HOW TO COMMUNICATE

Strategic communication on migration and integration

King Baudouin
Foundation

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Table of contents

Preface 3

Chapter I: Trust the media! by Jean-Paul Marthoz. 5

Strategic communication 7

Your publics 8

Framing your messages 9

Frank Sharry's Message Box 9

Some guiding principles 10

Tips 11

Your press service 12

Working with the media 13

Your tools 15

Chapter II: Experiences and examples of communications work 19

You don't need to be a communications expert to communicate more effectively by Groep C 20

The logic of communications by Didier De Jaeger 24

"Post 9-11 Message Box" Strategic Communications training by Frank Sharry. 25

Bibliography 28

Summary 29

Preface

Migration and immigrant integration are issues that frequently make it to the news headlines. Because of the complex and politically sensitive nature of migration and integration however, these issues are often misunderstood and misrepresented in the media. Incorrect, misleading, or over-emotional news reporting is not uncommon in this field.

It is a challenge for NGOs working on migration and integration issues to communicate on the work they do and on the issues at stake in a way that is understandable and convincing. Especially in times where migration is increasingly linked to security issues, there is a need for NGOs to develop sound communication strategies that are able to re-frame the migration debate. Engaging with the media to make sure the right messages are communicated is a substantial part of such a communication strategy.

The King Baudouin Foundation, in partnership with the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, organised a series of training sessions for NGOs on ‘strategic communications’ in the course of 2005. The trainers were Jean-Paul Marthoz from Enjeux Internationaux and Frank Sharry from the National Immigration Forum based in Washington D.C.

This publication was developed to share the knowledge gained through these trainings more broadly. The first chapter provides a brief tour of some key-aspects of a communication strategy, providing hands-on information for framing messages, working with the media, etcetera.
KBF also organised national training sessions for Dutch and French NGOs in collaboration with Groep C and Kadratura. The second chapter presents contributions of these communication experts who were involved in the training sessions for NGOs at European and national level.

This manual is developed for practitioners who could use it to move forward in the challenging world of communications and media. It aims to offer guidelines to improve their ability to think and communicate strategically on migration and integration issues. This is indispensable to have a better impact on policies, and to contribute to a broader societal support for migration and immigrant integration in our societies.

This publication is available on the following website: www.kbs-frb.be

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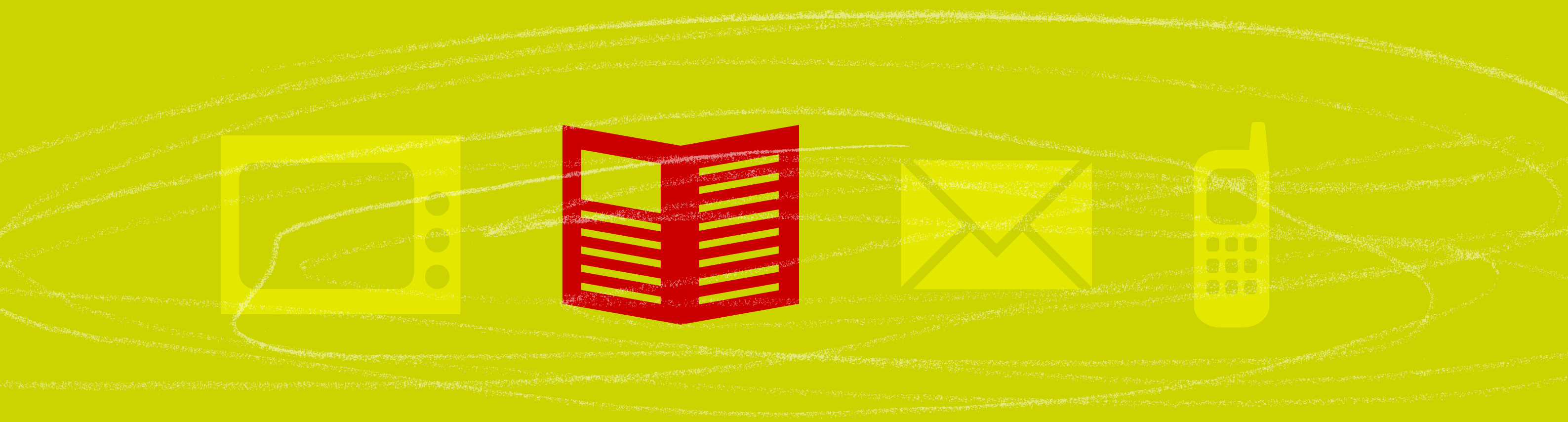


Chapter I

TRUST THE MEDIA!

by Jean-Paul Marthoz

Trust the media!

“It’s the media’s fault!” NGO activists are often tempted to blame the media -their “sensationalism, prejudices and fear-mongering”- for the allegedly growing hostility towards migrants and refugees.
This assumption is the wrong way to start thinking about how to roll back the tide of exclusion and stigmatization. First because the media are very diverse and provide heaps of examples of stories and programmes that are open minded, sensitive and serious; second, because history tells us that social movements can develop and even win against a predominantly hostile media environment.

This can only be achieved by inverting the conventional approach to the media: instead of seeing the press as either enemies or instruments of their cause, NGOs should become the best allies of good journalism by providing accuracy and the principle of reality where half-truths, outright lies and rumours are rife. NGOs should turn themselves into a source of information and commentary that is better, more articulate, newsworthy and reliable than their adversaries.

