

Community guidelines: Capturing your audience's attention

DRAFT

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ISBN 978 1 XXXX XXX X
OEH 2019/XXXX
Month 2019

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www.environment.nsw.gov.au

Purpose of this document

This document aims to provide your organisation with some tips on how to get your message through to the people who need to see it.

Useful links are included for more information about how to reach your intended audience.

Capturing your audience's attention

People are bombarded with different messages, slogans and ads every day. These come at us via traditional media channels such as TV and radio, but also via email and social media. So how can your organisation get attention in this often noisy and crowded media environment?

Get to the point

The first step is to understand why you want to communicate in the first place. What is it you are trying to say and what is the purpose of what you are saying? For example, do you want to raise funds? Are you trying to change the behaviour of people in your community? Or do you want people to get involved in your initiative? Having this clear at the outset will help your communication get to the point so your audience quickly understands what you want them to think, feel or do.

Be relevant

Without defining and understanding who your target audience is, there is a good chance your content will get lost. Too often organisations define their target audience as 'everyone' and this results in ineffective communication that is not relevant to people's lives. Some questions that may help you define your target audience and narrow in on who you're communicating with are:

- Where does your target audience live? How old are they? Are most of your audience young people at university? Or are they retirees?
- What behaviours or traits does your audience have in common? What are they interested in? For example, do they own dogs, or are they interested in the outdoors?
- Where do they get their news or information from and who influences them? For example, we know young people are more likely to get their news online and via social media while older Australians are more likely to read the newspaper or listen to the radio.

Being able to define who you are trying to talk to (your audience) and what you are trying to get them to do (your call to action) will make your communications relevant and effective.

Be positive

Be hopeful

If you want to motivate your audience, you need to be positive. We know that negative messages don't work and can turn people away from wanting to take action. That doesn't mean you can't acknowledge the issue or problem you are trying to solve – but do so in a way that outlines why you are doing something about it, and why others should also care. Showing people the positive impacts they can help create is the most effective way to motivate them. Make them feel like their contribution can make a difference, and that now is the time to act.

Localise the issue

People relate most to issues they can understand or empathise with on a local level. For example, while climate change is a global issue, [a recent study](#) showed that localising the issue for a US coastal community by focusing on rising sea levels and how this was going to impact their lives helped residents understand the issue and act. This involves talking to your community to understand their views ahead of developing any communication materials.

Build relationships

People want to feel they are important and part of the solution. To achieve this, you need to understand who influences your target audience and develop relationships with them. This may include conducting research (e.g. reviewing local media or speaking with community members) and identifying others that are involved in koala conservation. It may also mean keeping a record of journalists in your area writing about the environment and who they quote in their stories. Once you have identified who the major influencers are, seek a meeting with them to discuss your project and see how they might be able to help.

Celebrate good behaviours

Research shows that people are influenced by 'people like me' and will pick up behaviours from people closest to them, or by those seen as credible or trusted. By celebrating good behaviour (for example, drivers slowing down in koala habitat areas) and telling positive stories (using trusted sources), you can normalise good behaviour and influence others to do the same. Look at what other groups and organisations are doing to protect koalas and see if there is any inspiration in the work they are doing.

Engage people

All content should be free of jargon and written in plain English, so it is easy to understand. A handy hint is to write in the way you would talk. In addition:

Include a clear call to action

This might be as simple as 'share this story' or could be aimed at changing behaviours (e.g. 'slow down') or encouraging people to get involved in a project.

Include images

Photos and videos help bring messages to life and are crucial to effective communication. Using graphs and visualisations (e.g. infographics) can also help to make data easier to understand.

Make content easy to share, edit and adapt

People should be able to easily share your stories and news with their friends and networks. For example, developing downloadable content that people can share via social media or print out and stick on fridges or noticeboards, and providing materials that can be edited such as newsletter content and social media posts.

