

ACTIVIST TRAINING MANUAL: COMMUNICATIONS

The aims of this chapter

This chapter of the manual will provide you with a framework for developing a communications strategy; advice and tools for engaging with the media to gain coverage for your campaign; and the use of social media as a powerful tool to motivate your supporters.

This chapter is divided into three key sections:

Section 1: Strategy

- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Writing a communications strategy

Section 2: Engaging the media

- 2.1 Writing a compelling press release
- 2.2 Speaking to the press
- 2.3 Organising a press conference
- 2.4 Writing an opinion piece, feature or photo essay

Section 3: Digital campaigning and social media

- 3.1 Digital strategy and channels
- 3.2 Content and engagement
- 3.3 Social media videos
- 3.4 Social media advertising

SECTION 1: STRATEGY

1.1 Introduction

Communications are vital – if no-one knows about the issues that concern you; if they never hear of the problems or the solutions, it is unlikely you will be able to achieve your goals.

At the heart of any communications campaign there are three questions you must always ask yourself and your team when devising your communications:

1. Who do I want to reach?
2. What is my message / what do I want to say?
3. What reaction, response and outcome do I want to inspire?

Always keep these questions in mind.

You must also consider your budget: what funds do you have to build and support your communications. Always consider this at the very start, when you begin your thinking and planning.

Remember communications is at the heart of campaigning, whether you are looking to reach a select group of politicians or millions of members of the public. Communications is all about storytelling: use interesting narrative, human interest stories and arresting imagery.

The Golden rules

- ☛ Planning and preparation are essential to all communications.
- ☛ Never start producing communications materials until you know who you want to reach is and what you want your outcome to be.
- ☛ Always check and double-check your facts.
- ☛ Don't be afraid to repeat yourself, much of campaigning is telling people your message, telling them why it matters, and then telling them again.
- ☛ Test different style and tone for different audiences – what resonates with some might not with others.
- ☛ Once you have said something to a journalist you can never get it back – but if you don't say anything of interest you won't get any coverage for your campaign.
- ☛ Be prepared for all interviews – think of difficult questions and how to answer them.
- ☛ Understand the progression from creating attention and awareness for your cause to converting this attention into engagement and support.
- ☛ Understand and use each social media channel's unique characteristics to your advantage.
- ☛ Remember the power an image or video clip can have – the old cliché of 1000 words can be true. They also often provide an emotional connection.
- ☛ Collaborations can amplify your messages and bring energy and creativity to your campaign: consider working with other activists, NGOs, experts, or celebrities.
- ☛ Once you've run a campaign sit back and evaluate what worked and what didn't. How will you change things next time? Use hard data where possible, through free tools like Google Analytics and in-built monitoring on social media channels.

1.2 Writing a communications strategy

Your communications strategy can be more or less complex but there are elements that you should always consider, regardless of how big or small the campaign.

What are your campaign objectives? This is crucial, it keeps the work driving towards the real change that you want to see in the world. These objectives should inform your communications objectives, the audiences you target, the channels you use, etc. It is easy to fall into thinking only about communications objectives such as 'lots of press coverage' but perhaps to achieve your campaign objectives it would be better get one op-ed into the newspaper that you know the president reads?

An example of a campaign objective might be:

- A properly enforced ban on illegal fishing in Ghana

What are your communications objectives? This is much more specific to your communications outputs, for instance:

- Gain a significant number of petition signatures to demonstrate to politicians that there is strong public opinion against illegal fishing.
- Make the issue of illegal fishing something people consider when choosing who to vote for.

Who are your key audiences? National and/or international? Particular demographic – young, old, working in a particular sector? It is ok to have a big list here, but when you are creating individual communications outputs pare it back until you have a top two. That is because tailoring your communications to the audience is the best way to get an effective outcome. If you try and create an output that meant to reach audiences from school children to specialists, you may well end up with something that neither group will engage with.

What are your messages? Once you have identified your audiences, the next task is to draft relevant messages for each of them. Start with the those that are the highest priority.

Although the messages should be targeted to the individual audiences, they must all be consistent and ultimately designed to achieve your campaign goals.

Lay out carefully the messages you want to get across and make sure you explore any nuances so that poor wording doesn't get you in trouble as the campaign progresses.

What channels will you use?

Below is a list of channels and tools, but you should always define your audience first and look at the channels and outputs they engage with most. These will be covered in more depth in other parts of the manuals.

Press

Press releases
Opinion editorials
Features
Photo-essays
Interviews

Broadcast

Radio interviews
Radio
documentaries
Podcasts
TV news features
Long-form TV documentaries
Online television features

Website

Blog posts
News
stories
E-newsletters

Social media (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Whatsapp, Linkedin, Youtube, Vimeo, Snapchat, TikTok)

Short engaging
videos Striking
images
Well-written posts

In print and online

Reports
Policy briefs
Leaflets

Public Relations

Conferences
Round-tables
Panel
discussions

Plan, plan, plan

Once you have decided who your key audiences are, and what messaging and channels you will use to reach them and achieve your objectives, you should put each output down in a clearly laid out, dated plan. This should include milestones by which you can measure incremental progress towards your goals and other details such as budget and staff leads.