The corollary is that NGOs should never hush up and cover up difficult issues or embarrassing facts, not only because the “truth” should never be conceded to the bigots and the extremists but also because, as Pulitzer Prize laureate David Shipler once said, “no problem gets cured unless it is first turned out into the sunlight”.

Good communications does not start and end with a snappy press release, a glitzy video or a crowded press conference. It is a long term investment in the “battle of ideas”, an effort to help shift the debates from the trivial and the topical up to the level of reasoned discussions.

Indeed it pertains to the NGOs to be part of the efforts to improve the quality of the public discourse. That means in particular a decision not to pollute the information flows with approximative data, fuzzy figures or polemical statements. That means a commitment not to instrumentalize journalists. They press has an autonomous role to in a democratic society. Journalists should not be expected to be “on our side” but on the side of the most fundamental principles of their profession: independence, impartiality in reporting, which means balancing your story and your point of view against many others, are two of them.

There can be a convergence between NGOs working for the respect of migrants’ dignity and those journalists who are committed to practising their mission in the public interest. Journalism ethics has always required a sense of humanity and from Albert Londres to Barbara Ehrenreich the best and most famous pages in the history of reporting have nearly always been written by journalists fighting for freedom and justice.

Strategic communication

Communications is not about “spin”, PR or hip videos. It is about strategy
It is first and foremost a firm decision to make communications a core element of your organization

Communications should be central and not peripheral to your organization. Do not think of press work as an afterthought when all the decisions have already been taken and then have to be “sold” to the public.

Appoint a respected communications director who will sit at all strategic meetings, with the same level of prerogatives as the other directors.

Test all your decisions in the light of the media. It does not mean that you have to betray your principles or massage and distort your messages, just make sure that you know how your positions will play in the “outside world”.

Study the media
Apply to the study of the media as much attention as to your core issues. Know not only “who is who” in the press, but also the “media system”’: how your issue is usually covered, who the opinion leaders and most quoted sources are, etc.

Everyone in your organization is a communicator
Create a culture of media savvyness in the whole of your organization. Your most professional spokesperson can be undermined if an employee, a volunteer or even an activist is not “on message”.

Everyone -telephone operators, researchers, advocates- should receive proper and adequate training in order to turn your organization into a coherent and effective communications system.

Devise a long-term strategic communications plan
Determine a logical, thoroughly defined, step-by-step, policy including the definition of clear objectives and intermediate benchmarks, a time frame, the allocation of staff time and financial resources.
There is no quick fix, you are there for the long haul.

And never forget that the debate is volatile. A backlash could happen at any minute.

Your Publics

The immigration debate is highly contentious, the public appears sceptical and hostile. The temptation therefore is to retreat inside the walls of your fortress, preach to the converted and shout at the "other side".

Survey public opinion
In fact, only a minority of the publics have a determined, firm, position on these questions. Assume 10% of the public is intensely hostile, 10% is strongly pro-immigration and 80% sits in the middle, with half of the 80% leaning pro and the other half leaning anti.

Don't assume too much though: do not hesitate to consult or commission opinion surveys in order to more accurately identify the various publics, their concerns and perceptions, the way they get their information and form their opinions on your issues.

Research in particular how your issues -and you own organization- are perceived in the public. Don't forget: "a false idea is a true fact" and perceptions often matter more than realities.

Identify the decision-makers
Make sure you know who has the power to decide on your issue. Analyze the decision-making process, who has a say, who is for, against or undecided. Sometimes a decision depends on a very small number of officials, parliamentarians or even more frequently their expert staff and does not respond that much to the broader public opinion. Know how they form their opinion, who informs them.

Research the competitive environment
Know your opponents. Study how they frame their arguments, how the media relay their points of view.
Know your allies and their policies. Beware of your friends: they can either reinforce your voice or on the contrary confuse and marginalize it if they ruthlessly compete against you for media attention.

The identification of the various publics is essential in order to:

- Choose the argumentation that will be needed to move them to your side while keeping your faithful inside;

- Select the relevant media
  Although a common core message has to be defined for the mainstream media and the broader public the growing fragmentation of audiences and the proliferation of media outlets (women's magazines, TV debates, websites, etc.) require specific discourses, formats, or story angles. If TV and radio are the most obvious gateways to the public at large, key decision-makers can be reached through face-to-face discussions, email, specialized newsletters.

- Appoint the best "communicator"
  Most often your director or spokesperson. However you sometimes can resort to "unusual personalities"
  - that have either a broad-based appeal and acceptance and can help you disseminate your message to a wider public, like popular sports champions, TV entertainers, rock groups, etc.
  - or are particularly well-respected in a specific segment of the audience.

Framing your messages

The key is to develop the best themes and arguments that work for the targeted audience.

