Telling Your Story

How to understand, reach and connect with your audiences
Five Steps

1. Knowing your audience
2. Affecting public opinion
3. Tailoring messages and making them stick
4. Finding and telling your stories
Step 1: Who is My Audience?
Audience is CRITICAL to any communication effort
Audiences are diverse

- There is no ONE audience
- Must understand different aspects of diversity to know how to reach audience
- Targeting is critical
- Segmentation and tailoring makes it easier to do our jobs
What do I need to know about my audience?
Goals of messaging

• Inform
• Persuade
• Motivate
• Achieve mutual understanding
How do I evaluate?

• When evaluating message think about whether your audience would believe the message is:
  • Appropriate
  • Meaningful
  • Memorable
  • Understandable
  • Believable
Rokia study

• Done by Deborah Small, a Carnegie Mellon marketing professor, and two colleagues
• Had students come in for an experiment about messages
• Students received one of the two messages then asked some questions
• After receiving $5 for participating, students were asked if they would be willing to give to help the people they read about (this was the REAL study)
Any money that you donate will go to Rokia, a seven-year-old girl who lives in Mali in Africa. Rokia is desperately poor and faces a threat of severe hunger, even starvation. Her life will be changed for the better as a result of your financial gift. With your support, and the support of other caring sponsors, Save the Children will work with Rokia’s family and other members of the community to help feed and educate her, and provide her with basic medical care.
Food shortages in Malawi are affecting more than three million children. In Zambia, severe rainfall deficits have resulted in a 42% drop in maize production from 2000. As a result, an estimated three million Zambians face hunger. Four million Angolans — one-third of the population — have been forced to flee their homes. More than 11 million people in Ethiopia need immediate food assistance. Save the Children works to help feed and educate these children, and provide them with basic medical care.
Which message would *most* compel you to donate money and why?
Findings

• Those reading the Rokia message donated avg. $2.38
• The other message averaged $1.14
• Study was done again with Rokia story alone and the story with data

Which do you think was more effective?

DATA WITH STORY or NO DATA
Final word

Rokia + data = $1.43
Rokia alone = $2.38
“If I look at the mass I will never act. If I look at the one, I will.”
- Mother Theresa
How do you determine what audience to target?

What is the hardest audience for you to reach? Why?
Step 2: Affecting Public Opinion
Public opinion

An aggregate of the individual views, attitudes, and beliefs about a particular topic, expressed by a significant portion of the community.

- *Encyclopedia Britannica*
How does it work?

• Often surrounds issues of contention
• What you hear about doesn’t have to be the majority
  • Often small, vocal minority
• Press can perpetuate inaccuracies by looking for sources from both sides
What is an example of a topic where a vocal minority may not represent the public opinion?
(Short) Case Study

The *Lancet* and Autism
The Beginning

• 1998 – *The Lancet* publishes a study linking MMR (measles, mumps, rubella) vaccine to autism

• Study lead author Andrew Wakefield calls for MMR vaccine to be suspended
Article Impact on Society

• Measles outbreaks return to the UK, including the first death in 14 years
• Parents of autistic children blame themselves for agreeing to vaccinations
• Immunization rates in England and other countries decline
Research Exposed

• 2004 - Investigation by London Sunday Times journalist Brian Deer discovers that Wakefield had multiple undeclared conflicts of interest, manipulated evidence, and had broken other ethical codes.
• Article was based on claims by the parents of only eight children.
• 2004 – The Lancet issues partial retraction.
• 2009 – Health bodies in Britain, U.S., Canada, Australia and others report outbreaks of measles.
Fighting for Wakefield

• Generation Rescue formed 2005
• Generation Rescue ad that ran nationally in *USA Today* in 2008
• Video of Generation Rescue founder JB Handley on TV
Conclusion of *Lancet* Saga

- *The Lancet* offers full retraction of article
- Wakefield labeled “dishonest”, “unethical”, “callous” by UK General Medical Council
Who shapes your opinions?
Opinion leaders

• Opinion leaders serve as catalysts for the formation of public opinion through their knowledge and ability to articulate ideas about specific issues

• Sociologists describe them as:
  • Highly interested in a subject or issue
  • Better informed on an issue than the average person
  • Avid consumers of mass media
  • Early adopters of new ideas
  • Good organizers who can get other people to take action
The role of mass media

• Via mass media, you can become major players in forming public opinion
• Often provide the mass media with the information
• Idea is mass media determine what the public believes is important
  • Also called Agenda Setting Theory
Research says...

