time and money by streamlining her dispatching process. 🚀</p> <p>Primary Text Slide #3:</p> <p>🔥 Want to improve your operations like Sarah? → Request a demo today [Link] 🔔</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">Image 24 - Image 25 - Image 26 - Post #4</p>  <p>The advertisement features two images of Sarah. In the first, she is looking at a tablet. In the second, she is talking on a phone while a laptop displays a dashboard with charts. The text on the ad reads: 'Sarah is a busy mom who dispatches loads for 3 drivers. She uses SmartHop to stay organized and save time.' and 'SmartHop automates manual tasks, so Sarah can focus on booking loads and growing her business.' A call to action says 'Get access today!'.</p> <p>Source: Self-elaboration with Adobe Express. Published on: https://www.instagram.com/p/DAZmoDripwq/?hl=es&img_index=3</p>			
09/30/2024	Payroll Feature	<p>😊 Did you know you can effortlessly manage payroll with SmartHop? 📄 We automate expense tracking and increase company-wide visibility, so you can run payroll more accurately while saving you hours each week. 🔥</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Free yourself from manual tracking ✓ Create a shared source of truth with employees ✓ Reduce the human error of manual data transfer ✓ Catch and solve discrepancies early ✓ Provide more accurate and on-time payments <p>🎯 Get time back to focus on your business. 👉 Book your demo today! [Link] ✨</p>	- Fleet Manager

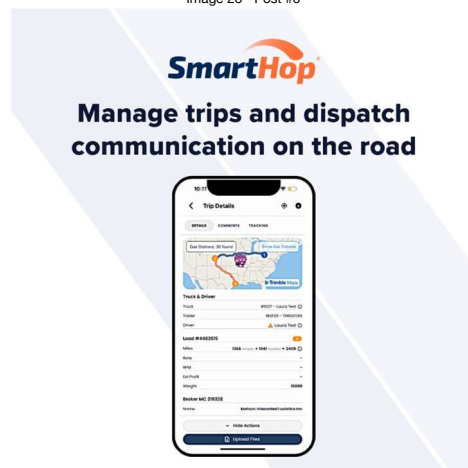
Image 27 - Post #5



Source: Self-elaboration with Adobe Express. Published on: <https://www.instagram.com/p/DAjKVzWMmWh/?hl=es>

10/02/2024	Driver Features	<p>Last month, we honored the truck drivers in our community for Truck Driver Appreciation Week 🚚!</p> <p>👉 Here are the top SmartHop mobile app features designed to make life easier for drivers on the road.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☀️ Access details and docs for past and upcoming trips ☀️ Communicate directly with dispatchers ☀️ Upload and scan your travel documents with your phone ☀️ Receive real-time updates throughout your trip 💰 Interested in joining the SmartHop community? → Book a demo today: [Link] 	- Owner Operator
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Image 28 - Post #6

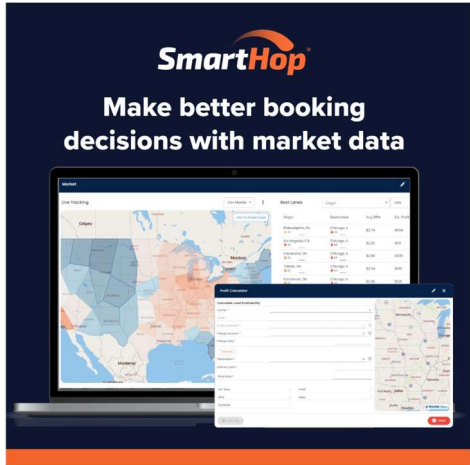


Source: Self-elaboration with Adobe Express. Published on: <https://www.instagram.com/p/DAo1O1wsK-z/?hl=es>

10/08/2024	Market analysis	<p>🚚 Do you wish you could make better load booking decisions with market-specific data?</p>	- Owner Operator
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	insights - Heat Maps / MPI	SmartHop has powerful tools to help you navigate the market with ease 🔥 ✅ Heat Map: The heat map feature visualizes market trends, so you can find the most profitable loads effortlessly ✅ MPI Score: Our Market Profitability Index (MPI) score ranks loads according to their potential profitability, steering you towards the best options ✅ Profit Calculator: With our user-friendly profit calculator, you can easily estimate your potential earnings for any trip 🛎 Excited to see these tools in action? Book a demo with our team today 🙌 [Link]	- Fleet Manager - Dispatcher
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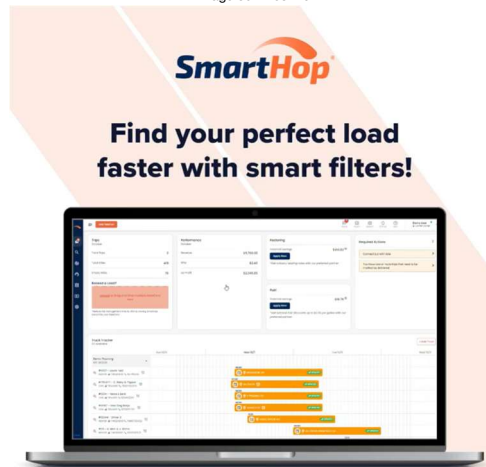
Image 29 - Post #7



Source: Self-elaboration with Adobe Express. Published on: <https://www.instagram.com/p/DA3QSamsNYZ/?hl=es>

10/11/2024	Use our smart filters to find the perfect load	🌟 SmartHop's advanced filters make it easier than ever to find the right load. 🎯 Customize your search with filters for location, destination, equipment, pick-up, CPM, profit, and more! 🌟 Set permanent preferences or adjust them for each search to find the best loads for you. 🔄 Book your demo today to see how SmartHop helps you find better loads faster! 🙌 [Link]	- Owner Operator - Fleet Manager - Dispatcher
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Image 30 - Post #8

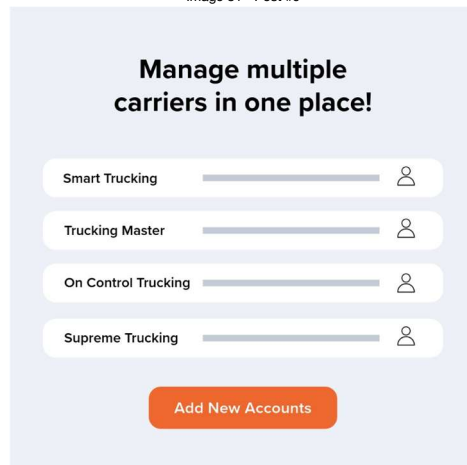


Find your perfect load faster with smart filters!

Source: Self-elaboration with Adobe Express. Published on: https://www.instagram.com/p/DA_E5rJN-oB/?hl=es

<p>10/17/2024</p>	<p>Add additional MCs: Ability to generate sub-accounts</p>	<p>🚚 Are you dispatching for multiple carriers? 🇺🇸 With SmartHop's Basic and Growth plans, you can manage multiple carriers in one place, with a single login! 🚀 Switching between carriers is easy as you search, book, and manage trips. Ready to optimize your dispatching process? 🎯 Manage all your carriers in one place with SmartHop! Get started 🖱️ [Link]</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dispatcher
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Image 31 - Post #9



Manage multiple carriers in one place!

- Smart Trucking
- Trucking Master
- On Control Trucking
- Supreme Trucking

Add New Accounts

Source: Self-elaboration with Adobe Express. Published on: <https://www.instagram.com/p/DBOSdAHs6uh/?hl=es>

<p>10/21/2024</p>	<p>Set your truck plan for your next load!</p>	<p>Have you set your truck plan for your next load? 😊 By creating your truck plan, you'll get recommendations on destination markets tailored to your location, truck type, and personal preferences. 🇺🇸 Get expert guidance on the ideal</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Owner - Operator - Dispatcher
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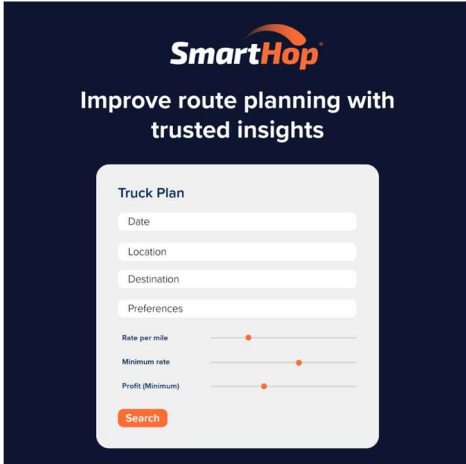
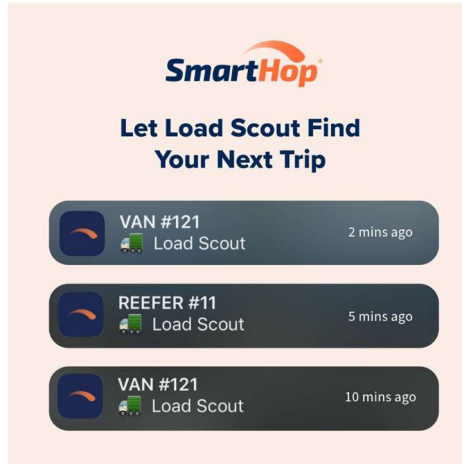
		<p>dates for booking and find loads that perfectly meet your needs!</p> <p>Not using SmartHop yet? 🚚 Book a demo with our team today to see how you can make better route planning decisions! 🙌 [Link]</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">Image 32 - Post #10</p> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <p style="text-align: center;">Source: Self-elaboration with Adobe Express. Published on: https://www.instagram.com/p/DBXTPn0ttDz/?hl=es</p>			
10/24/2024	Get to know Load Scout	<p>😊 Did you know SmartHop can find loads for you, even when you're not on the app? 🔍🕒</p> <p>Once you set up your truck plan and preferences, Load Scout continuously searches on your behalf and notifies you the moment a matching load is available! 🚚💡</p> <p>Want to see how Load Scout works for your business? 🚚 Book a demo with our team today!</p> <p>🙌 [Link]</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Owner - Operator - Fleet Manager - Dispatcher

Image 33 - Post #11



Source: Self-elaboration with Adobe Express. Published on: <https://www.instagram.com/p/DBg0s7Wsho-/?hl=es>


10/31/2024	Halloween Post	<p>Happy Halloween from Team SmartHop! 🎃 For dispatchers and fleet managers looking to earn more while simplifying daily operations, you can get 25% off your first month of SmartHop until the end of the day with promo code HALLOWEEN25. Lock in those spooky savings!</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Owner - Operator - Fleet Manager - Dispatcher
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Image 34 - Post #12



Source: Self-elaboration with Adobe Express. Published on: <https://www.instagram.com/p/DByoIWwsWYo/?hl=es>

11/04/2024	<p>Storytelling Fleet Manager - Get to know the invoice module</p>	<p>🚀 Meet Troy! He manages a 30-truck fleet, which can be tricky at times. Especially when it comes to invoicing brokers. He used to spend hours gathering paperwork, creating invoices, and communicating with brokers. Now, with SmartHop, he can generate invoices with a few clicks and send them directly to brokers, pulling information and documents from trips as soon as</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fleet Manager
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they're completed. 📁 Want to see how easy invoicing can be? ✨ Schedule a demo with SmartHop today!

