



Communicating Sustainability: How to get the message across



Winter 2005

Promoting the sustainability message is essential if we want to achieve our vision in the Time for Action strategy. How can we expect individuals, organisations and communities to live and work in a sustainable way, if they don't know what this means?

How to communicate sustainability, and make the most of opportunities such as the media, and partnership working, were discussed at a meeting of the West Sussex Sustainability Forum.

Forum Steering Group

Communicating Sustainability

Taken from a workshop session by Ed Gillespie and Solitaire Townsend of Futerra.

Badly planned and misplaced communication will, at best, not work, wasting time and money, and at worst have a negative impact.

Three common mistakes:

- Communicating without supporting policy
Success is easier when policy and communications work together.
- Communicating without Infrastructure
There is little point encouraging people to recycle if they do not have access to recycling facilities.
- Relying on mainstream marketing
Everyone is exposed to so much marketing - you have to make sure your message stands out and can be remembered.

So what should we be doing? Futerra have developed a Communicating Sustainability Strategy for the United Nations and suggested the following key points to consider:

● Targeting works

Different types of people will have different opinions, and will respond differently to various types of media. It is important to word messages and choose the way of communicating carefully. For example, the internet may not be the best way of reaching older people.

Targeting a defined audience can produce more success, and save money at the same time.

Keep in mind the following objectives:

- Raise awareness
- Change attitudes
- Change behaviour

Defining the message is also important. You don't have to tackle everything about sustainability in one go to create change. Focusing on a single message, such as local produce, can often be more effective.

● Be inspiring

Recent evidence shows that people are concerned about the environment, but find other issues more important. By realising this, and linking the sustainable development message to related subjects such as health or jobs, your chances of successful communication are increased.

● Make it personal and practical

Successful communication lies in putting the big picture into messages that can be personally understood and inspire an audience to a practical response.

'If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart'

Nelson Mandela

● 10 rules for Communicating Sustainability:

- 1 big picture**
make connections, demonstrate long term thinking, blow myths
- 2 technically correct**
be trustworthy, provide transparency, give real facts
- 3 be cool**
be sexy, mainstream, non-patronising, brave – stand out!
- 4 belong**
join a massive worldwide change, start positive conformity, join a success
- 5 only stories work**
empathy and emotions are powerful, use stories to hold peoples attention
- 6 optimism**
sustainable development is achievable, avoid too much guilt
- 7 glory button**
'sustainable development makes you a great person and we love you for it'
- 8 change is for all**
break stereotypes, use inclusive language and images, push mass ownership
- 9 we need more heroes**
introduce icons to emulate – 'be like me'
- 10 personal circle**
relate big ideas to everyday life, give them a familiar context.

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WEST SUSSEX SUSTAINABILITY FORUM



Media Awareness

Taken from a presentation by Jane Robinson, Communications Manager, West Sussex County Council

Despite some peoples misconceptions, journalists are not out to get you. They have an important role to play. They inform and educate, and challenge establishments on behalf of the public. They help to uphold democracy.

But journalists need us. They need people to fill their pages and airwaves. Journalists are often over worked and desk bound. They rely on us to spot the opportunities and dig out the stories that they use.

In West Sussex there are 10 radio stations and 4 television stations as well as freelancers and news agencies. Local papers also present a great opportunity in this area. There are 20 local newspapers, and it is estimated that 9 out of 10 adults read a local paper each week.

So how do you make your story stand out?

- **A picture is worth a 1000 words**, but they need to be innovative - avoid line ups! The picture will need to be eye catching just to make it into the paper. Animals and children are usually winners, but remember to get signed permission from the child's guardian.

- **Don't use jargon.**

People are not interested in strategies or documents. Avoid formal language for example 'maximise the potential of' or 'is giving rise to'. Keep the text concise, tight and interesting.

Be sure to make the introduction precise, 14-20 words. You need to catch the readers attention immediately.

What makes news?

- Sex
- Underdogs (David vs Goliath)
- Money (Win, lose or steal)
- Scandal (The higher the better)
- Conflict
- Success
- Humour (Give human interest)
- Celebrities
- Firsts (Anything innovative)
- Anniversaries
- Lasts (End of an era)
- Deaths, but injuries will do!

Successful Partnership Working

Taken from notes of discussion workshops hosted by Nikki Enticknap, Community Planning Officer, West Sussex County Council.

When Partnerships are successful they can be very useful. They allow sharing of ideas, skills and funding, provide an opportunity to learn from others and to spread the sustainability message to a wider audience.

There are 3 areas where Partnerships can succeed or fail:

- **Common Understanding**

- Identify the objective and define the aims of the partnership.
- You need to know what you need from the partnership and what they need from you. This way you can make sure that the right skills and knowledge are represented at the partnership.
- Make sure that all partners have permission to participate fully, with backing from the organisation that they represent.
- Be honest about the value of the partnership.
- Consider how long your partnership will be valuable.

- **Identify Actions**

- Actions give the Partnership a clear direction, but make sure there are outcomes at the end of each action.
- Achieving targets will encourage the partnership and increase involvement.
- When setting targets be clear who owns them.
- Practical actions can draw in volunteers and engage the wider community.
- Be aware of other partnerships and what they are doing. Should you be working with them to achieve shared goals?

- **Monitoring**

- Targets need to be measurable and relevant to the participants.
- You need to be open about your progress. The partnership needs to be realistic and flexible to change.
- Continually ask yourself questions – be clear why you are in the partnership and what your contribution is.

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