Proceed strategically, i.e. logically

- Identify your mission:
  What is the problem that you want to address?
  What are the solutions that you propose?
- Choose your targets:
  Who do you want to influence?
  What are their concerns?
  Who has an influence on them?
  How can you reach them?
- Define your objective:
  What do you expect precisely from these targets?
  What kind of action can they take to help solve the problem?
- Identify the objections and the obstacles:
  What prevents them to do that now?
- Frame your message:
  Which ideas will move the target to do what you wish?
  Why are your solutions in the best interest of the target?
  Why do they reflect common values?
- Select the relevant media and shape the message accordingly:

Frank Sharry's Message Box

To develop your message you can use a message box, i.e. a four-part graph that provides a structure for preparing and honing the best arguments related to a specific advocacy objective (**see a U.S. example as developed by Frank Sharry, Executive Director of the National Immigration Forum, page 25).**
In order to guide the exercise of coming up with the best four key themes, four sub-questions head each quadrant of the message box.
The key is to come up with no more than four key themes that constitute the most powerful and persuasive arguments available to advocates.

1. What is the problem as we define it?
2. What are the solutions that we propose?
3. Why are these solutions in the best interests of all?
4. What values and issues of identity are at stake?

Some guiding principles

Facts and values
Facts are paramount in journalism. For NGOs however values come first: facts are tactical weapons in the “distribution of meanings”. Try to elaborate frames that have a cultural resonance offering easily recognizable social and cultural characters (villains, honourable victims, heroes, etc.)

Be aware of the public’s prejudices
It is difficult and often counterproductive to address the recalcitrant or indifferent public head on.
A better tactic is to soften up the audience by communicating positively, i.e. showing how migrants are not profiteers and how they work hard and contribute to the wealth and common good, how they are part of the community to which they bring their diversity.

Find the common ground
Do not start from a position that is unpalatable to most of the audience. You can keep your principles and yet find a common ground. Identify different groups and take them on board. Never think “they’re not us”.
Beware! If targeting and “narrowcasting” are often necessary they should not contradict your general core message aimed at the “broader middle”.

Neutralize those leaning to the other side
You will not convert everyone and turn them into active sympathisers of your cause, but you can stop them from crossing over to the other side by better arguing your case and making it “costly” for them to join your staunchest adversaries.

Isolate the most hostile and die-hard adversaries either by ignoring them or by undermining their credibility, exposing their exaggerations, debunking the biases in their allegations, exploding their pretension at being the best protectors of the “national” population and the “decent people”. Do that with facts and figures and not with slogans and insults.

Be solutions-oriented
Change from criticizing government policy or your adversaries to suggesting feasible solutions that are in the public interest.

Try to coordinate with other NGOs
The “anti” tend to have a central message: foreigners go home! The “pro” tend to have too many different messages depending on their mandate, their political affiliations or other reasons.
Pluralism is an asset if it allows responding to the expectations of specific constituencies. However it can quickly turn into cacophony and “jam” everyone’s messages to the detriment of all.
Try to harness everyone’s energy by agreeing as often as possible on a unified straightforward message that can be repeated again and again in order to drown the anti’s easy slogans.
Try to find one set of messages all NGOs can use. If not, try to determine how NGOs can reinforce each others’ messages.
Communications skills are all the more important when you take part in coordination efforts. Political compromises can produce hard-to-sell lowest common denominator messages that will convince no one.

Tips

Be confident
Don’t buy the canard that it is easier for the extreme right to sell its negative, simplistic, xenophobic, message. You just have to be better than them.

Be decent
Never compete with your adversaries in vulgar simplifications. You are on different planets. Instead work harder to express a message that is easy to understand and based at the same time on the principles of truth and reality.

Be clear
You should build your message around one central element, for instance your proposed action with 2 or 3 accompanying sub-ideas, the “why” and the “how”. This message should help you draft the one paragraph quote that will be inserted in the papers or the 10-second sound bite you’ll be allotted on radio or TV.
Do not assume people understand an issue. Avoid jargon and acronyms. Provide information that non-specialists need to understand your message.

It does not mean sloganeering though
A central clear message does not mean that it should be simplistic. It is the “in a nutshell” reflection of your position. It should not degrade your discourse and turn into sloganeering and “you just have to” solutions.

Be relevant to your audience
Tailor the messages -their length, tone and contents- to your audiences.
For the broader public select a few key arguments, think that you are talking to your neighbour or your aunt. It will be the best test of the relevance and strength of your policy.
For the experts and decision-makers provide precise proposals, well-thought rebuttals and concrete alternatives.

Be consistent
Say what you mean and mean what you say. Be aware that the media is an open field. Do not think your message to a particular audience will not be heard by other audiences. In the age of the internet transparency is the rule. Be coherent. Do not act as if you are opportunistically changing messages according to audiences.

What is said is very important; who says it can be even more important.
Celebrities can be great ambassadors for your cause since they reach the broader public.
However do not overdo it: it might be seen as a “stunt” and an admission that you have run out of rational arguments.
Be careful of guilt by association: a “celebrity” might overstep his/her script or get sucked into contentious issues unrelated to your cause that might, in a ripple effect, adversely hit your organization.

Multiply your core message
Take your central message and develop it into multiple communications tools

- to choose a motto for your organisation or a slogan for a campaign;
- to draft questions and answers and “talking points” to be used by your staff and by your allies in government or other institutions.

Your press service

Press department

Every NGO should and can create a press department, even embryonic. It is the visible sign that communications is being dealt with seriously and considered as a strategic feature of the organization.

The press director should be a strategist, an organizer and an adviser.
- Being part of the executive team he/she will be in charge of testing all decisions in the light of their media impact and of drafting the strategic media plan.
- He/she will be responsible for the implementation of the media plan
- He/she will constantly appraise the media environment and feed back to the executive committee.