Image 35 - Image 36 - Image 37 - Image 38 - Post #13

SmartHop

See how fleet managers simplify invoicing with SmartHop

Troy manages a 30-truck fleet, making invoice tracking a challenge...

With SmartHop, he sends invoices to brokers with just a few clicks!

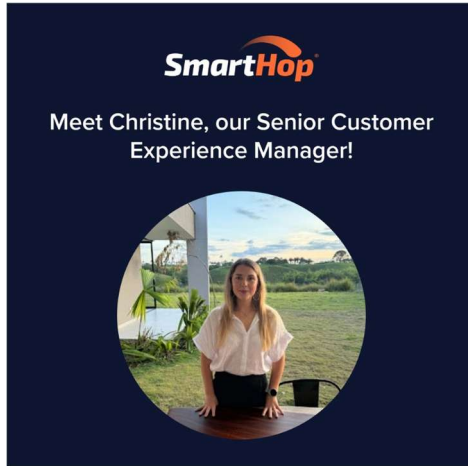
Try our invoicing tools for yourself!

[Request a Demo](#)

Source: Self-elaboration with Adobe Express. Published on: https://www.instagram.com/p/DB9JqjPseT4/?hl=es&img_index=1

11/07/2024	Meet Christine	🔥 Meet Christine, our Senior Experience Success Manager! ✨ She and her team are dedicated to ensuring you have the best experience with SmartHop, guiding you throughout your journey.	- ALL
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Image 39 - Post #14



Source: Self-elaboration with Adobe Express. Published on: <https://www.instagram.com/p/DCEqWaHMSNQ/?hl=es>

11/11/2024	Veterans day - Time to honor US military veterans.	📢 Today we're taking a moment to recognize and honor all the veterans in the SmartHop community. Thank you for your service and dedication. 🌟	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Owner - Operator - Fleet Manager - Dispatcher
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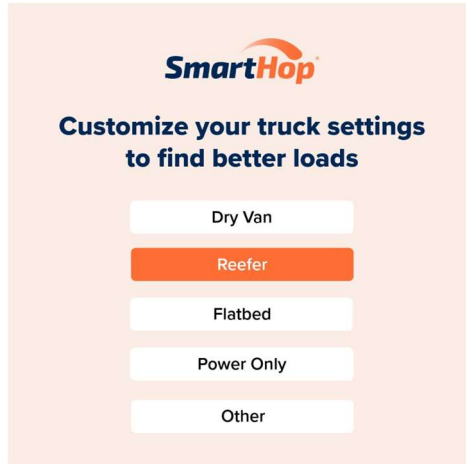
Image 40- Post #15



Source: Self-elaboration with Adobe Express. Published on: <https://www.instagram.com/p/DCPjh70s25I/?hl=es>

11/13/2024	Add your trucks and trailers to get customized load results.	🚛 SmartHop accommodates a range of equipment types! 🚚 Customize your load searches effortlessly by entering your truck and trailer details in just a few clicks. 🔥 Ready to explore SmartHop? 🙋 Request a demo today! [link]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Owner - Operator - Fleet Manager - Dispatcher
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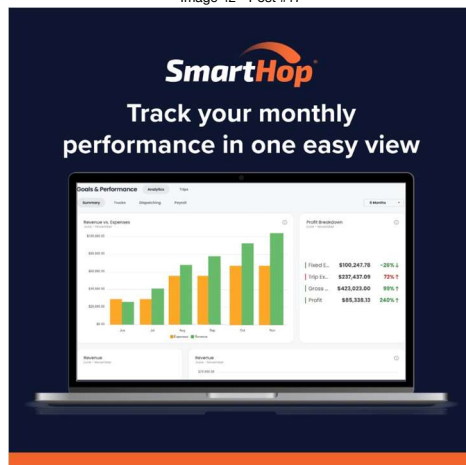
Image 41 - Post #16



Source: Self-elaboration with Adobe Express. Published on: <https://www.instagram.com/p/DCUdTUOsIP/?hl=es>

<p>11/17/2024</p>	<p>Estimated profit/performance report.</p>	<p>🤖 Want to know how you're performing each month? SmartHop gives you simple report comparing earnings to expenses to calculate your profit each month. Our performance dashboard brings all your essential metrics into one easy-to-navigate view. 🇺🇸 Not using SmartHop yet? Schedule a demo today! 🔔 [link]</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Owner - Operator - Fleet Manager - Dispatcher
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Image 42 - Post #17

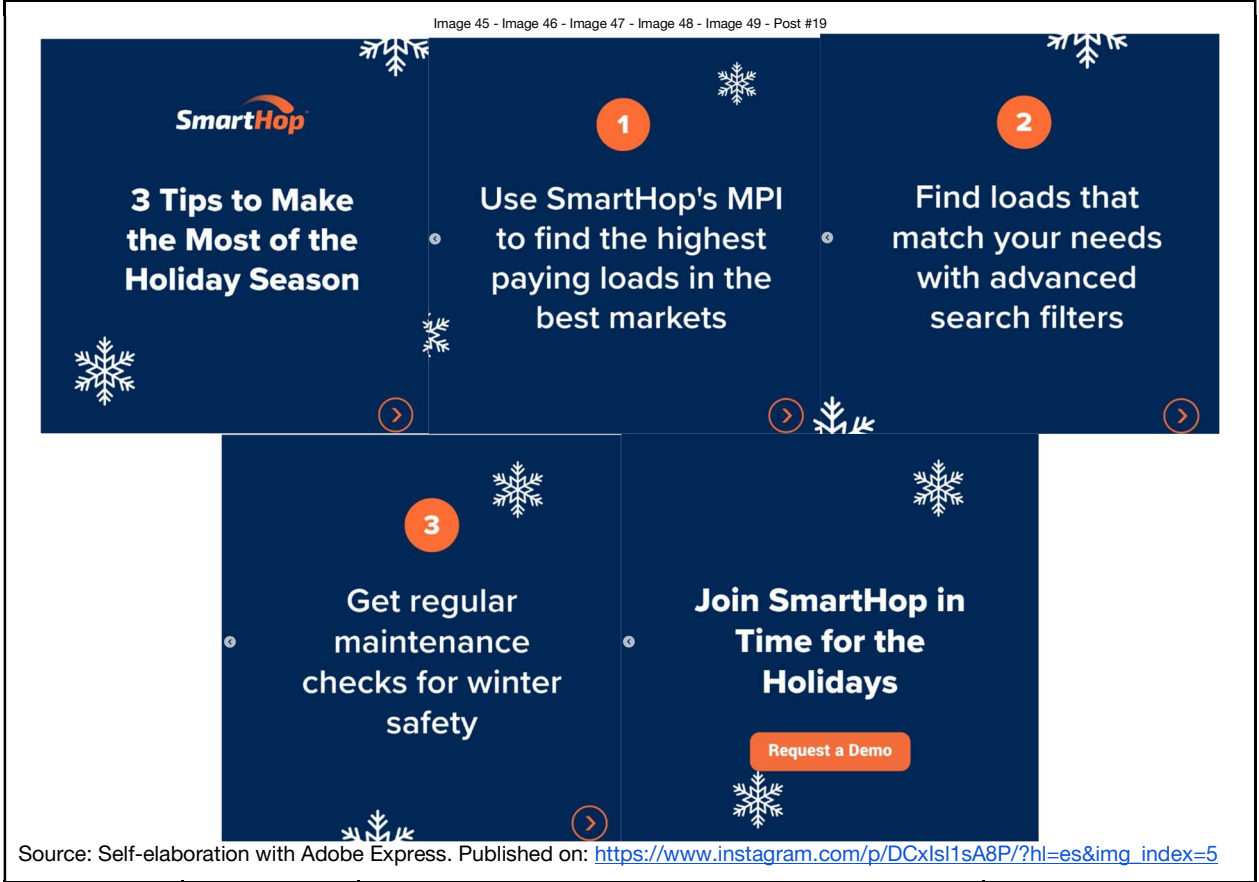


Source: Self-elaboration with Adobe Express. Published on: <https://www.instagram.com/p/DCvHyIMWkg/?hl=es>

<p>11/18/2024</p>	<p>Pre Thanksgiving promo</p>	<p>🍁 This year, we're giving thanks to the trucking community that keeps our country running by offering a limited-time discount! Enjoy 30% off your first month's subscription of our Basic or Growth plans with promo code THANKS30. Offer</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Owner - Operator - Fleet Manager - Dispatcher
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		valid from 11/18 to 11/28 — don't miss out! 🍁 🔒 Lock in your discount! [link]	
<p>Image 43 - Post #18</p>  <p>Source: Self-elaboration with Adobe Express. Published on: https://www.instagram.com/p/DChjNCMsrs0/?hl=es</p>			
11/22/2024	Mockup with MPI and heat map (App functionalities)	<p>Are you ready to book more profitable loads? 📦</p> <p>SmartHop's Market Profitability Index (MPI) uses real-time data to show you the markets where you're most likely to find profitable loads, helping you plan better routes. 🗺️</p> <p>🔔 Maximize the value of every haul with SmartHop!</p> <p>😊 Schedule a demo with our team today: [link]</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Owner - Operator - Fleet Manager - Dispatcher
<p>Image 44 - Post #19</p>  <p>Source: Self-elaboration with Adobe Express. Published on: https://www.instagram.com/p/DCrnnXWMP1C/?hl=es</p>			
11/24/2024	Industry tips	<p>🎄 With the holiday season approaching, trucking demand is set to rise!</p> <p>😊 Here are three tips for improving your efficiency</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Owner - Operator - Fleet

