

Scouts, Kittens And Integrity: notes towards an ethical & effective strategy for communicating change

 blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2013/05/15/scouts-and-kittens-and-integrity-notes-towards-a-ethical-effective-strategy-for-communicating-change/

2013-5-15

This collection of cliches and half-baked slogans comprises the notes from a talk I gave at the Blue State Digital London offices to a group of charity, think-tank and culture communications officers. It is based mainly on this much longer [report I wrote on ethical or change communications in the digital age](#). I do these talks to learn rather than to preach. If you'd like me to interact with your organisation get in touch.

In this case it was a group that included animal charities, a museum and the scouts which made me think much harder about how the general principles I talk about might work in practice with diverse organisations that have quite different audiences, subjects and aims but are all change-seekers.

First understand that the communications context has changed:

1. Media is environmental
2. Communications are networked – including mainstream media and PR
3. People are networked communicators – generational, gender, gaps

But for ethical communicators the environment has also changed:

1. A lot of caring people who are more informed, educated, cosmopolitan, and better connected than ever before.
2. Old model for ethical communications was that 'we' are right and that if only we could get our message across then people would care and act. Is bust
3. 'Post-humanitarianism' 'Ironic spectator- scepticism – personalisation – loss of certainty

Also there is now Information overload – confusion – distraction – distrust –

Complexity plus uncertainty

Most thoughtful or sophisticated campaigners or charities realise that they have a problem and are responding in very creative and reflective ways. For many, they will say NO problem – we're fundraising or getting awareness despite the economic crisis so why worry?

Digital is not a solution – it's an opportunity to begin a sustainable relationship

Kony2012 is an extreme example of this – massively successful yet did not catch Kony and may have had a negative impact on perceptions of Africa and progress in places like Africa.

Lessons for NGOs and other ethical communicators?

1. Our research shows that the public are increasingly sceptical about ethical marketing: by NGOs, charities, politicians etc which they see as the same as commercial marketing – they don't see the result of agency – you did not Make Poverty History,
2. The key message is that your communications must embody your values and purpose and must be tailored to suit your organisation – but here are some principles:

3. Keep it simple – focus on taking people on an emotional plus rational journey for themselves
4. Keep it consistent – don't give contradictory communications in an attempt to target niches etc
5. Include 'beneficiaries' – not just in messaging to donors but also give capacity to partners to have their own voice and own deliberation space

Conclusion:

Integrity – this is partly about your whole organisation being communicative – but also about values – your communications must be resilient – so when you make a mistake your are open and forgivable and can listen and learn

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