The job is also to create within the organization a “news culture“and a system that is always alert for meaningful information to be disseminated to the media.

Spokesperson

The spokesperson should be the “political face” of the organization. It is necessary in the current personality-focused media environment to reinforce the stature of your spokespersons, so that he/she is recognized by the public.
Be careful however not to go over board. The ubiquity of a spokesperson can act as a boomerang and trigger people off.

Use your experts

Do not hesitate to field other voices. Experts can be excellent spokespersons. They provide an image of knowledge that reinforces the organization’s status. However they should be trained to address the media effectively.

Training

Most members of your association should be trained for communications work, not only TV and radio interviews but also for background briefings, public conferences, internet chats, etc.

Test yourself, practise mock interviews, and rehearse before you jump into the media lions’ den.

Contract a specialized media team to train your staff for TV and radio interviews.

Evaluate your press work

Assess regularly the media impact of your work. Monitor how your message is being treated by the media, how effective your radio and TV interviews are. Analyze why you fail to be present in particular media.
Adapt your strategic communications plan accordingly.

Working with the media

Know the media

There is no such thing as “the media”. From the tabloid rag to the foreign affairs journal, from the specialized newsletter to the big regional newspaper, diversity is the rule.

Beware of professional media bashers. Do not start by being suspicious of the press.

Understand the ethics of journalism, their proclaimed commitment to impartiality, the reason of their professional scepticism and their role as a watchdog of all news making institutions, yours included. Do not expect them to be biased in your favour.

Know the news

Understand clearly “what’s news?” Look for importance, interest, proximity, impact, celebrity, oddity. Remember the rule: “When a man bites a dog” is news, “when a dog bites a man” is usually not. Put yourself in the mind of the journalist. Learn how to generate news but don’t assume that everything you say is newsworthy.

Know who “validates” the news, i.e. the key media actors, academic or think tank pundits that have the power to endorse or derail your proposals.

Be aware of news cycles, know when your voice is needed and when you are irrelevant. Learn how to “piggyback” on unfolding stories without giving the impression that you are opportunistic.

Be a news junkie, read, watch, listen the news in order to know when your message will be “hearable”. Sometimes the whole newshole is absorbed by just one big event and no one will give the scantest attention to even your best crafted press release if it is not relevant to the breaking news story.

Draw a calendar of future events. The media like to anticipate and write advance papers. These foreseeable events might give you a good “tie-in” or hook to publicize your own policies.

Know the journalists

Read and watch and listen the media in order to know who treats your issue. Beware: journalists move from function and media and they will not particularly trust an organisation that cannot get its basic mailing list and name spelling right.

Identify the key journalists that act as opinion leaders, even for their colleagues, on the issue. Know their views.

Learn how they really work, make sure you know their schedules, their constraints, the constant lack of space, their news hierarchies and especially their deadlines. Too often NGOs’ messages arrive too late when the contents of the news hole have already been determined and journalists are hectically wrapping up their stories.

Develop a real mailing list

Build up a very detailed and accurate mailing list. Too often these lists are full of spelling mistakes, they misstate the exact function of the journalist and suffer an awfully high level of attrition. Constantly update your lists.

Centralize the mailing list: make sure no one else in your organization is sending the same messages to the same list of journalists.

Avoid information glut

Appreciate the value of scarcity.

Do not send too many press releases, do not pester journalists unnecessarily. Respect them. Journalists are overwhelmed. Their email message box is deluged with press releases, streams of news agency wires, invitations, spam, etc. You could provoke indigestion in the media and condemn your messages to be automatically and aggressively deleted.

Become a trusted source and reference

Most journalists tend to rely first and foremost on official sources (government, judiciary, police). In order to increase your chance of going up on the news ladder turn your organisation into a trusted source of information and expertise.

Be honest and accurate down to the dots and comas. Journalists do not expect impartiality from you, but honesty, consistency and transparency.

Do not manipulate nor misinform journalists. A politician can err and will be excused. An NGO cannot afford to be wrong.

Do not base your relationships on friendship but on professional quality. Focus on the most professional and respected journalists.

Don’t try to tell journalists what to think.

Be focused. Do not take on issues that are remotely connected to your primary issue as if you were obsessively trying to be “in the media” at any cost.

Be dedicated. Be known as an organization that seriously follows up an issue, even when it is out of the news cycle, and can be trusted to provide informed updates.

Do not wait for a crisis to call the media. Talk to them informally when you have nothing to “sell”. Give them tips for stories. Help them navigate in the confusing and crowded migration field.

Be reliable

Service is the key. Return all journalists’ phone calls within the news cycle. If you don’t react when THEY need you they might be less receptive when YOU need them You should as a rule have the authority to respond immediately to media queries without having to refer to your slow-moving board or hyper-cautious policy committee.

Be modest

Do not take the quotation of your own organization as the best measurement of success. The hijacking of your argumentation in an editorial, without reference to your organization, is another yardstick of achievement. If you don’t have the answer, do not hesitate to guide journalists towards experts residing in other “friendly” organizations.

Be global

Thanks to internet or satellite TV, you live in a global world. You can be affected locally by events in faraway places. You can affect debates abroad. Think globally.

Your tools

Press release

The alpha and omega of press work.
Conceive it as a wire “inverted pyramid” story providing in the first paragraph all the necessary information (who, what, where, when, how). Be short -ideally one web sized page-, make sure you provide real added value to the news, work hard on the headline.

