SCICOMM

Communication strategies to increase your impact

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WHY ARE WE EVEN TALKING ABOUT SCICOMM?

> Sharing science has IMPACT
  - informs decisions and helps us make sense of our world
> Scientists’ voices play a unique and critical role
> More and more scientists want to share their work
KEYS TO SUCCESS:

1) KNOWING YOUR AUDIENCE
2) CREATING MESSAGES THAT STICK
WHAT DO WE MEAN BY “AUDIENCE”?

A group of people that are alike with regard to a specific set of concerns and interests (they may be very different in every other aspect)
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Other scientists
Journalists
Policy makers
Donors
Family
Students
Public
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WHAT IS YOUR GOAL?
AUDIENCE: SCIENTISTS

> What is important to scientists?
> What are their values, interests, concerns?
> What pressures do they face?
> What do they need from you?
AUDIENCE: NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGERS

> What is important to natural resource managers?
> What are their values, interests, concerns?
> What pressures do they face?
> What do they need from you?
WE ALL HAVE SOME LEARNING TO DO
THINK ABOUT YOUR MESSAGE...

What is a message anyway?
- A communication process that shares information through words, images and other language

Intended to lead audience to action
HUMANS: DON’T LOVE BEING TALKED AT

CAN I TELL YOU ABOUT SCIENCE?

OK!
HUMANS: SOMETIMES IRRATIONAL
HUMANS: DISTRACTED
HUMANS: NEED TO RELATE

Charles Saxon in *The New Yorker*, 3/21/83

"I don't know why I don't care about the bottom of the ocean, but I don't."
How much political capital will I have to spend on this? Do voters care?

What will it cost? Who supports this?

How does this fit into our agenda?

Is it true? Is it robust?

How does it affect my work?

Is it news? Will it sell?

Why does this matter to ME?
ADJUST YOUR STORYTELLING

Scientists

- data, background, details
- methods
- results

Non-scientists

- results
- why does this matter?
- data, background, details
GOOD MESSAGES...

...build connections

> Invite your audience into conversation
  – Get rid of jargon
  – It’s not “dumbing down”

> Share about yourself to connect to their:
  – Values
  – Interests
  – Concerns

> Help people see themselves in your story
GOOD MESSAGES...

…find compelling “hooks”

> Is this unexpected or novel in some way?
> Is it timely? Why are you telling this story now?
> Was/is there tension or drama?
> Does it have a hero? A victim? A villain?
> Can it follow a narrative structure?
GOOD MESSAGES...

...lead to an action

> Attract new/increased funding?
> Assist in policymaking?
> Change behavior?
> Increase society’s value of science?
ALL SORTS OF WAYS TO ENGAGE

› K-12 outreach
› Mentoring students
› Sharing your data
› Building new partnerships with business
› Inspiring interested audiences
› Informing natural resource policy
› Connecting with NGOs
› Developing a web and social media presence
› Talking to journalists
› Writing books/blogs/articles for broad consumption
BEFORE YOU JUMP...
QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

> What is my goal?
> What role do I want to play? What’s my comfort level?
> What are my institution’s goals? Where do I distinguish myself from my institution?
CRAFTING YOUR OWN COMMS PLAN: ATTENTION ABOVE ALL

> Underlying philosophy of plan: attention of your audience can’t be taken for granted
> No guarantee that audience that starts paying attention will continue doing so
CRAFTING YOUR OWN COMMS PLAN: ATTENTION ABOVE ALL

An attention mini-exercise…
CRAFTING YOUR OWN COMMS PLAN: ATTENTION ABOVE ALL

> holding attention of audience depends on accurate definition and understanding of that group

> social media great way to define and understand audience
CRAFTING YOUR OWN COMMS PLAN: VALUE OF SOCIAL MEDIA
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Kim Kardashian West
@KimKardashian
@KKWBEAUTY @KKWFRAGRANCE

Joined March 2009
CRAFTING YOUR OWN COMMS PLAN:
VALUE OF SOCIAL MEDIA
CRAFTING YOUR OWN COMMS PLAN: A SOCIAL MEDIA FOCUS GROUP

> Goal: to keep continual tabs on your audience, create a list of 10-15 representative social media accounts
> Use the social media platform where your audience can be found
CRAFTING YOUR OWN COMMS PLAN: FINDING REPRESENTATIVE ACCOUNTS

On Twitter (for example):
> Is there a prominent person or organization associated with your audience?
> Who does that person/org follow and reference?
> With that person/org what hashtags come up?
> Can you guess hashtags used by audience?
> Stay away from primarily promotional accounts
CRAFTING YOUR OWN COMMS PLAN: FINDING REPRESENTATIVE ACCOUNTS

No result is positive answer

> The definition of your audience you have defined may need to be redefined
  ○ Common not-great audience definition: “people who read the New York Times”
> Your audience may be congregating someplace else
CRAFTING YOUR OWN COMMS PLAN: A SOCIAL MEDIA FOCUS GROUP

> Creating your focus group is slow work
> Once you have group, keep a continual eye on the interests and concerns being brought up
> Frame your science messaging within these interests and concerns
QUESTIONS?