		<p>while making the most of the busy season:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ Try SmartHop Market Profitability Index (MPI) to find the highest-paying loads in the hottest markets ✔ Use SmartHop's custom load search to discover loads that perfectly fit your truck and trailer capacity ✔ Stay prepared by keeping up with truck maintenance to ensure you're always road-ready 🌟 Not a SmartHop customer yet? Sign up to make the most of the holiday season 🤝 [link] 	<p>Manager - Dispatcher</p>
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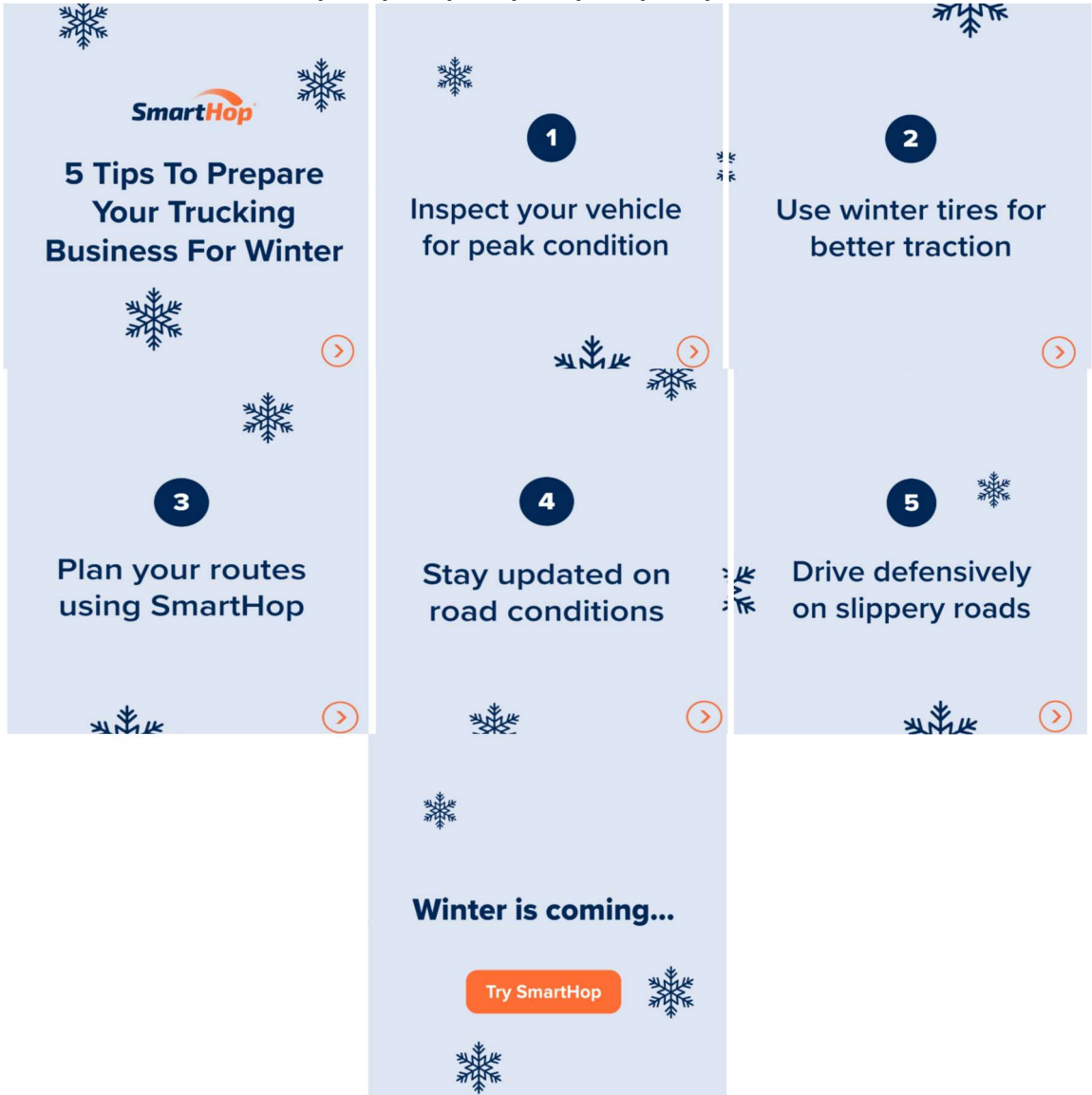
Source: Self-elaboration with Adobe Express. Published on: https://www.instagram.com/p/DCxIs1sA8P/?hl=es&img_index=5

11/28/2024	Thanksgiving	<p>🍁 Happy Thanksgiving from SmartHop! ✨ We're grateful for our amazing customers and the trucking community that keeps this country moving. Enjoy a day filled with gratitude and good food! 🍁</p> <p>If you haven't tried SmartHop yet, you can get 30% off your first month of our Basic or Growth plan if you sign up today! 🤝 [link]</p>	<p>- Owner - Operator - Fleet - Manager - Dispatcher</p>
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Image 50 - Post #20			
			
Source: Self-elaboration with Adobe Express. Published on: https://www.instagram.com/p/DC6pCGjMG3l/?hl=es			
11/29/2024	Cyber Week	<p>🌟 Our Cyber Week discount is now live! 🎁 Enjoy an exclusive 50% off your first month on our Basic or Growth plan with promo code CYBER50 🎯 — don't let this opportunity pass you by! 🥰</p> <p>📺 Get your offer! 🖱️ [link]</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Owner - Operator - Fleet - Manager - Dispatcher
Image 51 - Post #21			
			
Source: Self-elaboration with Adobe Express. Published on: https://www.instagram.com/p/DC9fqZRM00Q/?hl=es			
12/10/2024	Safety tips	<p>🌨️ Winter is coming! ❄️ Here are five tips to get your trucking business ready for the colder months ahead:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✅ Inspect your vehicle to make sure everything is in top condition ✅ Switch to winter tires to improve traction on snow and ice ✅ Monitor weather conditions and plan your routes using SmartHop ✅ Regularly check forecasts and road conditions, stay 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Owner - Operator - Fleet - Manager

		<p>ahead of the game</p> <p>✅ Practice defensive driving to navigate slippery roads safely</p> <p>🚛 Stay safe and prepared this winter!</p>	
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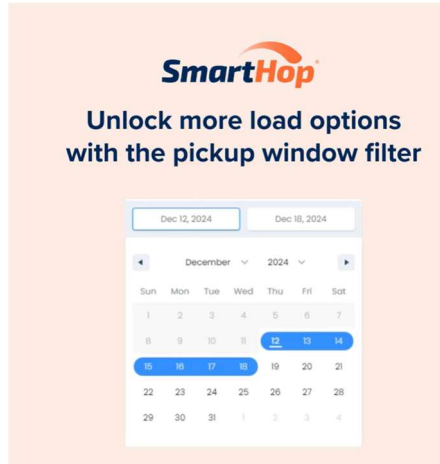
Image 52 - Image 53 - Image 54 - Image 55 - Image 56 - Image 57 - Image 58 - Post #22



Source: Self-elaboration with Adobe Express. Published on: https://www.instagram.com/p/DDZkJ54MiQa/?hl=es&img_index=7

12/14/2024	Customize your loadboard	<p>🎯 With SmartHop's load board, you can customize your pickup window to broaden your load options.</p> <p>☀️ Haven't had a chance to explore it yet? 🤝</p> <p>Schedule a demo today! [link]</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Owner - Operator - Dispatcher
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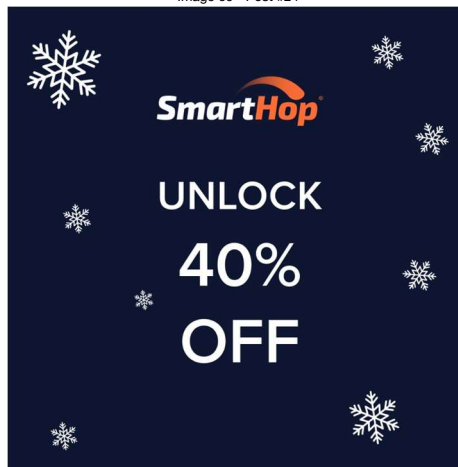
Image 59 - Post #23



Source: Self-elaboration with Adobe Express. Published on: <https://www.instagram.com/p/DDhknlztNoN/?hl=es>



12/20/2025	End of Year Blowout discount campaign (Discount on Dec 20)	Wrapping up the year and still not on SmartHop? 🤖 Last call for our end-of-year discount: schedule your demo today and use promo code EOY40 for 40% off! 🚚 🎉 Kick off 2025 right! 🚚 🎉 ☀️ [link]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Owner - Operator - Fleet Manager - Dispatcher
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Image 60 - Post #24



Source: Self-elaboration with Adobe Express. Published on: <https://www.instagram.com/p/DDzix06MIWR/?hl=es>

12/25/2025	Merry Christmas!	We want to extend our heartfelt gratitude to all our valued customers this holiday season. Happy Holidays from the entire SmartHop team! 🚚 🎉 ❄️	- All
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Image 61 - Post #25			
 <p>A dark blue square graphic with white snowflakes. At the top center is the SmartHop logo. Below it, the text 'HAPPY HOLIDAYS' is written in large, bold, white capital letters. At the bottom, it says 'From Team SmartHop' in a smaller white font.</p>			
Source: Self-elaboration with Adobe Express. Published on: https://www.instagram.com/p/DEC3cT2MNvl/?hl=es			
01/06/2025	Happy New Year!	Happy New Year from Team SmartHop! 🎉 🚚 Here's to making 2025 the best year yet, in your trucking business and beyond. 🌟 ✨	- ALL
Image 62 - Post #26			
 <p>A dark blue square graphic with a background of colorful fireworks. At the top center is the SmartHop logo. Below it, the text '2025 HAPPY NEW YEAR' is written in large, bold, white capital letters. At the bottom, it says 'From Team SmartHop' in a smaller white font.</p>			
Source: Self-elaboration with Adobe Express. Published on: https://www.instagram.com/p/DEfW8vdMMnB/?hl=es			

- **Chat – Create a Customized Experience Through Recognizable Characters**

To enhance user interaction and support, we propose the introduction of chat assistants for sales, support, and frequently asked questions, each represented by a unique character. These characters will become recognizable over time, helping to foster a sense of familiarity and connection between users and the organization. This will also allow for efficient support outside of regular business hours.

Proposal:

Meet Paula and Eric, the newest members of the SmartHop team. With their deep experience in the platform and the trucking industry, they're ready to answer any questions users may have. And if someone prefers to speak with another team member, they'll help schedule a call as soon as possible, or at a time that works best for the user.

Alongside the chatbot experience, users should also have access to a comprehensive FAQ section for quick answers, as well as the option to submit questions and receive responses via email, if that's their preferred method of communication. This ensures all users feel supported in the way that works best for them.

Image 63 and Image 64 - Mockup of the SmartHop chat characters



Source - Self-elaboration in Canva

In addition, Paula and Eric are AI-driven agents who will assist you throughout your entire subscription and onboarding process, answering your questions and providing support whenever you need it.

- **Personalized Content: Automated Birthday Emails**

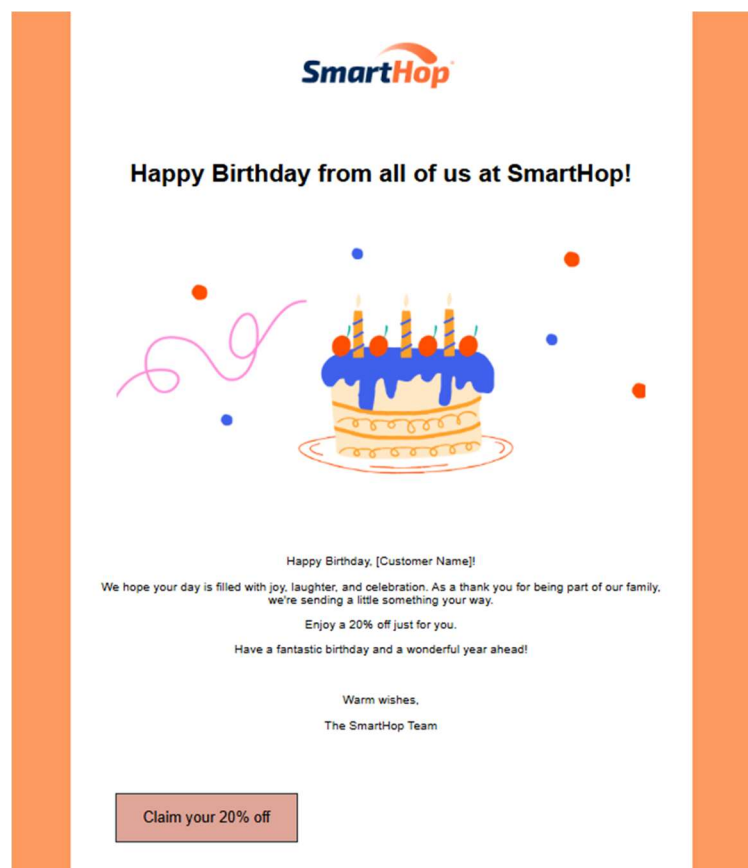
Content personalization is one of the most effective marketing techniques we can implement to strengthen customer relationships. Through personalized email campaigns, we not only build a more emotional connection with our audience but also gather valuable insights about their preferences and behaviors.