Evaluation and improvements for the future

At the start of any campaign you should define what success looks like and how you are going to measure it. These could be simple measures such as the number of new followers on your social media accounts or the number of signatures on your petition. You might want to evaluate your media coverage on the basis of whether it was in-depth (did they use a quote from you or your organisation?) as well as how much coverage there is.

This will enable you to evaluate what worked and what didn't, and think about what can be improved next time.

A final note on communications strategies: If you are setting up a communications strategy for an entire organisation, rather than a single campaign, you should also look into conducting strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) and competitor analyses for the organisation, as well as thinking about a separate strategy for internal communications.

Further reading and resources:

- <https://knowhow.ncvo.org.uk/campaigns/communications/communications-strategy>
- <https://www.odi.org/publications/5186-planning-tools-how-write-communications-strategy>

SECTION 2: ENGAGING THE MEDIA

The media is extremely valuable in successful advocacy. Effective media work can enable you to reach large audiences and different demographics with your message.

By laying them out in your communications strategy you have already decided on which audiences you are trying to reach through the media. Now make that very detailed – are there specific publications it would be especially important to reach?

When launching your media campaign you should go through the same process as you did at the larger scale for the communications strategy:

- What is my goal?
- Who am I trying to reach?
- Which are the best media outlets to reach them?
- What are the messages?

Building a good relationship with journalists can be the basis of effective media relations – they rely on you for good stories and crucially they are your means to reach a wide, perhaps

even global audience. Editors have the challenge of filling newspapers, magazines and news programmes every day of the year. By presenting them with a good story you are making their life easier – you can become their ally:

- Provide them with news
- Provide them with good quotes and visual materials
- Always make sure that your facts are correct

The Golden Rules Planning and preparation

Careful planning and preparation are essential to an effective media strategy. Plan what you are going to do well in advance, always be prepared before contacting the media and think creatively about how you present your information or comments to them. But even the best planning cannot predict the future – be on the look-out for unforeseen media opportunities and be ready to make the most of them. **And remember – always check your facts.**

If you are part of an organisation always try to have someone on hand who knows how to work with the media and who can respond to any enquiries that may come in. Make sure that the media you are in touch with have up-to-date contact details for you – they don't have time to wait around and if they cannot get hold of you or your organisation, they will go elsewhere. Keep track of what is going on in the media, particularly in those papers or programmes which may be interested in your issues or similar stories.

TIP: Remember that if you build a good relationship, then journalists will often come to you for stories – can you make yourself a spokesperson for a particular issue or range of issues? **Be ready and prepared to help whenever you can.**

One aspect editors will always be on the lookout for is 'why should I publish this now?' A 'peg' is an external event to hang your press release or opinion piece off, if a super-strength hurricane is leaving many people homeless for instance, that is a reason to publish an op-ed on climate refugees. Of course, your news might be so ground-breaking that it doesn't need a peg, but you should be aware you will always be competing for column inches.

The Golden Rules: Ensuring factual accuracy

It is vital that you always ensure factual accuracy and can verify any statements you make to the media (or anyone else). Failure to do this can critically undermine all your work, your organisation and even other organisations who are working to achieve the same ends as you. **Always check and double-check your facts.**

2.1 Writing a compelling press release

Tailor your press release to the right audience for your campaign aims – are you looking to engage the public in a particular country? Are you aiming for attract international scrutiny on an issue? Are you aiming for a particular political leader to read this story as they drink their morning coffee?

Write your press release to fit your audience, for example, highlight the international angle if it is the international media that you are approaching with your story. It might be worthwhile to write variations of your press release for your different media audiences – but ensure that you don't send five different versions to five different journalists at the same newspaper or magazine. Talk to them and see who is most interested in receiving your information.

The timing of your release: Embargos are a deal struck between publicists and journalists and they work in favour of both, which is why they normally work. They say 'this news must not be published until a given date and time'. This gives journalists time to prepare a story without worrying that someone else has already written about it, and they ensure that the publicist can carefully time the news for when they want. Normally press releases will be embargoed if a report is scheduled for publication on a particular date, or similar. If there is an embargo list the date, time and time zone at the top of the release in red. Note that embargoes are not in common use in some countries and this should be checked before using this technique.

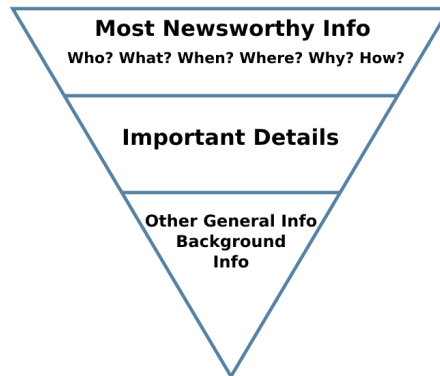
Headline: This must tell the journalist what the story is about, don't use a catchy clever headline that is unclear. For example: 'Piracy on the high seas' is nice but not clear enough. 'New film reveals increase in illegal fishing by Taiwan's fleet' is better.

