

Digital Media -- Media Training and Messaging

By Andrew Gilman

In my 25 years of experience in Media Training and Message Development, the advent of Social Media presents one of the few breakthroughs in a client's ability to develop and communicate a message that will reach a target audience. Social Media puts the client more in control of what is developed, communicated and ultimately received by an intended audience.

Social Media provides both opportunities and challenges for Message Development and Media Training. We view the upside for public relations opportunities to be much greater than the downside. Why? Because there are fewer initial filters on the information that is transmitted. However, therein also lay the challenges. Social media will require more transparency and rigor to make sure the messages, images and ideas are credible and supported.

The New School:

In the "old school," a reporter covering a poster presentation at a scientific conference might only write one or two sentences about the subject of the poster, and perhaps include one quote from the Q&A or a short media interview. With social media, the scientific association sponsoring the conference might decide to use its Web site and post the full video of the poster, along with reports from the conference or to vlog interviews with the poster presenters. Instead of a 20-40-second sound bite, the scientist might be able to answer five minutes of questions for that vlog.

In essence, social media platforms have the chance of capturing more of your

information. We used to think that cable TV stations increased the opportunity for more client information to reach an audience. Except for the financial market business TV networks, cable hasn't necessarily added to the outlets for general company, scientific or association news. It hasn't significantly increased the number of your quotes that make it on air.

Yet Web sites and other social media platforms, which are driven less by size and time constraints than on-air or cable media, can absorb more information and tell a fuller story.

How does Messaging and Media Training Change?

In some ways very little, in other ways a great deal.

For both new and old media, key messages need to be supported by facts and data. Editors might question whether a sound bite is supported by appropriate facts; the "community" may also question whether the general statement is supported. A good editor checks the facts before the message appears in print; in social media the fact checking comes after it's on a blog or social media site.

In either case, there is still the need to help develop at least one or two sound bites. With social media there are opportunities to develop more key messages on a variety of topics. And while you potentially have more time with social media, that doesn't mean the reader or viewer has a longer

attention span. In order to keep their attention, you need to develop more than the one killer sound bite that you know will be captured.

Regardless of the media, the most powerful sound bites are those that are visual in nature. The visuals can include anecdotes, examples, third party endorsement, and a series of tips. When readers and viewers visit your web site or a link, you can now have more analogies, third-party testimonials and/or citations from academic journals. Different readers and viewers will react to different types of proofs. And visitors may stay longer than the 6-10 second TV or radio bite.

Communicators need to be their own editors. In a digital world of instant response and open criticism, messages should be clear, concise and resonate with stakeholders and audiences.

Viral Video

The initial Blend Tec “Marble” video was essentially one long sound bite. The facts and figures that underlay the promotional video had to do with speed, sharpness and strength of the blades. The company probably has studies to demonstrate the fineness of the blender. Yet it was the pictures of the marbles in the blender that made the story. Blend Tec is “sticky” to use the new vernacular.

Hosted Video

At the end of Media Training, when subjects are in the communications frame of mind, we increasingly recommend shooting what we used to call B-Roll footage. Let’s call this “additional purpose” footage. In fact you may not have a specific purpose for it at the time you record the Q&A. With very

little editing, there is a multitude of ways to use this video:

- Send it to a reporter when they inquire about a specific issue
- Use it for the “test video” when networks want to know if your spokesperson is good enough for their broadcast
- Post it on your web site for specific answers
- Embed the video link in a press release on a subject
- Figure out a way to add it to a discussion on the web
- Have the information as a link for a job candidate for your company or organization

One of the themes of this conference is that anything we recommend or do today in Digital Media may be outdated 90 days from now.

Andrew Gilman is President and founder of CommCore Consulting Group. For the past 24 years, CommCore has provided communications strategy, message development, communications training, and crisis planning to the private, public and not-for-profit sectors. The company has prepared thousands of executives and spokespeople for media interviews, presentations, speeches, employees meetings product launches, road shows, analyst meetings, Congressional and regulatory testimony, crisis response, citizen lobbying and social media.