Proposal:

Automate birthday greeting emails to users, sending them a warm and friendly message on their special day from the SmartHop team. This simple gesture helps reinforce brand loyalty and shows that we care beyond just business transactions.

The birthday data can be collected during the user registration process or optionally requested when users subscribe to our email list, possibly in exchange for a small incentive like a discount or free resource.

Image 65 - Mockup of the SmartHop personalized email



Source - Self-elaboration in MailChimp

- **Email Marketing – Subscribe and Save**

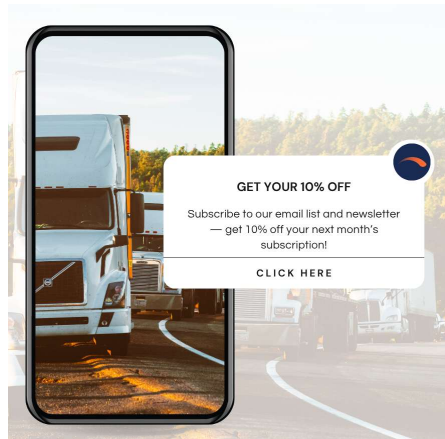
As a second proposal, I suggest promoting email list and newsletter subscriptions by offering a discount. This incentive can be applied through the mobile app or website, encouraging users to sign up and stay connected.

Proposal:

“Subscribe to our email list and monthly newsletter and get X% off your subscription this month!”

This strategy will help us not only to boost email engagement but also build a qualified contact base for future campaigns, while rewarding new users for joining our community.

Image 66 - Mockup of the SmartHop Email list subscription promo



Source - Self-elaboration in Canva

Content Strategy

Content marketing has the advantage of being highly versatile, allowing organizations to communicate through various formats (written, visual, and audio) tailored to meet the needs of different audience segments. The following proposals are designed to support the increase of organic leads and improve user engagement through content creation and distribution, particularly on social media.

- **User-Generated Content**

User-generated content (UGC) plays a decisive role in shaping brand perception and influencing purchasing behavior. UGC refers to content created and shared by users, rather than by paid professionals, through online channels (Ntousi et al., 2025).

Proposal: SmartHop Brand Ambassadors

I propose identifying one or two of SmartHop's most engaged users and offering them the opportunity to become official brand ambassadors. In exchange for sharing video content showcasing how they use the platform (highlighting preferences, features, and benefits), they would receive free access to the platform for one year, renewable for as long as they remain active ambassadors.

Deliverables from ambassadors would include:

- Monthly user-generated videos or short clips.
- Testimonials and honest feedback on new platform releases or features.
- Participation in product surveys or brief interviews.

This content, in collaboration with internally generated videos, would then be published across SmartHop's external channels, including Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and LinkedIn, reinforcing authenticity and building community trust.

Image 67 - Mockup of the SmartHop new video reel post



Source - Self-elaboration in Canva

○ **Newsletter**

Content-rich e-newsletters are one of the most effective marketing tools in the Internet age. But they won't work unless you carefully target the most pressing information needs of your prospective customers" (Pulizzi, 2013, p. 229).

The newsletter is one of the oldest information tools in communication history. With the rise of the digital age, its relevance hasn't diminished; only its format and distribution methods have evolved.

Proposal:

We propose the creation of the SmartHop Digital Newsletter for Customers that users can subscribe to to receive relevant updates and curated content, including:

- Platform updates and new features
- Industry news and regulatory changes
- Seasonal tips for truckers and small fleet owners
- Customer spotlights and community stories
- Exclusive educational content (e.g., how-to guides, video tutorials)

To encourage subscription, users will be offered a discount on their next monthly subscription in exchange for signing up and providing useful profile data (such as date of birth, location, or business size). This will help SmartHop further personalize content and offers in the future.

Each newsletter will also include direct links to key company resources and platforms, such as:

- SmartHop's official website
- YouTube channel
- Social media profiles (Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn)
- Educational blog or podcast episodes

This initiative not only supports customer engagement and retention but also strengthens SmartHop's content marketing, tying internal product updates to external communication in a seamless and informative way. See image 68 of the Newsletter Mockup.

- **Blog**

As a consequence of the digital age, blogs have become increasingly important. Today's customers are hungry for information and actively seek it across various formats and channels. Creating a blog is no longer optional. It has become essential for organizations. Through strategically developed content shared across digital platforms, companies can drive users to take action and engage meaningfully with their brand. As Pulizzi (2013) notes, blogs now play a key role in content marketing, enabling honest dialogue with customers who care deeply about your company, your products, and your message.

However, one of the key questions to consider when managing a blog is: Do we have the time and consistency to publish regularly?

SmartHop currently has a corporate blog hosted on its website, but its use has been inconsistent and infrequent.

Proposal:

Revitalize and prioritize the use of the company blog by creating and publishing regular, audience-relevant content. Below is a proposed editorial calendar with suggested topics for the next six months, designed to engage SmartHop's core audiences and support integrated communication goals:

Tab 2 - Suggested chronogram for the blog posts

Date	Topic	Focus	Key words
July 2025	How to Survive the Slow Season in Trucking: Strategies to Keep Revenue Flowing.	Practical tips for owner-operators and small fleets during a traditionally slow month.	Slow season, revenue, trucking strategy, summer downtime.
August 2025	Technology for Small Fleets: Is It Worth Investing in an Integrated Platform like SmartHop?	Educate your audience on the ROI and stress-reducing benefits of trucking technology.	Automation, dispatch tools, fleet management, SmartHop platform.
September 2025	Driver Appreciation Month: Honoring the Impact of Truckers on Our Economy	A heartfelt piece celebrating drivers, including real stories or testimonials.	Trucker stories, community, driver recognition, trucking pride.
October 2025	Winter Prep for Your Fleet: The Ultimate Cold Weather Maintenance Checklist	A practical checklist to help drivers avoid breakdowns and stay safe during winter.	Winter driving, truck maintenance, safety tips, and preparation.
November 2025	Fuel-Saving Habits That Boost Profitability Without Sacrificing Performance	Share cost-saving driving habits and strategies for improving fuel efficiency.	Fuel efficiency, cost reduction, profitability, and driving tips.
December 2025	2025 in Review: What the Trucking Industry Learned—and What's Next for 2026	Year-end recap with industry insights, key events, and trends to watch.	Trucking trends, 2025 review, predictions 2026, logistics insights.

See image 69 of Blog Mockup.

SmartHop MONTHLY UPDATE

NEWSLETTER

TRUCK SMARTER, NOT HARDER



SmartHop Goes Green: Planting for a Better Tomorrow
At SmartHop, we believe in driving progress—not just on the road, but in the world we share. That’s why we’re proud to support tree-planting initiatives as part of our commitment to sustainability and environmental responsibility. Every tree planted is a small step toward cleaner air, healthier communities, and a greener planet. Visit our **YouTube** channel to learn more about our tree planting event.



TRUCKER OF THE MONTH



5 YEARS MAKING HISTORY

Subscribe To Our Newsletter

Source - Self-elaboration in Canva



May 30th, 2025 - Laura Rodriguez

What's Next for Trucking? A Look Ahead to the Rest of 2025

We're halfway through 2025, and it's been a bumpy ride (surprise, surprise). But don't hang up your keys just yet—there's a lot to look forward to in the world of trucking over the next couple of quarters. Here's what's on the horizon:

Freight: Slow Climb, But Climbing

Freight demand is nudging upward, especially with e-commerce still booming and seasonal goods hitting the road in Q3. Industrial shipments? Still finding their rhythm. Bottom line: things are improving, just not overnight.

Capacity Tightening

With many small fleets exiting the scene and fewer trucks on the road, capacity is tightening. That could be good news for rates—and for teams that have held strong through the slump. Fewer trucks, more opportunities.

Spot & Contract Rates

Spot rates are holding steady for now, with possible bumps in Q4 (hello, peak season). Contract rates are slowly catching up. It's not a bonanza, but the trends are finally leaning the right way.

What's Still in the Way?

Fuel costs keep biting into margins.
Trade shifts and new tariffs are making supply chains squirm.
Labor talks and port disruptions could throw wrenches into Q4 planning.

So, What Should You Do?

Keep things lean, tech-savvy, and nimble.

Trucking's always been about resilience, and if there's one thing this industry's got, it's grit. Let's finish 2025 strong, one haul at a time!

- **Podcast**

One popular format in which organizations are creating content today is podcasts (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019). In audio format (and sometimes video), organizations produce engaging content for users through educational talks, interviews, speeches, and classes, distributed via platforms like Spotify, Apple Podcasts, and other apps.

With the goal of educating users about important industry information, available tools, and helping them become more familiar with the brand, the organizations are starting their own podcast programs, trying to boost their differentiation from their competitors.

Proposal:

I propose the creation of an organizational podcast with a bi-weekly publication schedule, featuring relevant topics for the industry. It is recommended that the podcast be hosted by an industry expert (ideally the organization's CEO). This should be developed in collaboration with the marketing team to ensure alignment in content, editing, and topic selection with the broader marketing strategy.

Below, I have included a proposed calendar for podcast publications, aligned with seasonal topics, practical tips, and engaging industry-related themes.

Image 70 - Mockup of the SmartHop Podcast cover



Source - Self-elaboration in Canva

Tab 3 - Suggested chronogram for the podcast episodes

Episode	Release Date	Title	Description
1	Week of Jul 15	The Road Ahead: Why Trucking Needs a Community Now More Than Ever	Kickoff episode introducing the podcast. Focus on the current state of the industry and how SmartHop sees community as the key to resilience.
2	Week of Jul 29	Owner-Operator to Fleet Builder: How Growth Really Happens	Interview with a successful SmartHoper who scaled their business. Lessons, pain points, and wins.
3	Week of Aug 12	Dispatch Like a Pro: Tips from the Inside	Talk with a dispatcher about tools, common mistakes, and how technology makes or breaks the workflow.
4	Week of Aug 12	Fuel, Freight, and Frustration: Surviving 2025's Toughest Industry Trends	Industry overview with expert commentary on rates, fuel costs, and market outlook.
5	Week of Sept 9	SmartHop 101: What We Do and Why We Built It	An inside look into SmartHop: what problems it solves and how it helps truckers every day.