The first paragraph is crucial: Write this last, after you have sorted out the rest of the structure and figured out what the key message(s) are AND why it is newsworthy: the 'hook'. Here is an example from one of EJF's press releases about Taiwan that got good coverage:

Beatings at gunpoint, slavery, dangerous working conditions and squalid living conditions. These are just a few of the findings from a new investigative film by the Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF) telling the harrowing stories of migrant fishermen working aboard Taiwanese-owned fishing vessels. The film shows that although some new rules have been introduced in Taipei, out at sea human rights abuses and illegal fishing practices continue.

A key thing here is to identify what makes your story newsworthy. In actual fact we were not breaking the news that human rights abuses happen in Taiwan fisheries (this is well documented), the hook is that we can give some specific, first-hand stories from the fishers.

Apart from picking out the newsworthy aspect, the first paragraph needs to summarise the entire story in 2-3 sentences. Never use the first paragraph as background or to set the scene. Stick to the inverted pyramid of news:



A general rule of press releases is the who, what, where, when, why rule. All of these should be answered, preferably in the first paragraph.

Rough structure (but don't get too hung up on this):

- Short, clear headline tells media what the story is about
- Paragraph 1: sums up the entire story in a few sentences
- Paragraph 2: puts story in context – why it's important
- Paragraph 3: presents details – who's involved, how it came about, etc.
- Paragraph 4: includes a relevant quote to add information, credibility and/or opinion
- Paragraph 5: try and end with a strong message, this might mean rephrasing something you have already mentioned – don't be scared to do that – your main message and call to action should be crystal clear.

In general, write the press release like you are writing a short, snappy news article. Many publications copy and paste the press release and you should consider it a win if they don't edit it. Don't use footnotes – references should be hyperlinked or if they can't be list them in the Notes for editors. Do put hyperlinks directly into the text, don't list them at the end.

If you are writing about a film or report, hyperlink to it in the body of the press release and again in the Notes for Editors.

Notes for Editors, this section should:

- Include a couple of screen resolution, watermarked images if you have them, if you have a wider selection of images or versions with higher resolutions this should also be mentioned – 'available on request.'
- Include links to any videos or footage that you might have to accompany your story (if possible this should be linked in the main body of the text).
- Include hyperlinked titles to any reports or other relevant material.

- List important facts that expand on the subject of the press release, in case the journalist is interested in writing a more in-depth piece.
- Always include information on your organisation, this is ours for EJF:

The Environmental Justice Foundation is an international non-governmental organisation working to protect the environment and defend human rights. EJF is a charity registered in England and Wales (1088128). www.ejfoundation.org

- Always include the contact, normally that will be only person, but you can list multiple if needed. Always include a phone number and if you are a listed contact ensure that you **will be available** on the immediate days after the press release is sent out. Sending out a press release and then going on holiday is something that infuriates journalists.

TIP: Take care to avoid jargon, journalists are almost always generalists, not specialists. Even if your story might be picked up by a specialist publication it is much better to write it in an understandable way so that it can get wider coverage.

FOLLOW- UP

After you have sent your press release out follow up with a quick call. When you do call, be sure to be pitching why they should publish your release, not saying 'Have you read my release?' journalists are busy people and will not thank you for a call to remind them to check their emails. If you have an email service or media contacts database, which sends emails out in bulk, they will normally allow you to check the overall open rate of your release and which contacts opened it. Use these statistics for on-going evaluation of you're the performance of your releases and to create subset lists for further contact.

2.2 Speaking to the press

When speaking to any journalist you must always remember that once you have said something you can never take it back. You should also be wary of speaking to a journalist 'off the record' – if you say something juicy enough it might end up in print anyway. That said, saying nothing – or very little of interest – might mean your story is dropped, jeopardizing your campaign. There are few channels that are as effective in getting your message across than a thoughtful interview and a good quote in a respectable media outlet.

Remember if you have got to the stage of being interviewed then it is likely that the journalist is interested in the story and wants to write an accurate, detailed piece. This is your chance to gain supporters, push for change or fulfil other key aims of your campaign: make the most of it.

Live TV or radio interview

Write down your **three** most important points and learn them by heart. Choose **one** point to end on – the take home message for the audience.

Make sure you speak clearly – it is natural to speed up when in an interview situation, practice beforehand to make sure you are speaking slowly and clearly. It is worth practicing out loud.

Once you have said something to a journalist you can never get it back. That is not to make you nervous throughout the interview, that is just to say make sure you do two things:

- Prepare and practice your answers.
- Don't be tempted to go off topic – if the journalist asks you a question you are not happy to answer, or you would have to guess at, just politely bring the subject back to the three key messages. Don't be tempted to fill the silence with speculation. A useful phrase is: "I'm sorry, I'm not in a position to answer that, but what I can say is..."

Make a list of potential questions you will be asked. Be sure to include those that are difficult to answer or might be controversial. Think of answers for each one and practice them out loud.