Tell a story

Research suggests logical, fact-based campaigns don't always work. You need to engage both the heart and the mind in your communication and the best way to do this is to tell stories. Incorporating real people and their stories into your content can also communicate urgency. Telling these stories can bring your issue to life and influence them to take action. If they see others like them acting, it can help motivate them to think 'I can do this too'.

Go where your target audiences are

Creating a piece of beautiful and engaging content such as a short video isn't enough; you need people to see it. It's important to think carefully about how your content will reach your target audience.

Find your champions and encourage them to communicate

After you've identified who in your community influences your target audience, work with them to engage with people and promote your message. The best way to change minds is still through personal engagement.

Share content via the channels your audience already use

This might include sharing content with other community organisations (for them to use) or using social media. Social media is becoming an increasingly important communication tool; however, it is only effective when used strategically (see table below for a summary of which channel may be best for sharing your content). When using social media you may also need to consider allocating a small budget to promote your posts (to increase the reach of posts) to audiences who do not already follow your organisation.

Consider tracking your social media metrics

You can use software to manage your social media accounts. For example, Tweetdeck is a Twitter tool that helps with tracking, organisation and engagement.

Other social media tips

Media relations can be an effective tool for driving website traffic and raising community awareness, but an engaging spokesperson and a newsworthy and timely angle are required. It is also important to foster good relationships with your local media as this will help you understand what they need to create a story, and how you can best work with them in the future. When engaging with the media, it is important to provide them with all the content they may need to run a high-quality story. For example, even newspapers now rely on video content for their websites and social media channels, so providing short video and high-quality images that can accompany a story, along with an interview opportunity, can help you to secure coverage.

Engaging directly with your audience can be the most effective way to communicate but it can also be the most time-consuming. Providing stakeholders with notice of upcoming activity so they can also get involved can be a good way to help spread your message. In addition, if other supportive organisations are engaged ahead of time, they can help to reinforce your key messages. Other methods of engaging directly with your audience include by hosting community meetings or attending festivals or events.

Social media tips		
Channel	What content	Tips
Facebook	Best used for previewing and promoting videos or other long-form content and/or encouraging your audience to visit another site (i.e. your website).	Good for reaching mass audiences of all ages online. Facebook preferences content that has a push behind it so you will need to allocate budget to get your content noticed.
Twitter	Best used for linking to articles (such as blogs on your website) or commenting on news and engaging with journalists, academics and other organisations.	Twitter only allows you to use 280 characters – so be succinct. Linking to external articles or sites and commenting on news of the day is also a great way to drive engagement.
Instagram	Best used to reach young audiences via short videos (up to 30 seconds) and beautiful imagery.	It is important that photos posted are genuine and not taken from other sources or organisations. The use of hashtags is also recommended (do your research on what hashtags people are already using, such as #koalas and #visitsw) to help get your content to a wider audience. You can also share your Instagram posts via Facebook for additional reach.
YouTube	A storing house for video content that can then be published on your other social channels.	Publish high-quality, long-form video content on YouTube and then promote it on your other social media channels.

Measuring success

Ideally, the success of communication activity should be assessed in relation to the outcomes it aims to contribute to (more tips on how to measure success can be found in *Developing effective community engagement programs* guide found on koala.nsw.gov.au). Some common measures used to assess the effectiveness of communication include:

- audience reach (how many people saw your content)
- engagement on social media channels (e.g. how many people liked, shared or commented on a social media post – this can be a useful measurement metric to understand whether you are creating content your audience finds interesting)
- pick up of key messages (by media and stakeholders)
- relationships developed with community stakeholders and influencers
- positive feedback from stakeholders and the community
- an increase or spike in website traffic, or more information downloaded from your website
- an increase in enquiries and calls to your organisation or in funds donated.

Useful links:

- [Branding Biodiversity – The new nature message](#) (Futerra Sustainability Communications)
- [How to engage stakeholders and mainstream biodiversity](#) (UN Convention on Biological Diversity)