6	Week of Sept 23	Mental Health on the Road: Let's Talk About It	Addressing isolation, stress, and burnout in trucking. Real talk with a guest from the field.
7	Week of Oct 7	Women Behind the Wheel: Stories from Female Truckers	Celebrate and amplify voices of women in the industry. Real stories, challenges, and advice.
8	Week of Oct 21	From Load Boards to SmartTech: The Shift in Tools Truckers Use	Discussion on the evolution of digital tools and how modern tech (like SmartHop) is changing logistics.
9	Week of Nov 4	Your Trucking Business, Your Brand	Practical tips on branding, social media, and visibility for owner-operators and small fleets.
10	Week of Nov 18	Peak Season Prep: How to Maximize Holiday Freight	Tactical planning for the holiday season: loads, pricing, planning, and SmartHop features.
11	Week of Dec 2	What I Wish I Knew: Advice from Veteran Truckers	Candid advice and stories from seasoned drivers and fleet managers.
12	Week of Dec 16	Year in Review: 2025's Lessons and 2026 Outlook	Reflection on the year's challenges and opportunities, featuring highlights from the podcast's first season.

Institutional communication:

- Social marketing: Social Impact Events

Aligned with the proposal to create internal corporate events that foster stronger employee relationships, we also recommend the implementation of social impact events. These initiatives not only strengthen team dynamics but also demonstrate SmartHop's commitment to contributing positively to society.

As a brand, SmartHop has the opportunity (and responsibility) to model purpose driven leadership. By organizing volunteer or community and society oriented initiatives, the company can inspire employees to connect beyond their daily tasks and collaborate around shared values.

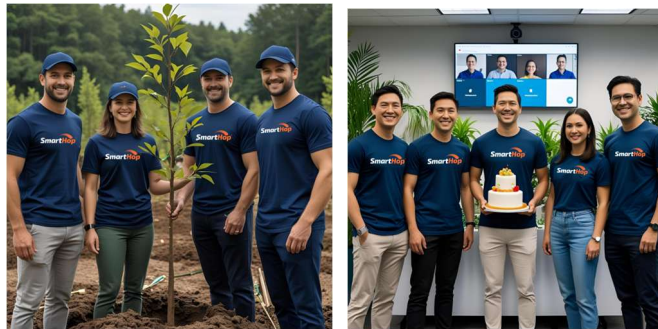
Proposal: Department-Based Volunteer Initiatives

I suggest organizing periodic social impact events, tailored around the availability and interests of employees. These events should:

- Be carried out by small, department-based groups to ensure business operations remain uninterrupted.
- Encourage cross-department participation so employees have a chance to interact with peers they may not work with directly.
- Focus on causes aligned with the company's values, such as sustainability, education, logistics support for underserved communities, or technology access.

These initiatives provide employees with a meaningful way to give back while also boosting morale, teamwork, and a sense of belonging. Social impact events are a powerful way to reinforce internal culture and project SmartHop's brand identity as a socially responsible organization.

Image 71 - Image 72 - SmartHop social events (Created with Canva AI)



Source - Elaboration using Canva AI

These events can also be featured in internal publications to raise awareness among employees about the organization's social efforts and current corporate social responsibility commitments. Highlighting employee participation reinforces a culture of purpose and shows how individual contributions align with larger societal goals.

Example Initiative: Tree Planting in Local Communities

One suggested activity is organizing tree planting events in partnership with local communities. This initiative can serve as a way for SmartHop to actively contribute to offsetting the environmental footprint left by the trucking and logistics industry. By involving employees directly in these events, the organization not only supports ecological restoration but also empowers team members to take part in meaningful, hands-on sustainability actions.

Regularly featuring these events and their impact, through photos, testimonials, and updates in internal newsletters or digital notice boards, can help build employee pride and deepen their connection to the organization's mission beyond business.

2025

THE The Long Haul CHRONIC



Social

From the road to the community, our team keeps the wheels of kindness turning. This past quarter, employees across departments came together to support local food banks, participate in our annual winter clothing drive, and raise over €3,000 for children's hospitals.

Whether it's donating time, supplies, or just showing up with heart, your generosity reflects the best of who we are, not just as a company, but as a community. Let's keep that spirit rolling!

Source: Self-elaboration in Canva

○ Press releases

Press releases are a written communication tool used by organizations to share important news and announcements. They are an excellent resource for addressing crisis situations, issuing official statements, reassuring customers after major changes, and demonstrating the organization's transparency toward external audiences. It's important to remember that "the primary goal of crisis communication is to ensure open and timely communication across all available channels during times of disruption or change" (Verčič & Špoljarić, 2023).

Image 74 - Mockup of the SmartHop Press release for crisis communication



Source: Self-elaboration in Canva

However, the literature (Pulizzi & Barrett, 2009) presents press releases as more than just a crisis communication tool, but also as a powerful content creation strategy. Pulizzi & Barrett (2009) describe press releases as a form of written content that can leverage keyword strategies, not limited only to major announcements. They highlight the use of tags and optimized language as a way to increase visibility, drive audience engagement, and encourage more consumers to interact with the organization's news and updates.



PRESS RELEASE

June 16, 2024

SMARTHOP LAUNCHES INTEGRATED PAYROLL PROCESSING FEATURE TO SIMPLIFY FLEET OPERATIONS

SmartHop, the all-in-one platform built to empower trucking companies with smarter operations, is proud to announce the launch of its newest feature: Payroll Processing. With this release, SmartHop takes a major step forward in helping fleet owners manage every aspect of their business in one place — now including the ability to pay drivers and employees directly through the platform.

This new feature allows users to seamlessly process payroll within SmartHop, eliminating the need for third-party systems and reducing administrative workload.

"Running a fleet is complicated, and payroll shouldn't be," said Guillermo Garcia, CEO and co-founder of SmartHop. "We're making it easier for small fleets to operate like big ones — without the added cost or complexity. With payroll now built into SmartHop, our users can save time, reduce errors, and stay focused on what really matters: growing their business."

Key benefits of SmartHop Payroll include:

- Automated driver and employee payments
- Tax and compliance support
- Easy-to-use payroll dashboard
- Full integration with SmartHop load, finance, and reporting features

The new payroll feature is available starting [launch date] for all current SmartHop customers. New users can access the tool as part of the SmartHop platform subscription.

#SmartHop #PayrollFeature #TruckingTech #FleetManagement #TruckingTools #DriverPayroll #PayrollSimplified #TruckingSolutions #TruckingInnovation #TruckingEfficiency #LogisticsTech

SmartHop public relations
media@smarthop.co
123-456-7890

123 Florida St., Miami, FL

Source: Self-elaboration in Canva

- **KPIs and content engagement goals**

To measure the success of these strategies, three key metrics will be used:

1. Website Traffic

Specifically, the volume of traffic driven from external content sources such as social media links, blog posts, and shared materials.

2. Organic Lead Growth

The increase in the number of organic leads generated through content initiatives on social media, blog articles, email campaigns, and other recommended strategies.

3. Social Media Engagement

Higher engagement from users with social media posts and newly published content, including likes, shares, comments, reactions to promotions, and click-through rates.

These metrics will serve as the foundation to evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies outlined in this plan.

Budgeting and Resource Allocation

- Required personnel or external support

To successfully implement this strategy, the following budgets are considered:

Tab 4 - Estimated Budgeting and Resource Allocation

Social media postings strategy		
Item	Estimated Monthly Cost (USD)	Notes
Content & Social Media Specialist (full-time or freelance)	\$3,000.00 to \$5,000.00	Covers content creation, design, copywriting, posting, and strategy.
Tools (Canva Pro, Adobe Express, Adobe Creative)	\$50.00 to \$200.00	For scheduling and design.
Creative asset production (images, short videos)	\$200.00 to \$500.00	Freelancers or AI tools.
Email Marketing Automations		
Email platform (Mailchimp)	\$50.00 to \$200.00	Based on contact list size.
Initial setup (one-time)	\$300.00 to \$1,000.00	Email templates, workflows.
Copywriting & monthly edits	\$300.00 to \$500.00	Can be done by a content specialist.

Internal User-Generated Content Development		
Coordination time	\$0	Handled internally
Incentives	\$100.00 to \$300.00	To reward participation with gift cards, free days, etc.
Editing and publishing	\$300.00 to \$600.00	Content marketer handles this.
Employee Content Writing Program		
Incentives (bonuses, free days)	\$500.00 to \$1,000.00	For writing content, To reward participation with gift cards, free days, etc.
Coordination, editing, and publishing	\$400.00 to \$600.00	Managed by marketing
Internal Magazine & Newsletter		
Writing & design	\$500.00 to \$800.00	Managed by marketing
Tools (Email, design)	\$0	Already paid in previous strategies
Internal Events (Celebrations, Team-Building)		
Food, supplies, and event materials	\$500.00 to \$2,000.00	Varies based on activity
Event coordinator (optional)	\$0 to \$1,500.00	Freelance or internal role
Employee Educational Portal		
Learning platform (Trainee)	\$200.00 to \$800.00/ month	Based on the number of users
Content creation (videos, guides)	\$500.00 to \$1,000.00/ month	Educational material production
Initial setup & configuration	\$1,000.00 one time	

Recommended Additional Staff		
Content & Social Media Specialist	\$3,000.00 to \$5,000.00	Can manage all content creation, social media, and email
Internal Communications Coordinator (optional)	\$2,500.00 to \$4,000.00	Supports HR and manages internal content & events
	Low Estimate	High Estimate
Total Monthly Estimate	\$6,600.00	\$14,950.00

Note: Considering that the SmartHop team already has a person working directly in content marketing, email, and automation, this budget could be lower.

However, I suggest hiring in-house personnel, as this integrated communication plan requires consistent coordination across departments, such as HR, operations, and others.

Timeline for Strategy Development

Since some of the strategies proposed here have already begun the planning, design, and implementation phases, the timeline will be divided into two parts.

The first section covers the activities carried out between September 2024 and early 2025. The second section outlines the suggested timeline for the implementation of the remaining activities starting in September 2025. Please see Appendix 24 for the integrated communication plan timeline chart.

Conclusions

"Many scholars have stipulated that all organizational communication must be integrated..." (Kitchen & Turkey, 2022, p. 74). This is the perfect recommendation for SmartHop: to maintain constant and integrated communication across all fronts. Departments must operate in a more connected and coordinated manner, and employees should be recognized as one of the company's most important audiences.

The clarity of the message SmartHop wants to communicate to all stakeholders must begin at the top. Before reaching external audiences, the message must be clear and

transparent internally. The importance of presenting a unified and consistent face to all stakeholders has been widely studied in the literature and is essential for effective strategic planning (Grigorescu & Lupu, 2015; Kitchen & Turkey, 2022; Kotler, 2012; Dinamarca, 2011; Núñez et al., 2010).

Although some of the proposed strategies have already been initiated, it is vital for the organization to also focus on internal communication. This will better prepare internal stakeholders to engage with the company, align with its current mission, and communicate effectively with external audiences.

While marketing departments have long focused on integrated marketing communications, the broader goal for companies should be integrated communication as a whole. Understanding what, how, and when to communicate with each stakeholder is critical for the organization's message to have a real impact.

Recommendations

For SmartHop, the primary recommendation is to maintain consistent development and execution of all proposed strategies. The main issue with previously developed content initiatives is the lack of long-term planning and follow-through. Many of these efforts were halted too early to generate meaningful results.

Whether the cause was strategic misalignment, limited budget, or other obstacles, the strategies outlined in this report are supported by literature and real-world evidence. SmartHop should continue building long-term content strategies to foster a strong community that views the platform as a trusted connector within the trucking industry.