2.3 Organising a press conference

This is a sophisticated (and often expensive) means to gather a number of journalists in one place and provide them with your news. Consider whether this is appropriate, for example:

- Would it be better to just issue a press release?
- Do you have an expert, celebrity, politician or other who can speak in support of your work?
- Do you have images or video footage?
- Will you make new materials – such as a report – available?

Press conferences work best when they are succinct (7-10 minutes maximum for each speaker) and very clear as to what the news is. As a guide, the conference presentations should take no more than 30-45 minutes. Always allow time for questions from journalists. Different speakers should present their own perspectives but without repeating the same information. So, for example, if you have a local community leader, a health expert and a researcher from your NGO then get each person to put their views across avoiding unnecessary overlaps and duplication of facts and figures. Allow time either at the start or finish of the conference for:

- additional questions to be asked of the speakers

- journalists to meet with speakers individually
- television crews who will want to film their own interviews with

speakers To hold a press conference:

- choose a location such as a hotel that journalists can reach easily and that is big enough for your needs
- check that any equipment you need such as a slide projector or television and video player are available
- send out an invitation to journalists or editors in advance, giving them the date and time, location and very brief details of the conference (why you're hosting it, who's speaking, any materials that you will make available)

TIP: Bear in mind that journalists will ask some very difficult questions and they may even ask your 'opposition' what they think in advance so that they get both sides of the story. Be prepared – think of any difficult questions and how to answer them.

YOUR MEDIA CHECKLIST

- ☛ Is your story newsworthy?
- ☛ What are the key points you want to make and what are the key facts you will need to let journalists know? Have you thought through the most important and interesting elements of your story? Think creatively.
- ☛ Have you got all your facts and the references to support them.
- ☛ Think about the different media you could approach – it is often the case that if one paper or TV program covers a story others will not.
- ☛ Are you making the most of your opportunity?
- ☛ Are you approaching the media at the right time for your campaign – would it be better to wait until you have more information, or should you seize an opportunity now?
- ☛ Are you approaching the media using the best available technique – what will work best, a press release or press conference?
- ☛ Check you approaching the correct person in the way they prefer – are you talking to the journalist who is covering the story. Do you have the correct name, job title/position and spelling? Do they want to receive information by fax, email, post or directly from you?
- ☛ Have you followed up on your initial contact? Just sending a press release does not mean they will run your story – try to call them and talk about your story to get their interest.
- ☛ Monitor your impact – how much coverage did you get? Was it high quality? Is there anything you could have done to improve?

2.4 Writing an opinion piece, feature or photo essay

Another, potentially very powerful way to reach your audiences through the media is to write opinion pieces or features. These have the added advantage in that they do not have to be based around news – they can be exploring a body of work or commenting on external progress.

In feature articles you can explore the nuances of the issues we campaign about and help the reader understand the bigger picture. They also give you the chance to showcase images and films if you have them. Opinion pieces allow you to shape the narrative around a particular issue.

Because neither blogs nor long reads necessarily have the same ‘inverted pyramid’ of a news story, where the crux of the story is summarised as early as possible, we often give them a [standfirst](#), a short sentence or two telling the reader what the article is about (see [example](#)).

Make your headline as engaging and as short as possible. It can be funny and clever but don’t stray into clickbait, that only annoys people. To break up the text in a long read use short snappy subheadings and images.

It is crucial to avoid jargon. Write like a human – keep it warm and engaging. Add hyperlinks to related aspects of your work, that keeps people exploring different facets of your campaigns.

SECTION 3: DIGITAL CAMPAIGNING AND SOCIAL MEDIA

3.1 Digital strategy and channels

Digital channels have made it easier than ever to talk to multiple audiences and to reach potential supporters in order to achieve your overarching goals. To master one of today’s most difficult tasks – creating attention and awareness for your cause and converting this attention into engagement and support – using each channel’s **unique characteristics** is crucial.

Before setting up your accounts and starting to publish content, you should define what you want to achieve by using social media and how your digital channels can help you with that.

Setting goals

A good set of goals covers a range of different measures to help set, review and control performance across your digital activities:

- **Increasing problem and solution awareness:** You can make people aware of an issue or a problem, and that you provide a solution to a problem. Your objective is to help

people realize that there is an issue and that you are working on it in order to solve it.

- **Acquiring new supporters and onboarding:** Interesting people in your cause and gaining active supporters is often a primary objective for activists – from small projects to big organizations. New contacts deserve a lot of attention, because they are new. Telling them who you are and what you do helps them to get familiar with your project.
- **Activating (and monetizing) supporters and building advocacy:** You can use your digital communications to encourage people to do something for you for the first time, e.g. read your articles, share your content, come to an event or donate. Cultivating a sense of community increases satisfaction and loyalty to a cause. On social media, this means offering the opportunity to exchange views, ask questions or to get in touch with you.

