

I3 Net Science and Society Communications Workshop

Monday 6 November 2006, Dana Centre, London

Session One: Using the Internet for Public Communication (Ailsa Barry)

Various tools on the internet which should be used:

Web 2 – resources and services on the internet which allow people to collaborate and share information on-line. It is a social phenomenon that allows users to generate and distribute web content, enabling open communication, decentralisation of authority and information to be shared and re-used.

1-1: instant messaging, e-mails
1- many: blogs, web pages
many-many: wikis

Youtube web page: <http://www.youtube.com/> is the largest video outlet and currently contains 13,331 videos which have been tagged as containing science content. The Natural History Museum uses this web site to reach a huge audience and recently received 265 hits in 1 ½ days on one video. Putting news stories on a regular basis on your home page is also a highly successful way to reach a large audience. If the news stories appear regularly, your audience will keep returning for updates.

Flickr – photo sharing website and online community platform.

Folksonomy –internet-based information retrieval. Methodology consisting of tags, categorise content such as web pages, online photos and web links. Tags make information easier to search, discover and navigate and can be more effective for search engines.

Blog – online journal. You should link to related areas, use other bloggers, write well and regularly and use photos to ensure maximum interest.

Use Technorati and Google blog! Ensure that your key words fully cover your topic and use RSS feeds.

RSS – XML-based system so users can subscribe to their favourite website.

del.icio.us – social bookmarking web for storing, sharing and discovering web bookmarks.

Myspace – social networking website, e.g. “Arctic Monkeys” reached number 1 in the UK music charts by putting their music on this site.

Mashup – website or web application that seamlessly combines content from one source into an integrated experience.

REMEMBER:

- give users the information they want;
- encourage sharing of work;
- build knowledge in a practical / stimulating way;
- create motivation for the user to return to your site.

It is a good idea if possible, to ‘involve’ your users. For example, the Natural History Museum held a bluebell survey report:

<http://www.nhm.ac.uk/nature-online/british-natural-history/survey-bluebells/bluebells-exploring-british-wildlife.html>

To get an idea of the work that goes into a website such as the Natural History Museum’s, 16 people are employed to work on the web page, the interactive area in the gallery, exhibitions, etc. To put this into perspective, the whole organisation has an annual budget of approximately £57M. The speaker stressed that production values do not need to be at the high end to achieve maximum impact.

Session Two: Producing effective written communications (Rupert Morris)

The key message is: Keep it simple!

1. Remember the reader - only when something is read by an audience does it obtain value. Start with a short sentence, then begin to explain and expand.
2. Get to the point – it is a good sentence if it is easy to read aloud.
3. Use fewer nouns and more verbs – e.g. the speaker did not like the JRA description in RadioNet’s leaflet:
“The ability to perform world-class research is predicated upon the ideas and inspiration of scientists and the implementation of those ideas by talented engineers.”
4. Simplify as you explain.
5. Be consistent - start at the right place and stay there! (which includes not changing tenses). The speaker gave an example of an announcement used by Ryanair, which is grammatically incorrect, even though you know what is meant:
“The use of mobile phones is prohibited and must be switched off.”
6. Read it through (and preferably ask someone else to read it as well)

Always ask:

- What are you trying to achieve?

- Who is going to read it?
- What kind of message will work best?
- Does it have visual appeal?
- Is everything as clear as you can make it?
- Have you or a colleague read it through?

“The Economist” web page has a very useful style guide:
<http://www.economist.com/research/StyleGuide/>

Remember that it is more difficult to write simply than to hide behind technical jargon.

Session Three: Working with the Media (Scott Chisholm)

Remember that jargon is a weed in the garden of language, so a journalist will weed or translate and that is when errors occur. It is up to you to take control of what journalists write! But remember, that you are not talking to the journalist, you are talking to the audience.

A story is news worthy if it is:

Topical (just happened, seasonal, “bandwagon”, e.g. company creates a story to bring attention to itself)

Relevant

Unusual (what journalists call “the wow factor”)

Trouble (add this element and it’s a news story; without it, it’s just an advert)

Human (this is the emotional element)

The two underlined are the most important to a journalist.

Make sure that you inform the audience in an entertaining way about what you do, so that the audience becomes educated.

The more you help journalists, the more they will help you. Treat all journalists with the same respect.

Science can often be misreported because journalists do not understand the subject – therefore, it isn’t relevant!

The best thing you can say to a journalist is, “let me give you an example”.

You have the right to know the answers to the following questions before speaking to a journalist:

1. What’s the publication/ programme? (who is the audience?)
2. What’s the story?

3. What's the angle?
4. Is the journalist talking to anyone else?
5. What do you want from me? (phone conversation, live broadcast, feature)
6. What's your first question? (*Radio*)

Before your 'presentation' (interview) prepare all the negatives and positives of the argument. Once you have exhausted these possibilities, the journalist cannot throw anything at you that you are not prepared for. Preparation is imperative!

During your 'presentation' (interview), remember the following:

- Look as if you want to be there (think 'smile')
- Make eye contact with the interviewer
- Look through a camera lens, never at it
- If you are being interviewed by telephone, make sure that you are standing, so that you are literally and figuratively on your toes
- If you need to break the strain of keeping constant eye contact, look down and then look back up – never look around you
- Don't put up with bad manners from a journalist. Be polite, but firm and if the journalist interrupts you, it is perfectly acceptable to say, "Excuse me, this is an important point, please let me finish." As the expert, you should decide what is important, not the journalist.
- Humour can be a great tool (it will make you appear human).

Answer the question, if you choose. However, if you do not choose to answer the question, you must acknowledge or address it. You can use a question as a vehicle to get back to your presentation.

You do not have to accept the language the journalist is using. You must stop the journalist immediately and say, "Those are your words, not mine, I would say....." If you do not correct, it will become your proposition.

A journalist will often look for trouble (see T.R.U.T.H. above): if a journalist gets aggressive, there is more chance that the interviewee will say something more sensational, which can only be good for the journalist's story.

Remember to be in control: use accessible language, craft your presentation and start where knowledge converges. If you get too technical, the journalist will not understand and will lose interest.

Things to be aware of:

- If a journalist by-passes your communication department and calls you directly, it is a trick.
- Don't be pressurised or fooled if a journalist tells you, "I have a deadline". If they miss one 'deadline', the story can always be published in the next paper or broadcast on the next programme.