Prioritization of Actions

Short Term

- Identity Manual Update - Developing an updated identity manual is foundational. All stakeholders must have a clear understanding of the company's identity, mission, vision, and values. This is a top priority.
- Content Strategy Development - Establishing a solid content strategy now lays the groundwork for future initiatives, especially in social media.

Medium Term

- **Social Media Strategy Revamp** - Although social media is already in use, the strategy should be enhanced to build a loyal community, one that sees SmartHop as a valuable industry voice, even if users are not current clients. While implementation can begin now, results are expected in the medium to long term.
- **Personalized Email Marketing (Internal & External)** - Though not urgent, this can be implemented quickly and support broader long-term goals.
- **Social Marketing / Impact Events** - While not a top immediate priority, it's essential for the organization to show that it cares. Planning small social impact initiatives communicates company values and strengthens public perception. Begin planning in the short term for execution in the medium term.

Long Term

Internal Events: Celebrations & Team-Building -- Given potential budget constraints, these activities should be planned thoughtfully and executed in the long term, to build motivation and shared purpose among employees.

Employee Educational Portal - This initiative should also be considered for long-term development. Depending on the available budget, learning opportunities could be gradually implemented and adapted.

Other strategies proposed throughout this report may also be implemented progressively over the long term.

For Future Research:

Future studies should explore the role of integrated communication strategies in startups. With an estimated 50 million new companies launched each year and only 10% surviving beyond 10 years (Louise, 2025), understanding communication's role in this context is crucial.

While this case study focused on one startup in the U.S. trucking industry, broader research could analyze how communication practices influence startup sustainability and stakeholder engagement in different sectors and markets.

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Appendices


Appendix 1 - SmartHop subscription plans

Starter	Basic	MOST POPULAR Growth	Premium
\$50 /MONTH	\$150 /MONTH	\$300 /MONTH	\$1,250 /MONTH
For owner operators looking to book loads.	For small companies looking to make smarter booking decisions and manage operations efficiently.	For midsize companies that want to focus on scaling their business while reducing overhead costs.	For larger fleets requiring dedicated dispatching and lane management services.
Request a demo	Request a demo	Request a demo	Request a demo

Source: <https://www.smarthop.com/pricing>

Appendix 2 - SmartHop Ideal Profile Persona

Patrick Pearson



Job Title
Fleet Manager

Age
Age 65 or older

Highest Level of Education
Some college, no degree

Social Networks

- f
- @
- X
- in
- p

Preferred Method of Communication

- Phone
- Email
- Text Messaging
- WhatsApp

Tools They Need to Do Their Job

- Load boards;
- Invoicing Software;
- Transportation Management Systems;
- Payroll tools.

Job Responsibilities

- Fleet management, dispatching, invoicing creation, drivers payroll, and trips management.

Source: Self-generated using Hubspot persona tool available in <https://www.hubspot.com/make-my-persona>

Appendix 3 - SmartHop Ideal Profile Persona

Jorge Perez



Job Title
Founder and CEO of JP
Trucking

Age
45 years old

Highest Level of Education
Graduated in Business
Administration and

Social Networks



Preferred Method of Communication

- Email and video call apps;
Medium social media networks usage: Whatsapp, Instagram, facebook and Linked being preferred.

Tools They Need to Do Their Job

- Loadboard
- TMS
- Loads management


Enter text here

- Jorge Perez, 45, has been a truck driver for 5 years. He is married with three kids, one recently graduating high school. He is the owner of the trucking company JP Trucking, that for the moment only counts one truck, but which plans of expansion are expected for this year 2025. In his free time, he enjoys podcasts on logistics, music, and audiobooks. He likes functional and practical things, and he wants to take advantage of the new technologies to reach success.

Source: Self-generated using Hubspot persona tool available in <https://www.hubspot.com/make-my-persona>

Appendix 4 - SmartHop Ideal Profile Persona

Maria Rodríguez




Job Title
Founder of Maria's
dispatching

Age
37 years old

Highest Level of Education
High School graduate

Social Networks



Preferred Method of Communication

- High usage of electronic tools: Email and video call apps; Loadboard platforms.
Medium social media networks usage: Whatsapp, Instagram, Facebook and TikTok being preferred;
She uses her computer usually when working, but occasionally, she needs to work with her phone or her iPad.
Tech-savvy.

Tools They Need to Do Their Job

- Loadboard
- TMS
- Load management
- Communication with drivers
- Document management

Source: Self-generated using Hubspot persona tool available in <https://www.hubspot.com/make-my-persona>

Diego Martínez



Job Title

**Customer experience
lead in SmartHop**

Age

36 years old

Highest Level of Education

**Professional in
hospitality, with a**

Social Networks



Preferred Method of Communication

- Technology/Social Media:
High usage of electronic tools: Email, SMS, Phone, Video call apps;
Medium social media networks usage: Whatsapp, Instagram, Facebook and LinkedIn being preferred;
He uses both his phone and computer for work.
Tech-savvy.

Tools They Need to Do Their Job

- - Loadboard
- TMS
- Load management
- Communication with drivers
- Document management

Source: Self-generated using Hubspot persona tool available in <https://www.hubspot.com/make-my-persona>

Appendix 6 - SmartHop Customer Journey: Insights, Pain Points & Needs

	Awareness	Consideration	Decision/Subscription	Onboarding	Engagement & Retention	Consideration
User Actions (Activities)	Searches for a tool to help their business	Evaluation of SmartHop as a potential solution.	Decision making to sign up or start using SmartHop.	Customer first steps into the platform: Onboarding or training and information fillout	Keep the customer SmartHop monthly subscription and build loyalty.	The customer becomes a promoter or ambassador of the SmartHop brand.
Touchpoints (Interaction Points)	Social media content and ads Blog articles Trucker word of mouth Industry and Facebook forums Paid promotions YouTube content and ads	SmartHop website Customer testimonials YouTube product demos Email marketing campaigns Blog posts (if available) Sales chat	Direct contact via phone, email, or chat Sales rep conversations Onboarding emails or confirmation messages	Welcome emails or onboarding steps Employee Resource center with guides and videos Portal access for setup Intro training via video call	Monthly newsletters and updates Customer support Community engagement events Educational social media content Feedback through surveys and forms	Referral programs User-generated content or testimonials Featuring users on SmartHop social media Engaging with and sharing SmartHop content
Sentiments (Thought Bubbles)	Concern Frustration Curiosity	Curiosity Interest	Excitement Interest	Excitement Uncertainty Empowerment Frustration	Confidence Belonging Appreciation Loyalty	Pride Connection Gratitude Ownership
Emotions (Mood Meter)						
Pain points and needs	Difficult market Little knowledge Overwhelmed by different market options Same tools used by competitors	Need of more information Multiple possible solution platforms. Loadboard market is saturated and lacks clear differentiation.	Check out process difficulties Platform errors Introduction to new technology	Not friendly technology Non intuitive onboarding	Lack of tech savy skills Not needed tools Confusing usage of the platform Main loadboard tool being empowered by indirect competitors	Product promise not accurate Lack of training into all platform functionalities Little understanding of tech driven solutions
Possible Solutions (Opportunities to improve the experience)	SmartHop tools Inbound marketing SEO Social media	Web page design Social media managment. Content and SEO marketing. Email marketing.	Friendly checkout. Easy demo scheduling. Active sales and chat support. Ongoing customer support	Tech-driven onboarding for smoother experiences AI-powered self-service training. End-to-end support via AI and HR teams.	Introduction of intuitive tools. Constant in-app training. Soft updates Focus on only one necessity.	Clarify product value and expectations. Present ALL IN as one solution. Keep users informed regularly.

Source - Self-elaboration in Canva

Appendix 7 - DAT subscription plans

Plan Name	Recommended For	Price /month	Additional Fees
DAT One Enhanced	Recommended for New OTR Owner-Operators	\$99	
DAT One Pro	Recommended for OTR Owner-Operators with 1-3 Trucks	\$149	
DAT One Select	Recommended for Small Fleets with 3+ Trucks	\$199	\$99 additional/user

Features for DAT One Enhanced: Broker Credit Score & Days to Pay, Load Counts by State, 30-day Average Lane Rates (For Van, Reefer and Flatbed).

Features for DAT One Pro: TriHaul Triangular Routing Tool, DAT Assurance Payment Support, Canadian Loads, 15-day Average Lane Rates (For Van, Reefer and Flatbed).

Features for DAT One Select: LIVE Load Board Results, Market Conditions Tool, Exact Match Alarms, Multiple Searches & Filtering.

Source: Available in <https://www.dat.com/carriers-2>

Appendix 8 - TruckStop subscription plans

Plan Name	Description	Price /User/Month	Label
Basic	Everything you need to start finding and booking loads now.	\$42*	
Advanced	Everything in Basic plus tools to weed out slow-paying brokers.	\$135*	
Pro	Level up your profits with tools that make it easy to make more on every load.	\$159*	BEST VALUE

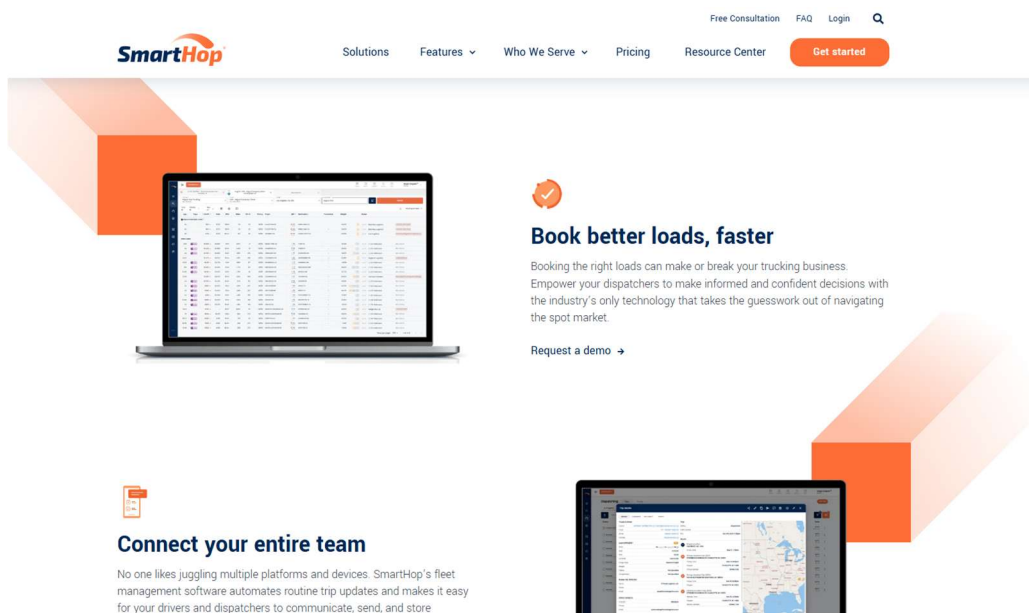
* USD/User/Month**

** USD/User/Month

Each plan includes a 'START NOW' button and a 'Full feature chart' link.