Once you know what you want to accomplish, you'll be able to direct your energy into the right tasks:

In order to introduce your message to more people and maximize outreach, you should:

- Identify your key target groups and their preferences (see section 3.2 and 3.5)
- Offer value to your supporters, i.e. produce creative and engaging content
- Engage with current affairs and trends and follow popular hashtags
- Encourage people proactively to share your content
- Consider cooperating with ambassadors/influencers: Experts, researchers, journalists or public figures as well as individual users with a high number of followers and a correspondingly high reach can help you to reach a wider audience, give you credibility with a specific group of people through their support and increase engagement as well as (potentially financial) support. When working with influencers, you should identify what you need from an influencer and what you can offer them.

In order to activate your supporters and increase engagement, you should:

- Refine the targeting of your content and analyze characteristics of your supporters (see section 3.2 and 3.5)
- Offer value to your supporters, i.e. produce creative and engaging content
- Engage with current affairs and trends and follow popular hashtags
- Encourage people proactively to share your content
- Monitor your engagement rates (e.g. check and read comments, identify successful posts)

Channels, audiences and characteristics

The number of social media platforms increases every day. Today, the average internet user has up to nine different social media accounts but is not necessarily active on all of them.

Not every channel is suitable for every cause. For example, if your project requires sharing a lot of statistics and technical information or you want to reach out to political representatives, you might consider using Twitter. If your supporters are younger than 40 years old, they might not be on Facebook.

KEEP IN MIND:
Social media usage is different in different countries! You should check which platforms in your region are the most frequently used and who uses it.

The following social media channels are internationally the most frequently used:

Twitter:

[Twitter](#) is a microblogging system that allows you to send and receive short posts called tweets. Tweets can be up to 280 characters long and include links to relevant websites and resources. Twitter's core target audience are middle-aged adults (30 to 49 years old). The platform is particularly suitable for establishing contact with policymakers, business leaders, professional experts, researchers, NGOs and journalists. Media articles and short videos (<1 minute) are most successful content types. The tone of tweets should be short, direct and can contain technical information. Using a few, specific hashtags (#) can help creating more views of your tweet, known as impressions.

Facebook:

[Facebook](#) is a social networking website that allows registered users to create profiles, upload photos and videos, send messages and keep in touch with friends, family and colleagues. The site, which is available in 37 different languages, includes public features such as:

- Pages (allow members to create and promote a public page built around a specific topic)
- Groups (allow members who have common interests to find each other and interact)
- Events (allow members to publicize an event, invite guests and track who plans to attend)
- Marketplace (allow members to post, read and respond to classified ads)

Facebook's core target audience are middle-aged and older adults (30 to 55 years and older). The platform is particularly suitable for publishing different types of content (images, videos, articles), emotionally connect to a big public audience, direct people to your website, get mailing list subscriptions or petition signatures, receive video views and donations via [Facebook Donations](#).

Online engagement is very high on Facebook and therefore good to increase your outreach and brand recognition. The tone of Facebook posts should be less technical than on Twitter and more emotional and engaging; the frequent use of emojis is common. Using a few, specific hashtags (#) can help creating more impressions (views of your post).

Instagram:

[Instagram](#) is an online photo-sharing application and social network platform that was acquired by Facebook in 2012. Instagram is a very visual platform, which generates a very high level of engagement and offers many ways in which users can interact. Users can add a caption to each of their photos and use hashtags and location-based geotags to index these posts and make them searchable by other users within the app.

Teens and younger adults (14 to 29 years old) are Instagram's core target audience. The platform is particularly suitable to reach out to young individuals, influencers and other NGOs. It only allows you to publish images or videos and add descriptions to them, you cannot share articles or other links in posts although one URL (e.g. link to your website) can be added to your profile (your "biography" or "bio"). Instagram stories (short "live" videos, including polls, tags and other features) can help increase engagement. The tone of Instagram posts should be informal, emotional but still professional. Emojis are very common and it's recommended to use many hashtags at the end of each of your post descriptions to receive more impressions.

LinkedIn:

[LinkedIn](#) is a social network specifically designed for career and business professionals to connect. LinkedIn is about building strategic relationships. The site boasts members from just about every country and every industry imaginable. Middle-aged and older adults (30 to 55 years and older) are LinkedIn's core target group, with a strong focus on business leaders, corporate partners, researchers, NGOs and job seekers. The platform is particularly suitable to reach out to professionals and to recruit staff. Articles and videos are the most popular content on this platform. The tone of a LinkedIn post can be very technical but should always be direct and informative. Use of emojis is rare.

User journeys

In order to reach your goals and maximize the impact of your project, you need to make use of each digital channel's specific characteristics. This will increase the time a supporter spends on your cause and increases the likelihood of long-term engagement and future support.

You should always bear in mind your strategic communications goal and long term benefits. For example, although increasing your follower numbers will allow more people to see and share your posts would it be better still to aim at recruiting people to the EJF mailing list - as you will be able to contact this person on a regular basis, increasing the likelihood they take another action for your project, e.g. making a donation.