Provide contact names, phone numbers and a website where journalists can find additional information, background briefings, and useful links. Mention embargo date if necessary.

Do not focus only on the print media. If possible provide photos, audio and video material. Put it on your websites where they can be downloaded.

Be aware that hundreds of press releases fly over the email every day. Make sure that journalists will not miss it. Check addresses, send messages at the right time when journalists browse their email and not when they are on deadline.

You can “pitch” the story, i.e. calling the most important journalists but don’t take the risk of being seen as a brainwasher, a pest or a brat.

The surest way to “get in the media” is to create over time a reputation for relevance. Journalists will stop on your message and will take your call if they know you are a professional organization that only “bothers” them when it has something meaningful to say.

Opeds

Many print media have forum pages where outsiders are invited to present their views. However competition is very strong to get on these pages. Preferably call the editor in order to test his/her interest in your opinion piece. Make sure you adapt your choice of angle and tone of language to the publication.

Letters to the editor

Often one of the best read sections. Use it not only to correct any error related to your organization but also as a forum by joining debates and reacting to articles. You can also use it to bring topical issues to the readers’ attention, irrespective of whether the paper has recently reported on them or not.

Your letter should be concise, courteous and snappy. It should be signed by the highest-standing person in the organization.

Press conferences
Do not be tempted too often! Organize a press conference only when you have something very strong to say.
Keep it short and focused, with, at a maximum, 2 or 3 speakers with clear guidelines, short statements and no overlap.

Prepare written material, press kits with speakers' bios, reports and any other relevant documents.

Provide for photo and TV opportunities. Arrange one-on-one interviews.

Choose the date, hour and location with great care. For instance, ban Friday afternoons, do not invite the press to your office if it has no proper and well-fitted meeting room or is not easily reachable by public transportation.

Phone some journalists to remind them of the press conference. However don't waste reporters' time. Many are quickly "pissed off" by media pitch calls.

Tape the press conference so that it can be reviewed later and take pictures for your own information or promotional publications.

Media briefings
They are low-key meeting with selected journalists where your experts present background information to reporters and allow enough time for probing questions. The purpose is to "educate" journalists on your issue and policies and give them a deeper understanding. Very effective in the wake of a big event, a conference, or a parliamentary session. Creates more trust than a press conference.
Beware that journalists clearly understand and accept the rules of "off the record", "deep background", "no attribution".

Interviews
The "win all or lose all" test.
Know exactly the context of the interview (who is the interviewer, for what programme, how long, live or taped, etc.)
Prepare carefully: define your core message. Select statistics or concrete examples to support your core message. Draft sound bites. Prepare answers to uncomfortable questions.
Train: submit yourself to "mock interviews".
During the interview: keep on track. Make sure you are not distracted from your core message. Learn how to "bridge", i.e. using an unrelated question as a bridge back to your core message.
In short, stick to the 4 C's: Conversational, Concise, Clear, Convincing.

Talk shows
Some TV and radio debates are great places to present your views. Be careful however and think twice before accepting to take part in "no gloves-on" talk shows where you'll be the punching ball of all or forced to adopt the viciousness of your adversaries.

Prepare very carefully. Know who is going to take part, make sure YOU decide what you want -and not what the moderator expects you- to say.

Always remember that you are in the listeners/viewers' living room. Do not be rude or familiar.

Reports

The credibility of an NGO depends either on its capacity to provide a mass constituency or on the groundbreaking quality of its expertise and information.

Be on the cutting edge of issues! The media have less and less time to investigate and dig deeper into stories. That gives NGOs the opportunity to become “information wholesalers”, i.e. providing well researched reports and surveys that can be used by the media as such or as a basis for further reporting. Apply rigorous standards of accuracy and honesty to your own reports.

Stunts

Some NGOs are good at staging “media events” that provide good visuals, drama and action. Think twice before taking that road: it can marvellously reinforce your organization’s image; it can as well backlash, irritate the mainstream public and undermine your reputation as a serious interlocutor in the corridors of power.

Publications

A newsletter, a magazine, can be a good way to exist in the media field and make your own voice heard without passing through the whims of gatekeepers and editors.

However you should factor in the cost in terms of resources, time and staff. Do not produce an unprofessional, unfocused, sheet that might blur your image with outsiders.

Website

Do not take your website as an afterthought. In the current media world it is the first window on your organisation.