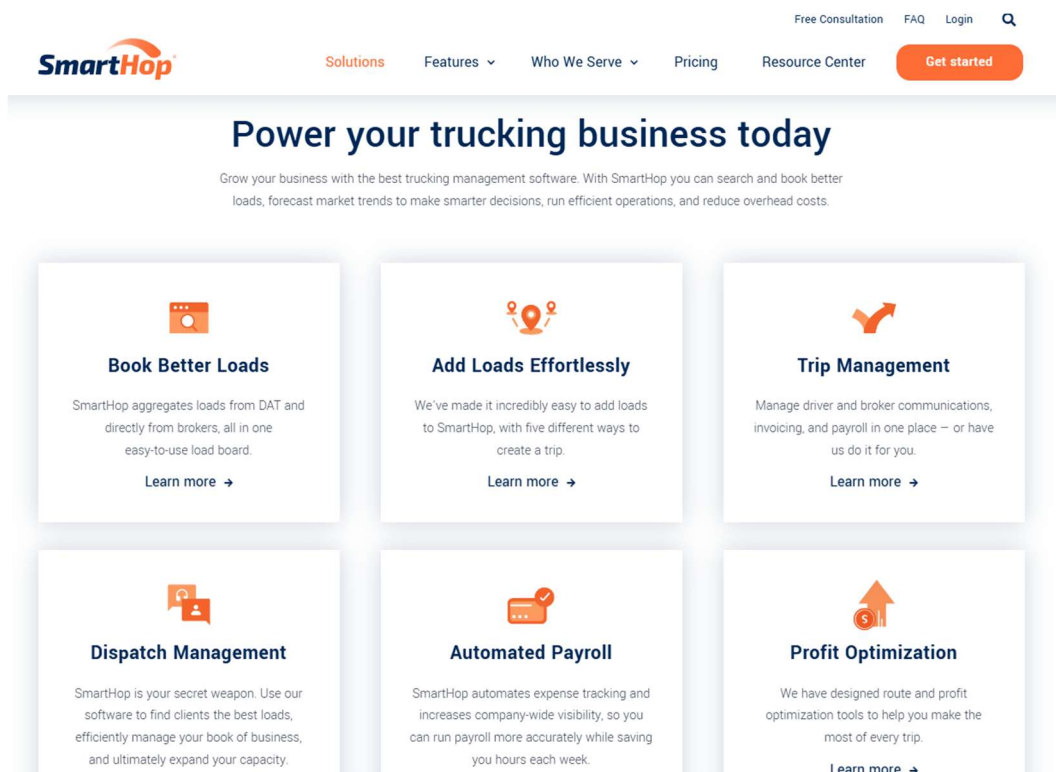
Source: Available in <https://truckstop.com/product/load-board/carrier/>

Appendix 9 - SmartHop Web Page cover - Home page



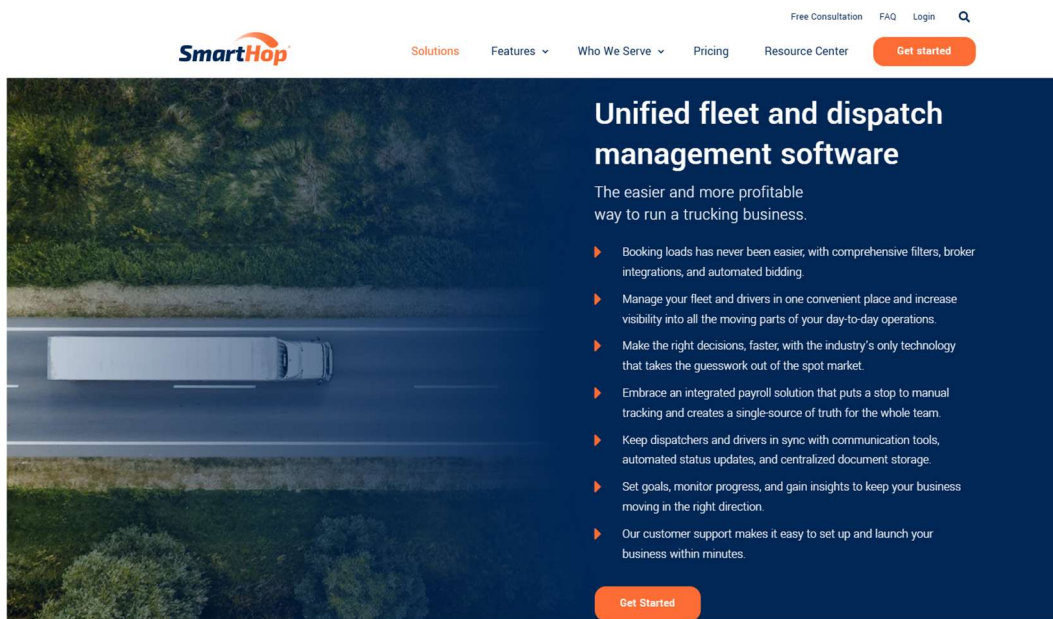
Source: SmartHop We Page available in <https://www.smarthop.com/>

Appendix 10 - SmartHop Web Page cover - Solutions



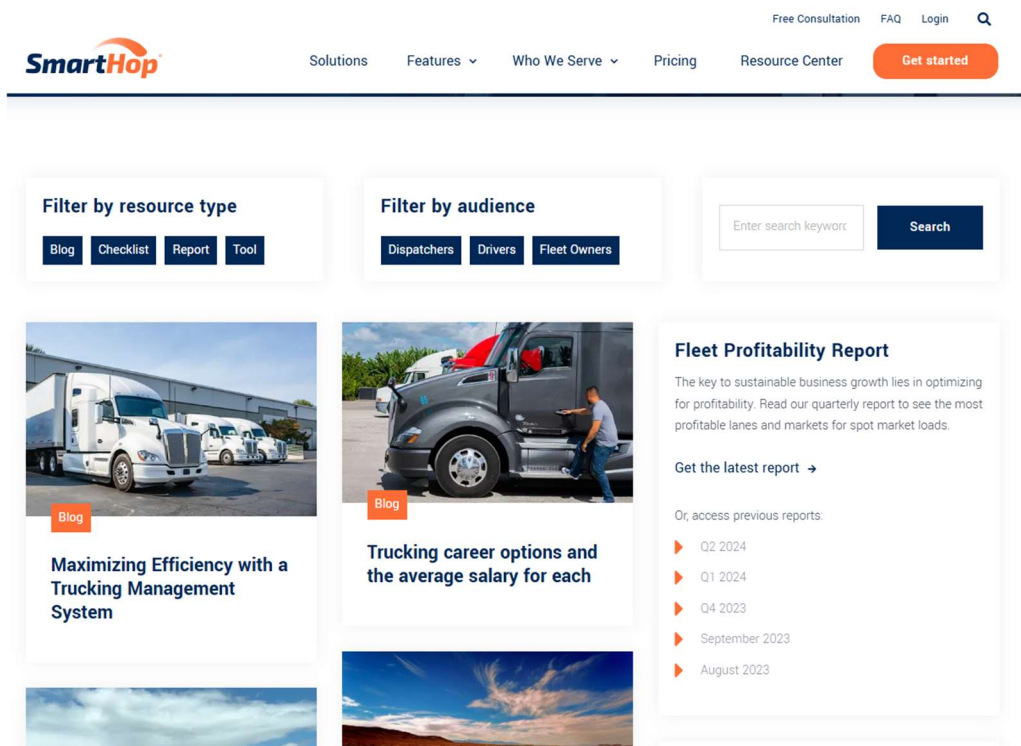
Source: SmartHop We Page available in <https://www.smarthop.com/>

Appendix 11 - SmartHop Web Page cover - Solutions



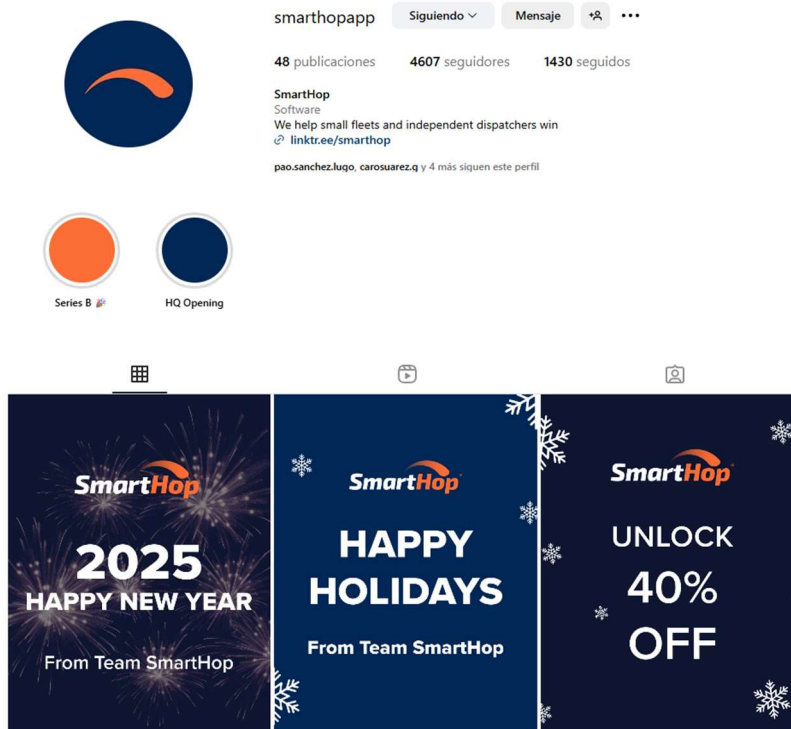
Source: SmartHop We Page available in <https://www.smarthop.com/>

Appendix 12 - SmartHop Web Page cover - Resource center



Source: SmartHop We Page available in <https://www.smarthop.com/>

Appendix 13 - SmartHop Instagram



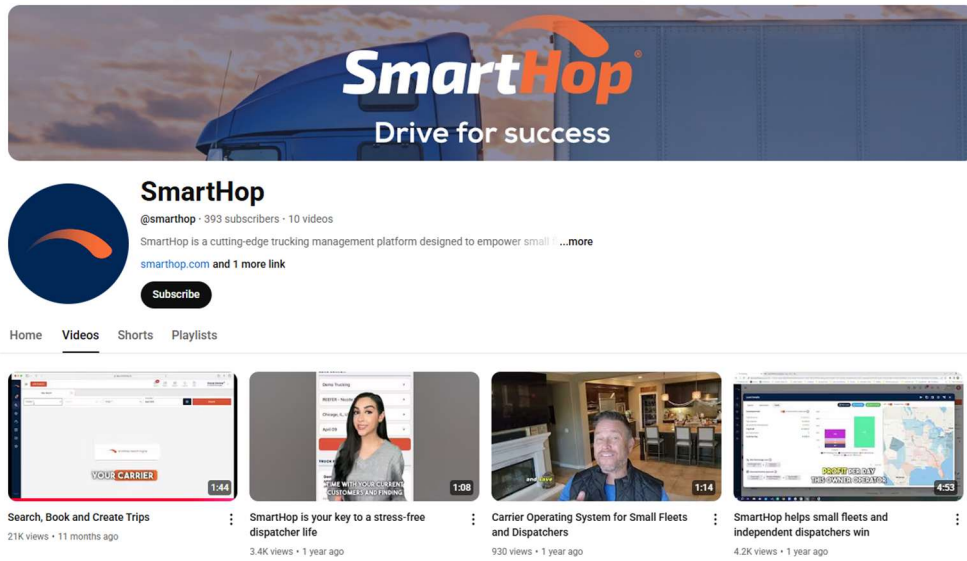
Source: SmartHop Instagram available in <https://www.instagram.com/smarthopapp/?hl=es>