A content strategy for your social media channels might be helpful: In a best-case scenario, your content targets the right audiences on the right platform and directs it to your website or your newsletter:



Protecting People and Planet

MENTAL
E
UNDAT
ION

SUPPORTER

JOURNEYS

STRATEGIC USE OF CHANNELS



MAILING LINKEDIN

Read tweet /
article Look at image/
Watch video

Like/ Comment

Share / Mention /
link Follow on
Instagram You u e

Read text /
Look at image/
Watch video

Like/ Comment

Share / Mention /
link Follow on
Instagram You u e

Donate

TWITTER FACEBOOK

Look at image /
Watch video /
Watch story

Like/ Comment

Tag/ Mention /
Follow

Visit profile /
Click on link in bio

Visit website

Sign petition/
Sign up for
mailing

Donate

Read text /

Like/ Comment

Share / Mention

Click on

Visit website

Sign petition/
Sign up for mailing

Donate

3.2 Content and engagement

Content mix

Posting regularly on platforms using the right hashtags can help you to gain broader brand awareness. But to get the most out of social media, you need to truly engage your audience.

In order to build a strong supporter base for your cause, you want people to be interested in your issue, to take action and/or donate. All of these things are more likely if people feel engaged – when they feel like they're part of a conversation and a community:

- On social media, engagement means likes, watches, comments, shares.
- On the mailing list, engagement means opening rates, clicking on links in it.
- On the website, engagement means visits, sessions, clicks, conversion rate (e.g. someone ends up making a donation on your website or is directed from your website to your fundraising platform)

Depending on your time resources, you should aim for maintaining a constant stream of updates of your project and, since you shouldn't just be talking about yourself, you can make use of some opportunities to share content of others. A third of your content should be original content that you've created yourself. 50-70% should be curated, shared content (e.g. media articles, content from other organizations, experts). In a best-case scenario, 10- 20% should be promotional content from your supporters (e.g. followers sharing your content, talking about you etc.).

Sometimes it can be helpful to keep an eye on special days which can be linked to your project (e.g. World Oceans Day if you're campaigning on oceans). "Piggybacking" on larger organizations with similar topics and objectives (e.g. by tagging them and/or trying to get your posts shared by them) as well as following popular hashtags is also a good way to build outreach and engagement.

Dealing with negative feedback

The probability that you will receive negative feedback will increase with an increasing follower base. This is nothing to worry about: you simply need to decide how you want to handle it.

Always try to keep your distance and try not to take negative comments personally. Social media serves as a mouthpiece for many people and some users just want to blow off some steam. This behavior is human, don't take it to heart.

Hiding and deleting comments sometimes seems like a fast and easy way to deal with negative feedback. In fact, providing a measured and thoughtful response is often better. Answering to a negative post can also be very successful, even though you might worry about what to say. Remember that it will often be the case that you don't want to convince

the person writing the negative comment, but the people who are silently following the conversation to see how you will tackle it.

Copywriting for social media

Strong copy that establishes trust, authority, builds relationships, and gets people talking, sharing is in high demand. Here's a short guide to writing good copy:

- **Identify your audience:** In order to write good copy, you need to understand who you're writing for. It's easy to write generically about your project, but instead of focusing on what you offer or what you are working on, focus on who you're offering it to and who you want to support your cause.
- **Do your research:** In order to back up your copywriting strategy with some solid data you should take a closer look at the people who like, comment or share your content on your social media platform. Using insights from your website (e.g. by using [Google Analytics](#)) can also help you to find out more about your supporters (e.g. demographics, age groups, interests, which pages they access etc.). Studying your competitors is also key to find out what they are doing to be successful and how you can learn from them.
- **Write strong headlines:** We consume huge amounts of content each day. Without a great headline, your content will be easily overlooked. A good headline or title will get you attention and engage your audience, and a simple click can lead to a subscriber, a follower or a donor.
- **Write to a specific person:** Write as if you were having a conversation with someone. These may not be the exact words you use in the final draft but will help you to get started.
- **Write persuasively and proofread:** From signing up for a newsletter or filling out a contact form: Good copywriting will get people to take action. Every word matters. Evoking emotion, conveying authority, and influencing action matters. Spelling and grammar errors are unacceptable, as they make you look unprofessional and untrustworthy – so always remember to proofread.
- **Aim for brevity:** Web and social media users scan massive amounts of content every day. Long, complex sentences won't help you to get your audience's attention. Make sure your copy stands out and engages them as they scan quickly around their screens.
- **Be consistent in tone:** Considering the specifics of your content strategy on different platforms, try to stick to a consistent tone in your messages within each channel, e.g. don't be chatty and informal in one Facebook post and serious and technical in another.

The power of images

A picture is worth a thousand words. That may be an overused cliché, but it's still true. Images have the power to attract, persuade and engage. People remember 10% of what they hear, 20% percent of what they read and 80% percent of what they see. Also, visuals are processed by the brain 60,000 times faster than text.

Visuals are one way of grabbing your audience's attention and gaining interaction, especially on Facebook. A post on social media accompanied by an image is ten times more likely to receive engagement. With this in mind, you can use these images to drive users to your project.

The power of visual communication has rocketed with the rise of digital and social media. Photographs and films can and do change the world. Using this unique characteristic of photo and film can help you to tell people about your story or your project, to create experiences and to obtain empathy and support for your cause.