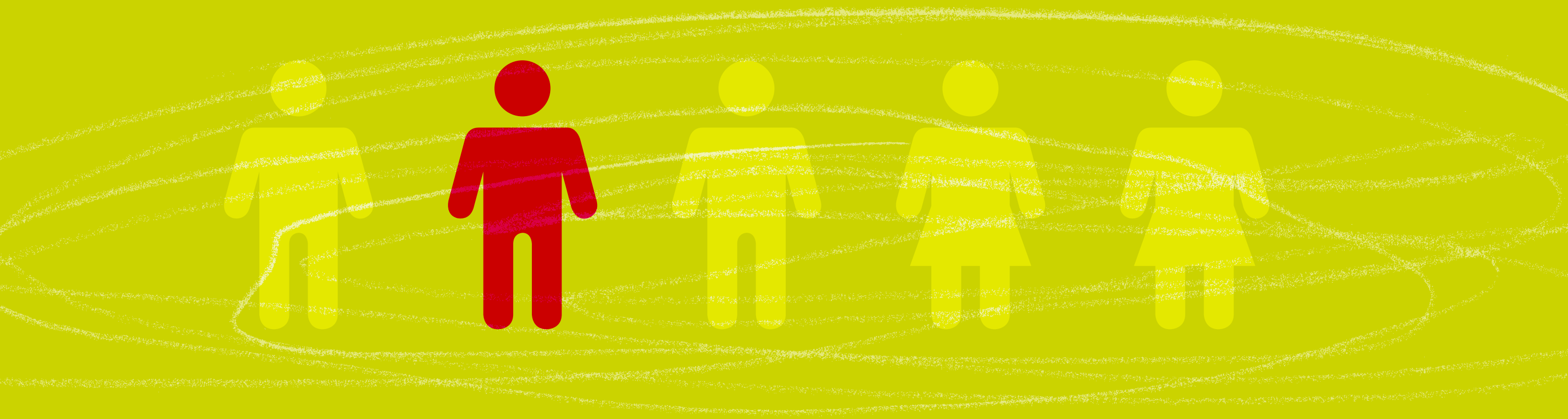
Do not overspend on hip design or invasive visuals that might slow the access to your site. Invest in conceiving it as a user-friendly and logically organized site that visitors can readily access and where they can quickly find answers to their queries

A website is not meant for members only but for the public at large. It is a media by itself as well as a reference for mainstream media. Journalists are increasingly using cyberspace as a primary means of news gathering and story backgrounding.

Plan it in order to draw journalists repeatedly to your site. Try to turn it into a “node” on your issues, a site where people go not only to know your policies but also use it as a hub towards research institutes, other NGOs, and official institutions.

Blogging and SMSing

Learn to navigate in the “new news” environment of “many-to-many” media and “citizen journalism”: blogs, moblogs, SMS, have demonstrated their growing capacity to inform and mobilize large-scale collective action. They are also the best way to get around mainstream media when these are indifferent, distracted or hostile. Building your own autonomous capacity to reach the public directly should be a priority. It will help you create the critical mass that will make you visible and interesting to the mainstream media.



Chapter II

EXPERIENCES AND EXAMPLES OF COMMUNICATIONS WORK

The following texts, graphs and presentations are drawn from the experiences developed by trainers and communications experts that worked with the King Baudouin Foundation. They are meant to provide concrete perspectives and approaches to the challenge of communicating on issues of migration and integration.

You don’t need to be a communications expert to communicate more effectively

Key points, Groep C by Peter Claes and Roel Dekelver

Migration is undoubtedly one of the most difficult topics about which to communicate. It is a technical subject which is also a highly emotional experience for virtually all potential target groups.
This means that good training and education for people who need to communicate in this sector are crucial. But you don’t have to take all the courses or be a communications expert to quickly be able to communicate more effectively. What’s more, before you become caught up in all sorts of technical subject areas you should have a clear understanding of five very simple principles. Avoid the five most common pitfalls and you will be able to increase your communication power tenfold.

This document gives a brief overview of these five principles (one section contains two principles).

1. Who is my message aimed at?

Scenario
You want to convince a government minister to amend his policy.
So you summarise the key arguments that might convince him in an interview you gave in a local newspaper.
The most important thing is to get your key arguments across as clearly as possible.
Persuasive arguments and press coverage cannot fail to make him change his mind.

Is the above scenario familiar? Is there a flaw in this plan and if so, what is it?
There is more than one flaw in this scenario. It may sound humiliating, but the whole concept is wrong. Like many other decision-makers, politicians are most influenced by arguments that concern - or might concern - their supporters.
Communication is more than a single discussion in the media; it is most effective when you do not try to convince your target individual directly but rather endeavour to win over those who influence your ‘target’.

Action item 1: Always target a broad public

During our workshops, many people cited a specific group of decision-makers - often a minister - as the key target for their (press) communications. But in almost all cases it is far better not to aim directly at this target group since most decision-makers generally look to the opinion of their supporters.
It takes considerable experience to be able to implement the Action item above effectively and is a practical exercise for experienced practitioners. But this obstacle can easily be overcome. Work on the basis that your message is aimed at a broad public. This is a simple strategy and in almost all cases the correct one since:

- most decision-makers’ supporters do not differ substantially from the wider public in general;
- a message which is comprehensible and powerful enough for the wider public is almost always so for other, more specific target groups.

2. How can I reach the general public?

Getting your message across to the general public may seem simple but in reality this is not necessarily so. In 90% of cases, putting key internal information across to the general public falls foul of one of the two points below:

- many of the arguments and the specialist jargon you use everyday within your organisation mean absolutely nothing to those outside it (who are not dealing with migration on a daily basis);
- there are also many important nuances and arguments which are meaningful to experts and which you want to include in your message but it is often impossible to get all these nuances across.

Action item 2: Decide on a core message

> ***Scenario***
> *You have a number of thoughts on a new draft law which has been put forward. You have clear-cut comments and suggested improvements for each of the articles, so you draft a press release flawlessly setting out your arguments.*
> *Will this come across well in the press, do you think?*

Afraid not.

Journalists always use a headline containing one core message. The public, too, will generally remember just one key point or idea within a message. Ask a family member to recount a particular news item: they will generally get the key information across in just one sentence.