Appendix 14 - SmartHop Facebook



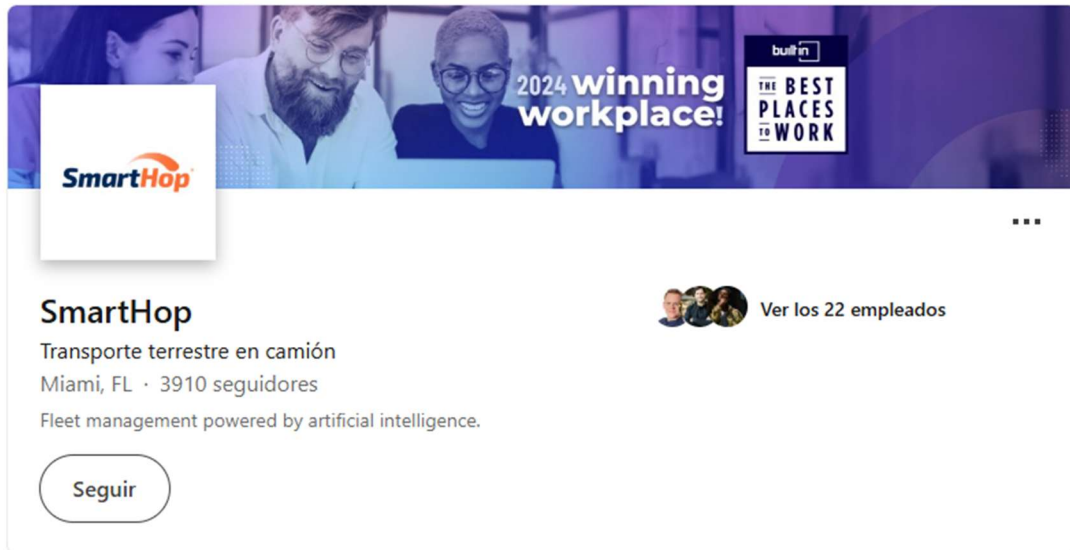
Source: SmartHop Facebook available in https://www.facebook.com/smarthopapp/photos_by

Appendix 15 - SmartHop YouTube Channel



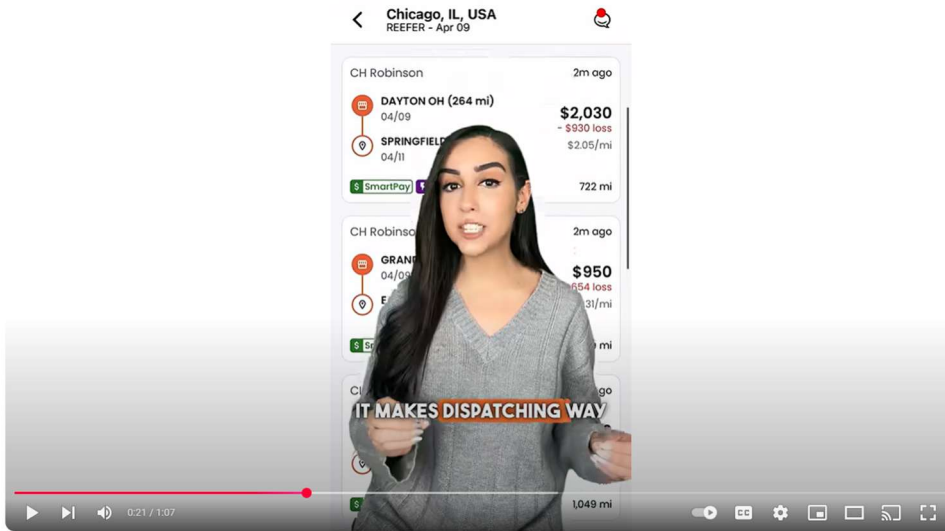
Source: SmartHop YouTube Available in <https://www.youtube.com/@smarthop>

Appendix 16 - SmartHop LinkedIn Channel



Source: SmartHop LinkedIn Available in <https://www.linkedin.com/company/smarthop>

Appendix 17 - SmartHop UGC YouTube video



SmartHop is your key to a stress-free dispatcher life

Source: SmartHop YouTube channel available in <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gAkCB9B-8Nc>

Appendix 18 - SmartHop UGC YouTube video



Carrier Operating System for Small Fleets and Dispatchers

SmartHop
394 subscribers

Subscribe

6

Share

Download

Save

...

Source: SmartHop YouTube channel available in <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gAkCB9B-8Nc>

Appendix 19 - Free Trucking Expenses Calculator

Free expense calculator

Managing your expenses effectively is crucial for ensuring the profitability of your business. That's why we developed a comprehensive expense calculator, built just for trucking companies.

[Try it now](#)

The advertisement features a dark blue background with a white van on the left. On the right, there is a laptop displaying a spreadsheet with orange and blue cells, and a smartphone showing a calculator with the number 1738. The text is in white and orange.

Source: SmartHop Available in <https://www.smarthop.com/blog/free-expense-spreadsheet>

Appendix 20 - Instagram Storytelling Post

SmartHop

Struggling to manage drivers while also juggling constant communication?

The image shows a man sitting at a desk with a laptop, looking stressed with his hand on his forehead. The background is a blurred office setting. The text is in white on a dark blue background. There are navigation arrows on the right side of the image.

Source: SmartHop Instagram Available in https://www.instagram.com/p/C9vsqf5sljF/?hl=es&img_index=1

Appendix 21 - Sample of email campaign

Hi [first name],

Black Friday deals are here! When you sign up for SmartHop Basic by November 30th, you'll **get access to all our Professional features** for your first month at no additional cost!

This is a great way to try our most powerful software at a significantly lower cost. SmartHop Professional is normally 250 dollars/month, and you'll be getting it for just 100 dollars. Compare Basic and Professional plans [here](#).

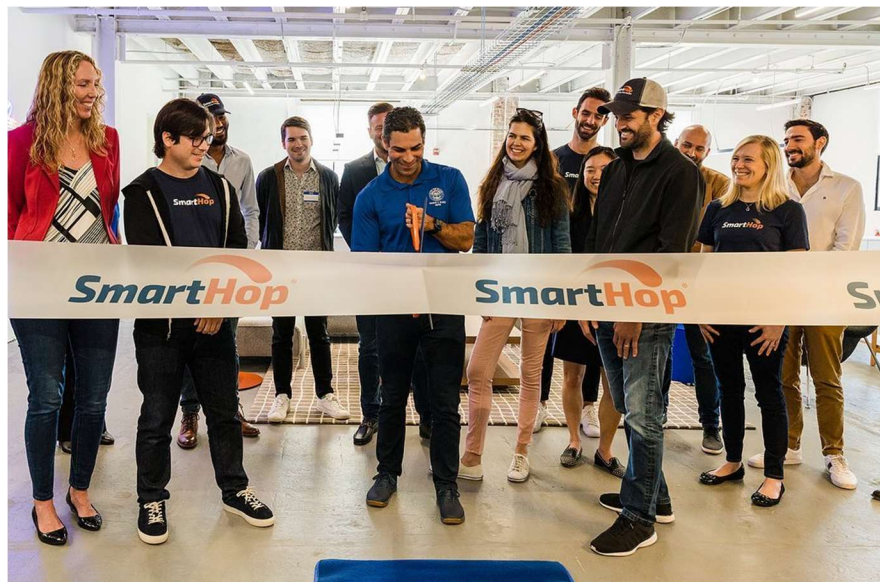
Request a demo with promo code **BLACKFRIDAY23** to lock in this limited-time promotion before November 30th.

Best,

Team SmartHop

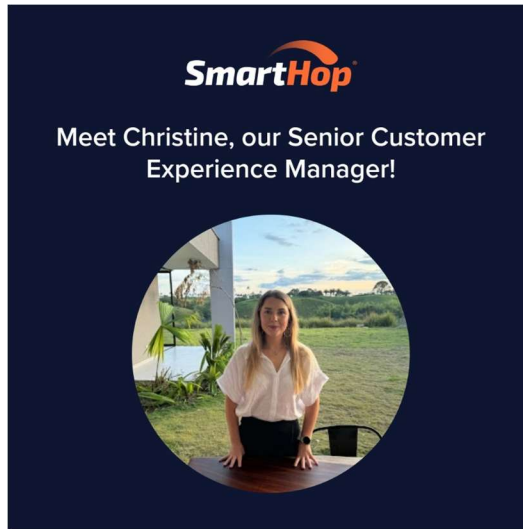
Source: SmartHop provided documents (SmartHop, 2025)

Appendix 22 - SmartHop Office Opening Post



Source: SmartHop Instagram available in <https://www.instagram.com/p/CcNv9ADvzzm/?hl=es>

Appendix 23 - SmartHop social media post about an employee



Source - Self-elaboration using Adobe Express

Appendix 24 - Gantt chart for strategy plan

INTEGRATED COMMUNICATION PLAN (2024 - 2025)

	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB
Plan and Launch blog & newsletter strategy											
Start podcast; employee content program											
Launch birthday email automation											
Design, plan and Publish employee magazine; build internal content hub											
Host internal event; launch educational portal phase 1											
Implement social media upgrades; ambassador program begins											
End of -year metrics review; expand UGC & podcast promotion											
Second employee event; launch cross-team CSR projects											
Highlight internal achievements via social media											
Publish themed blog; expand email targeting strategy											
Year-end podcast episodes; customer UGC campaign											
Final performance review; plan next year; celebration event											

Source: Self-elaboration in Canva

Laura Nathalia Machuca Rodriguez
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Authorization Request for Academic Use of Company Information

Date: July 16, 2025

To: SmartHop Inc.
120 NW 25th St Ste 201

Miami, FL 33127, USA

Subject: Authorization for the Use of Company Information and Content in Academic Project

I, Laura Nathalia Machuca Rodriguez, a current student in the Master's program in Marketing and Digital Business at Universidade Portucalense, hereby request formal authorization from SmartHop Inc. to utilize specific company-related content and information as part of my final academic project. This project constitutes the culmination of my master's studies and will be presented exclusively for academic evaluation purposes.

The scope of this request includes:

1. Use of strategic and organizational information provided to me during my collaboration with SmartHop, to be used strictly for the purpose of a case study on integrated communication.
2. Inclusion of marketing materials, strategies, and content proposals previously developed by me during my work with SmartHop, specifically those related to social media and content strategy.

Assurances and Conditions

- The use of this material will be limited to academic and non-commercial purposes.
- All references to the company will be made with respect and in alignment with previously published or public content, unless otherwise agreed.
- All documents and content created by me during my collaboration will be clearly marked and identified.
- SmartHop retains the right to request a review of the final project before submission, should the company deem it necessary.

Authorization Confirmation

I, the undersigned, hereby confirm that Laura Nathalia Machuca Rodriguez is authorized to use the above-mentioned materials and information for their academic project under the terms specified above.

Authorized Representative (SmartHop Inc.)

Name: Suzannah Rubinstein

Title/Position: SVP, Operations

Signature: 

Date: 07/16/2025



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