Design

In the world of social media, great design exists to support great copy. Fonts, colors, sizes, spacing: these things can help you to create a consistent look. Don't get stressed out: You don't need to be a Photoshop expert in order to create nice visual content. There are many free services on the market (e.g. [Canva](#), [Pixlr](#) or [Lumen5](#)) who help you to edit your images, add headlines or make short films which are easy to use – even without a degree in visual design.

3.3 Social media videos

75% of videos are watched on mobile devices, so you should often be thinking mobile-first when it comes to creating social media videos.

Some general tips for social media videos:

- **Use vertical or square video:** This format tends to be more engaging, especially on mobile devices
- **Grab attention in the first 3 seconds:** If you can't get a viewer's attention in the opening seconds, they won't stay around for long. Put the best visuals at the start and stimulate interest through your opening text. Avoid using video introductions for your organisation – branding can be added at the end of the video.
- **Make sure your video fully communicates the message without sound:** Use subtitles and text in the video so that people can understand your message without sound. Many people will be watching with sound-off.
- **Pace:** Attention spans are fleeting so the pace of your video will often have to be very quick. Stories that “build” are not always great for keeping and maintaining people’s attention. A “heartbeat pace” with lots of ups and downs throughout works better. Generally, no slide should be up for longer than 4-5 seconds.
- **Don’t forget a call to action:** Let the viewer know what you want them to do when they reach the end of the video. Suggest the next step so they can share the video, follow the link to learn more, subscribe for more videos etc.

Voice and tone

Almost all digital news organizations have adopted an informal/conversational tone in their videos, both in scriptwriting as well as voiceovers. This tends to translate well amid the noise of online video on digital platforms. Having a personality to the writing can help your message cut through. Don’t be afraid to be playful or deviate from the viewers’ expectations – especially on the occasions where you have a positive story to tell! And always remember: Avoid using abbreviations and jargon.

Narrative text

“Narrative text” refers to the text you are writing onto the video to tell the story. This is different from a subtitle – text that translates or transcribe the dialogue of a speaker. This kind of text is key for social media videos where a lot of people will be watching with no sound.



It might be useful to come up with an in-house style guide to ensure all the text you write onto a video follows the same rules. This way you can decide on colors, fonts, positioning etc. and keep your visual identity consistent.

You might decide you want to make sure rules for how the text appears on the screen – does it fade on, move in from the side, or scale-up? Whatever you decide, try and keep it as consistent as possible over different films.

For social media videos, clear, concise and punchy sentences are very important. Avoid as much as possible spreading and splitting long sentences across multiple pieces of footage. You need to make it as easy as possible for the viewer to take in the information *and* watch the footage.

That means:

- Not cramming too much text onto the screen.
- Making sure the text is legible (think carefully about what font and colors you are using).
- Making sure the viewer has time to read and understand the information.
- Make sure the visual underneath matches the content of the text.

Spelling, grammar and punctuation

Make sure you use proper grammar and spelling. Poor grammar and spelling mistakes can result in your message getting lost. In some cases, when writing for video, you have a degree added flexibility to ensure sentences are as short and punchy as possible.

Don't be afraid to start a sentence with "But", "And", "Yet" or other conjunctives. It will allow longer sentences to be broken up and can help the storytelling be more dynamic:

For many of us, the climate crisis hasn't arrived yet.
But for millions around the world, it's already here.

You might want to decide on in-house rules for spelling and grammar. The key is to keep your rules consistent and intentional, keeping in mind what is going to help the reader digest the information.

You should also avoid using a comma between two separate captions. In 95% of cases, it can be rewritten into shorter sentences, or broken more cleanly into two. And you should be thinking very carefully about how to keep the pace dynamic and the viewer engaged.

Ellipses can sometimes be used for listing across multiple shots (e.g. if pointing out several examples of something but you want to use a different shot to illustrate each one):

- It can also be very effective for storytelling purposes. "There's a hugely destructive fishing practice you might have never heard of..."

- You can make a conscious decision to use an ellipse in your script for making a dramatic revelation, adding emphasis or to add some personality/tone to the scriptwriting.
- The key here is that if you do use an ellipse, it is a conscious decision and therefore a reason – not just because you are trying to fit too many words/ideas into one caption.

Line-breaks

Good line-breaks are important because they make the process of reading and understanding far easier. Even, balanced lines mean the viewer's eye has a lot less work to do:



In an ideal world, lines should split at natural linguistic breaks, ideally at clause or phrase boundary. This applies for subtitles and captions as well.

Two examples:

Bees contribute more to the UK economy /	rather than:	Bees contribute more to the UK /
than the royal family generates through tourism.		economy than the royal family generates through tourism.

Male honeybees are only there to mate /	rather than:	Male honeybees are only there /
and don't have a sting.		to mate and don't have a sting.