Simplify your own message by condensing it into a single thought or idea. Many media reports pertain to a single subject but contain many different messages.

Decide in your own mind what your core message is and choose only those arguments which best support this message. The rest of the information is relevant to insiders but has no bearing on getting a good message across to a broad public.

Communicators in the field of migration suffer more than most from ‘important nuance’ syndrome, which results in their messages being smothered by swathes of unnecessary and incomprehensible information.

Tip

If you cannot sum up your message in one short sentence, change your underlying message.

Try to think up a headline for your own message or action. Is it really short and punchy enough for a front page?

Action item 3: Put your message across to a broad public

> ***Test***
> *Take a look back at press releases you have sent out during the past year. No doubt they will be clear and comprehensible to you.*
> *Now think of an elderly aunt or uncle. Read your report again. Would your aunt or uncle also understand the message?*

The workshops we have organised have taught us that almost everyone substantially overestimates the level of understanding of the general public and journalists.

The messages are too technical, full of jargon and far too detailed and extensive to capture the interest of a broad target group.

Couch your message in terms the man in the street can understand. This way not only will you reach more people but your message itself will be more powerful and interesting for the press.

Tip
Translating a technical message into comprehensible and interesting information for a broad public is very difficult.
But in actual fact, this is what you do frequently without even realising it. If an old friend from university asks you what you are doing now, you might well give a detailed and fairly technical answer. On the other hand, if an elderly aunt asks you the same question, you would certainly give quite a different answer - one that is shorter, simpler and less technical.
Use the 'elderly aunt' test for your own messages.
Imagine one of your own aunts - someone similar to a person you might meet at a station, in the market or in hospital. We'll call her Auntie Annie. Would you write a press release differently if you knew she would be reading it? Would you answer Auntie Annie's question differently to the way in which you would answer that of a radio journalist?
Adapt your message to appeal to this imaginary Auntie Annie.
It may just be an exercise, but you will soon see that little trick has a positive impact.

How can I increase my credibility?

Based on the above, we now know that we must address our message to the general public and that the message must be made accessible to this broad target group. The exercise below is designed to establish that the message is getting across effectively and is making an impact on the target group.
There are numerous techniques for enhancing the impact of your message. But before thinking about anything else, first try to consider the preconceptions prevalent within this particular target group since these will severely distort your message.

> ***Scenario***
> *We've all done it: You're flicking between television channels when you come across a debate on a subject that interests you. But because you haven't been following it from the start you're not exactly sure what each speaker's viewpoint is. It is surprising how long it takes for you to realise that one of the speakers does not hold the view you initially assumed of them. For some time, you will continue to interpret his or her arguments from the initial point of view and will devise a logical explanation for the striking positions taken by that speaker.*

This effect is also present in your own communication. Always start with the premise that many people will assign you several positions, not least on account of the associations they make with the organisation you represent. Often these associations are inaccurate. But unless you dispel these myths from the outset, your entire argument will be coloured by these misconceptions - and your message will be lost.

> ***Example****: Someone who is convinced that you stand for a full open-border policy - while in reality, for example, this is not the case at all - will understand your comments on new draft legislation regulating access to a country quite differently to how you intend them: precisely because he or she presumes you have a different agenda.*

Tip
Ask yourself what Auntie Annie would think about your positions. Try to dispel the main myths by beginning your message with a sentence playing down the issue.

> ***Example****: In the scenario above, you might do this, for example, by beginning with a sentence like: "We firmly believe that immigration rules are necessary but…."*

How can I convince my target public?

The steps outlined above will help you to get your message across more effectively to a broad public. But will this target public be convinced?

There is one simple, underlying principle which will significantly affect the persuasive power of a message: arguments only convince those who agree with the basic premise. If you base your reasoning on a position with which a large number of people disagree, you will simply never convince them to come around to your way of thinking; this is one of the most common mistakes.

Based on messages put across by workshop participants themselves and on past communication material they have brought with them, it is clear to us that most organisations in the migration sector do not construct their communication around an argument but rather start out on the basis of their predetermined conclusion.

If you want to convince people of something, you first need to ensure that they are listening to you before your develop your argument. As such, always begin any argument from a position or standpoint with which your target group can agree - find some common ground. A simple exercise to establish whether your message contains any such material is the **common-ground test**.

1. Draft your fundamental message as you would like it to appear and ask yourself whether Auntie Annie would agree with it
2. If you don't think that 70-80% of the population would agree with the idea, go back one step in your argument. What principle did you use as your starting point for this idea?
3. Do you believe that 70-80% of the population would agree with the previous step in your argument? If not, go back one step further.

Repeat this process until your argument begins with a position with which you believe 70% of the population would agree at least in part.

The logic of communications

Keypoints by Didier De Jaeger, Director Kadratura in Belgium

Many people think that communication is about expressing one's own policy whereas it is essentially an effort to understand how people think and how they are going to react to what they are told.
Too often activists import the tricks and the toolbox of communications without first changing their own attitude towards communications, i.e. moving from the expression of a policy towards a dialogue with the audience.
In order to get impact in the media they often resort to spectacular or provocative ways. Although using methods of civil disobedience or street action can be useful at an early stage to get the name and the message of the organization out this is a wrong communications logic: the objective should be to enlarge the pool of sympathisers and not to irritate them by actions that only please the already converted.