- Positive better than negative
- Radio and TV better than print (most of the time)
- Emotion and fear are good for low interest
- Logic better than emotion for highly educated
- Altruism needs good motivator
Limits of persuasion

- Lack of message penetration
- Competing messages
- Self-selection
- Self-perception
Fighting misinformation

AKA “I didn’t do it!”
A lie gets halfway around the world before the truth has a chance to put its pants on.

Winston Churchill
Misinformation is “sticky”

• Rejecting information requires cognitive effort
• It’s harder for your brain to weigh the truth of information than just accept it
• If the topic isn’t important to you (or you have other things on your mind) misinformation is more likely to take hold

What do we pay attention to?

• Does the information fit with other things I believe in?
• Does it make a coherent story with what I already know?
• Does it come from a credible source?
• Do others believe it?

When does it stick?

• Conforms to our existing world view
  • Political
  • Religious
  • Social

Strategies to fight misinformation

- Replace the existing narrative
- Focus on the facts
- Keep it brief
- Tailor the message to the audience’s beliefs
- Repeat, repeat, repeat

However, it doesn’t always work

• A 2013 study by Brendan Nyhan entitled “The Hazards of Correcting Myths About Health Care Reform”

• Conducted an experiment

• Trying to determine if more aggressive media fact checking would correct false beliefs (ACA death panels)

• Participants either read an article on Sarah Palin’s claims OR an article with Palin’s info and corrective info

**BIG FINDING:** Successfully refuting a lie actually INCREASES belief in the lie among members of ideological groups predisposed to believing the lie.
Step 3: Tailoring Messages and Making them Stick
Six Principles of Sticky Ideas

• Simplicity
• Unexpectedness
• Concreteness
• Credibility
• Emotions
• Stories

Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die, Chip and Dan Heath, 2007
SCHEMA
BEWARE the Curse of Knowledge
A definition

“Tailoring is any combination of information or change strategies intended to reach one specific person, based on characteristics that are unique to that person, related to the outcome of interest, and have been derived from an individual assessment.”

- **Matt Kreuter**

  Kreuter, MW, and Skinner, CS (2000),

  "Tailoring: What's in a name?"

  Health Education Research. 15, 1-4.
What’s the point?

• Take a general message and make it relevant on personal level to an audience or individual, typically to change behavior
Tailored delivery

• Print (newspapers, form letters)
• Internet (Amazon, Netflix)
• Social media (Facebook, Twitter)
• Cell phones (texting)
WHAT'S NEXT?
Step 4: Finding and telling your stories
Why tell stories?

• Simple
• Timeless
• Contagious
• Easy to remember
• Inspirational
Popularity isn’t everything
Popularity vs. effectiveness

• Babies, cat and dog videos tend to be very popular, yet not effective beyond a few laughs
• To create effective content you need to tell a story
Not everything can be a story, **BUT** we can use these techniques in any of our communications.
Why storytelling?

"Algorithms cannot give people goose bumps, and algorithms cannot tell a story, and cannot give you that nugget of insight that differentiates brands and products. That is only performed by human beings that can tell stories and can understand consumer behavior instinctively."

– Mike Sheehan, chairman of Hill Holiday
In your opinion, what are the factors that drive great creative PR campaigns?

- Great storytelling
- Audience insight
- Content creation
- Purpose
- Results
- Humour
- Viral execution
- Technological innovation
- Third party endorsement
- Crowdsourcing
- Stunts

Holmes Report’s Creative Index, 2012
What does science say about storytelling?
½ of your waking hours

2,000 a day
Let’s do an experiment!
ARRIVAL OF A TRAIN AT LA CIOTAT

Lumière No. 653
Did this video terrify you?
So what’s going on?

• You know it’s not real
• Just a 2D image of light
• HOWEVER, your brain isn’t a spectator
• When a story begins, you become a PARTICIPANT
• Your brain processes the story as if it’s real
What does this mean to us?

• Information alone doesn’t get people’s interest
• It’s HOW that information is told that makes the story
Listening = Learning
REVELATION
Final thought: Our goals with storytelling

• Build empathy between the audience and the “product”
• Weave storytelling techniques into all communication efforts
• Inspire the audience to ACT and ENGAGE
What stories do you have to tell about your research?