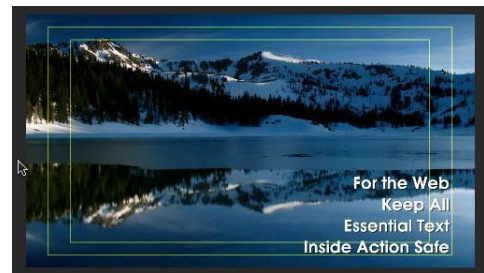
Timing

Timing is always longer than you think! Especially after you've seen the same text a hundred times, you will read it quicker than the average viewer.

A good rule of thumb is to allow enough time to read it aloud. In certain cases, you might even keep it on a bit longer to allow the text to truly sink in, or for the viewer's gaze to fully take in the shot underneath (if it's particularly powerful, for example, it would be a shame if the viewer only has time to read the caption before the shot changes). As a general rule, try to keep the end of the narrative text caption aligned with the end of the shot underneath.

Position

Text that touches the very edge of an image creates an unbalanced feeling; generally, this is something you want to avoid. These are considered in the "safety margins" in [Premier](#) or "title/action safe zones" in [Final Cut Pro](#).



Everything apart from the logo should remain within the widest edge of the safe guide.

Audio

In general, for social media videos, you'll want to choose background music with no lyrics (instrumental). The genre of music should fit the video mood and style and not be too distracting:

- Avoid distortion and clipping.
- If sound effects are used, keep them at a subtle level (a quiet whoosh or a bass for emphasis) – nothing too cartoony or distracting.
- Consider starting where the beat drops - not at the beginning of the track.



If you're looking for free music licensed with creative commons, [Free Music Archive](#) and [YouTube's Audio Library](#) are some great resources (just make sure to double-check copyright restrictions).

Export and distribution

When you've finished editing your video make sure to optimize exports for specific platforms. Make a thumbnail that helps draw people to your video – the one that's generated automatically might not be very engaging. Come up with an engaging title and description for your video and give people a reason to click on it.

3.4 Social media advertising

All major social media networks offer advertising options. But that doesn't mean you should use all of them. When choosing where to place your ads, look at which ones perform already well organically (i.e. without promotion). It's also helpful to know which networks are most popular with your target audience.

Facebook ads:

[Facebook advertising](#) allows you to promote either your Facebook page, posts on your page or external links (e.g. your website, petitions, mailing sign up page). Facebook ads are targeted to users based on their location, demographic and profile information. After creating an ad, you set a time frame and budget for it, which will partially determine how many clicks, likes or amount of impressions your ad will receive (longer ads with higher budgets have greater returns). If you choose targeting groups effectively to ensure those seeing your advert are those who will be most interested in it, your cost per click/like/impression will be lower.

Twitter ads:

[Twitter ads](#) allow you to promote tweets, accounts and trends with the objective of increasing traffic, gaining relevance or branding. There are three types of ads, based on different goals:

- Promoted tweets = tweets you pay to be displayed on Twitter and that act as ordinary tweets which can be retweeted, replied to or liked.
- Promoted accounts = an account that is displayed to users because they may find it interesting despite not following that account yet.
- Promoted trends = a paid trend around a specific topic, hashtag or event, that appears at the top of the "Trends for you" section, clearly labeled as promoted.

Instagram ads:

[Instagram advertising](#) is attached to Facebook ads. In Instagram, you can publish ads with segmentation by age, region, and pay in your local currency. You can promote different types of content, e.g. an image, a video or a post in your Instagram story. Like Facebook ads, you can create them for reach, clicks or followers.

Setting up and optimizing ads

You should always ask yourself about the intended outcome of your advertising campaign before you decide on your budget.

On most social networks, ads are sold in an auction format. You have to set a maximum amount for a specific target result (e.g. a click or like), or a maximum budget per day. As you create your ad, the ad manager interface will provide a recommended bid based on your stated goals.

Here are a few tips for a successful advertising strategy:

- **Define your objectives:** Understanding your objectives is crucial, as it ensures you choose the right social media platform to advertise on. You need to know what your goals are in order to find the right advertising solution and the right creative strategy (e.g., would you rather have more petition signatures or more followers?). Both engagement and impressions can be valuable for your project, you just need to choose the right one to align with your goals so that you only pay for results that are real and useful for your cause.
- **Define your target audience:** All social media channels offer specific ad targeting. Therefore, you should define who you're trying to reach to take maximum advantage of these targeting options to ensure you get the best return on investment.
- **Track high-performing organic posts:** Some of the posts you're already publishing will resonate with your followers; others won't. Track which ones perform best, i.e. are being clicked, liked, shared, or commented on. These high-performing posts make the best candidates for getting promoted.
- **Keep mobile in mind:** Most social media ads are being viewed on mobile devices. Your mobile ads should be specifically designed for a small screen.
- **Test ads to optimize performance:** Testing one ad against another in order to find out what works best and refine your strategy is known as A/B testing. You should always use smaller budgets to test several ads to determine what works best, then promote the winning ad with a bigger budget.
- **Measure results:** Measuring your results and having concrete data about the value your ads will let you know whether you've achieved your targets. It shows you what worked and what didn't so that you can improve your strategy. The major social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) offer analytics to help you measure the results of ads.