The key is to develop a real communications strategy based on the following steps.

1. Defining the mission of the association: why it exists.
2. Clearly defining the objectives: presenting a policy, changing a perception, etc.
3. Choosing the targets: you cannot address everyone at the same time. You have to choose a specific group and understand how the targeted public functions mentally, what they fear or expect, what makes them 'tick". The knowledge of the other is essential. Most activists know how to deal with their adversaries but they are at great pains relating to the "middle". It is helpful to elaborate a typology of the different audiences specifying how people relate to an issue, from passion to indifference or hostility.
4. Drafting the message: on the basis of the objective(s) and the target(s) identifying the message(s) that can modify perceptions or attitudes in the appropriate direction. Many activists fear to lose their "soul" and compromise their cause in that process as if saying what is needed to be convincing would forbid them to say what they think. This is of course not the case; as in all dialogue, that means adapting the arguments to more effectively reach one's objectives and not changing the objectives.
5. "Packaging" the message: choosing the best means to convey the message (billboards, stunt, the media, etc.).
6. Choosing the procedures: organizing -assembling a team, defining responsibilities, establishing a time line and benchmarks, etc.- to effectively implement the communications plan.

Post 9-11 ‘Message Box’

by Frank Sharry, Executive Director of the National Immigration Forum.

Frank Sharry is the Executive Director of the National Immigration Forum. The Forum, based in Washington D.C., is one of the most important organizations working on immigration policies in the US, with a membership of over 250 organizations accross the nation. The Forum’s mission is to embrace and uphold America’s tradition as a nation of immigrants. As the Executive Director of the Forum, Mr. Sharry is a leading spokesperson for pro-immigrant policies in the US, with frequent appearances in the media, both in print and on television.

The ‘post 9-11 message box’ as presented hereafter has been developed on the basis of the message box structure described on page 9 of this publication. By focusing on the four key-questions of the message box (what is the problem, what is the solution, why is this solution in the interest of all, and what values are at stake?) it attempts to re-frame the immigration debate in a world that increasingly links immigrants with terrorists. Using this message box helps to come with a clear, focused and persuasive message while being interviewed.

Post 9-11 “Message Box”

Strategic Communications Training - Updated: July 2003

Terrorism is the problem, not immigration

- Immigrants come to contribute to and build America, not to destroy America
- Immigrants and refugees fled lawless societies to be law-abiding new Americans
- Immigrants share our values and have suffered loss of freedom and rights.
- Mayor Giuliani, President Bush and others have been leaders in the effort to unite not divide.

Tighten policies that work, keep doors open to those who contribute

- We need to isolate terrorism, not isolate America
- We must keep those out who mean to do us harm
- We should restore our commitment to protecting refugees
- There are effective measures to deter terrorism that can and should be taken

Answer / Transition / Back to Message

We are a nation of immigrants

- Immigrants for generations have come to America & sought the American Dream
- This great nation was built by great individuals looking for opportunity and freedom.
- Immigration is a defining feature of our past and will be a defining feature of our future.
- The dynamism and diversity immigrants bring to our neighborhoods and our nation enrich us all.
- Immigrants are part of the American fabric
- The US should remain a beacon of hope for the world’s refugees.

Immigrants are part of the solution

- Immigrants are part of the community & part of the solution since September 11th
- We need their talents as translators & interpreters. They help our nation understand different cultures.
- Immigrants are among the firefighters who rescued people on Sept. 11, they are the doctors and public health officials trying to protect us, and the military men and women defending us against terrorism.
- We stand united as a nation: refugees and immigrants are among the heroes, victims, and patriots of this tragedy

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Summary

This manual “How to Communicate. Strategic communication on migration and integration” presents some basic principles on developing strategic communications for NGOs working on migration issues.
It emphasizes the need to integrate communications as a core element and as part of the mission of any organisation working on these issues, and it provides hands-on information for learning to “think strategically” and working more effectively with the media.
The publication also includes contributions of several experts in strategic communications.

Le manuel “How to communicate. Strategic communication on migration and integration” présente les principes de base de toute communication stratégique sur des questions liées à la migration.
L’ouvrage se veut un outil à l’intention des ONG actives dans ce domaine. Il souligne la nécessité pour les ONG de considérer la communication comme un élément-clé de leur mission et de leurs actions. Le manuel présente des concepts fondamentaux quant à la manière de mener une réflexion stratégique sur la communication. Il propose des méthodes pour la mettre en place, ainsi que quelques bons conseils en vue d’une meilleure collaboration avec les médias.
La publication comprend également les contributions d’experts spécialisés en réflexion et communication stratégiques.

In deze publicatie “How to communicate. Strategic communication on migration and integration” worden enkele belangrijke principes aangereikt over strategische communicatie rond het thema migratie.
De handleiding benadrukt het belang van een communicatiebeleid voor organisaties die rond dit thema werken: communicatie zou een deel moeten zijn van hun werking én van hun missie. Er wordt nuttige informatie gegeven over hoe “strategisch te denken” over communicatie, en er worden methodes en tips besproken om beter met de media om te gaan.
De publicatie bevat ook bijdragen van verschillende experts in strategische communicatie.

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Central Africa - supporting projects in the field of AIDS prevention and offering guidance to AIDS patients

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An e-newsletter will keep you informed. If you have any questions, please contact us at info@kbs-frb.be or on 070-233 728.

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