

Messages That Make Connections

How much impact do the messages you deliver have? Whether verbal or written, marketing or interpersonal—the messages you communicate will have maximum impact if you deliver information that matters to your audience and differentiates you or what you're selling -- be it product, service or idea.

In our last article we talked about networking and how "real" networks are only as effective as the communication between the different points of contact. Picture a spider web. It's only a web if it's connected. Otherwise, it's just a bunch of dangling strings. So how do you create strong links via effective communication? How do you develop messages that make a real connection?

At Communications Plus, when we begin working on messaging for our clients we first ask them what they *think* matters to their audience in regard to the service or promotion we're working on. This information becomes the first piece of a puzzle we're putting together. Next, and more importantly, we find out what *actually* matters to the audience by asking them directly.

Armed with these two insights we compare and look for where answers overlap. This is how we identify the cornerstones of our messaging strategy. Then, we can look at what insights we uncovered that are truly differentiating factors. What can we say about this project, service or idea that no one else can say? Outside of features that others might also claim, what benefits does it deliver?

The answers to these questions become pillars in the final piece, which is context. Perhaps the most essential step in effective messaging is developing a story around the key points. Ever wonder why case studies and illustrative examples are so plentiful in communication? They have amazing power. Context gives premises and promises an extra dimension. They offer proof. Moreover, as humans we easily pass along stories, thereby context gives a message legs.

In developing context we also have to look at the audience and their point of view to be sure the stories we tell make sense to them and incorporate their preferences. The basic premise of the process is simple: if the audience is a class of preschoolers the message will be positioned differently than if the audience is a group of professionals. Perhaps you're positioning to appeal to engineers or Generation Y. Or perhaps, you're positioning to a group of Gen Y engineers. The nuances get tricky when the audience characteristics are harder to define, but the philosophy remains the same.

Determine what matters to the market. Differentiate. Tell a story that appeals to the audience.

So, if you're attempting to communicate effectively and build your network at a business event, how does this really apply? It's a lot to think about when you're just trying to make conversation. Right?

First, if you're promoting yourself and/or your business it's worth taking time to think about your messages in detail with some strategic focus. You may have a handful of different stories you tell depending on your audience, but the essence of your effective message will always be the same. So, figure out what it is.

Second, telling your story and communicating your messages is only half the story. Remember, it's not about you. Listen. Ask questions. This is the informal version of the discovery phase. Uncover what matters. Then show you understand by communicating those messages back.

Last but not least, a final word of caution. "Canned" content is worse than bad content. It's inauthentic and impersonal. A "spiel" doesn't make strong connections; it breaks them. It sends off red flags and flares. Don't rehearse and recite. Just know the main points you need to share in order to deliver an effective message. Beyond an effective message, a real connection must also have trust present and accounted for. See what a tangled web we weave?