Communicating Research and Impact

Ten Golden Rules

Glasgow University
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Widening Research Impact

We help organisations such as universities and think-tanks to enhance their impact and reputation.

Please see final slides for more information about how we may be able to help you.
understand why
What do you (really, really) want?

Do good for GU
Fundraising
Attract students/investors
Spread knowledge

Influence
Power
Personal Profile
Money
What do you (really, really) want?

Reach

Reputation    Revenue
know your audience
There's many a slip...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sender</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Receiver</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><a href="mailto:j.drori@thoughtsmith.com">j.drori@thoughtsmith.com</a></td>
<td><a href="http://www.thoughtsmith.com">www.thoughtsmith.com</a></td>
<td>Widening the Impact of Research and Communication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Understanding who your audience is...

Politicians  Senior civil servants  Other officials  Influencers
Journalists  Company directors  Television News
Teachers  Colleagues  Children  Investors

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Know Your Audience - Media

- “What’s the peg” (Why now?)
- “What’s the story” (Why this?)
- “Why does it matter?” (Who cares?)
- “Who’s telling it” (Why you?)

- Court controversy
- Want clarity and responsiveness
- Need help to mediate
- Need visuals, people
- Use active language, short sentences
- Trust researchers
- Find references a bit of a yawn
- Thrive on emotion
- Expect fast responses!
- Key theme: Segmentation

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A handy shortcut to audience research
Know Your Audience – Policy Makers

Policy Makers & Senior Civil Servants

- High integrity
- Dispassionate (Suspicious of passion)
- Crave strategic fit and scalability
- Want clarity
- Prefer academic consensus
  - key references only
- Need help dealing with politicians, and press who will always find fault
- Manage risk. Wish to avoid blame
- Generalists, constantly moving
- They’d be brilliant at poker
- Keep your own politics to yourself
Know Your Audience - Politicians

• Relevance to manifesto commitments and policy vision

• “Will it make me look good?”

• Criticise the policy, not the politician

• Keep your own politics to yourself
Try not to...

- patronise
- lecture
- confuse
communicate *with*, not *to*

Listen. Ask what’s on their minds.
understand what you want your audience to know or do
tell a good story
Conveying the message

• What’s the story? Why does it matter? Why now?
• You don’t have to tell people everything you know
  – They already know you’re clever
• What are the top messages?
  – How do you get those across above all else?
The big picture before detail
Format and Style

- UK/US business style, not academic/Japanese
- Different formats for different audiences
  - A tweet or two
  - 30s, 60s, 4 min, spoken
  - One para, or 1, 5 pages prose
  - 20 min illustrated talk
  - 60 min workshop
  - Video, Multimedia
- Select language and format for each audience
  Spell out implications
  “You should…”, “Don’t…”, “In practice, this means that…”
Mind Your Language

• Active not passive
• Fewer, shorter words
  • Anglo-Saxon rather than Latin or Greek
• Avoid jargon
  • Except for credibility and to help others own buzzwords
• Beware caveats
  • Say what you know and what you don’t know
  • Explain how confident you are

• Avoid ‘discourse’ and ‘notion’, even in the singular
Quality of arguments

• Researchers are professionally sceptical
  – Lots of evidence. Method is key.

• Other people trust researchers (with important provisos)
  – Method is secondary. Lead with results.

• Write good abstracts
  – Say what it’s about! Even academics need help finding what they need
  – Provide summaries in lay language (Kew ex)
remember your audience’s audiences
find out what your audience already knows
“Be very, very careful what you put into that head, because you will never, ever get it out.”

*Cardinal Wolsey, 1471 - 1530*
Quality of evidence

• How surprising is the message? Is it what they want to believe?
  – Climate change is/isn’t caused by humans
  – Immigration is bad/good for jobs
  – Chocolate/red wine/sex helps you lose weight

• Research often allows ‘outs’ – people hear what they want to hear
# How are academics seen by the media and politicians?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Pro</strong></th>
<th><strong>Con</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Impartial</td>
<td>Ineffective (social sciences)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intelligent</td>
<td>Out-of-touch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledgeable</td>
<td>Impractical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some very good people</td>
<td>Hard to understand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public service motivation</td>
<td>Slow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical specialists</td>
<td>Possibly poor value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keen</td>
<td>Earnest, naïve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Low-key</td>
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Reinforce the Pros, not the Cons!

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widen your influence

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Be a hub

- Use media to develop credibility and salience
  - Find visuals and human interest
- Choose media for maximum benefit/effort
- Point people to interesting work by others
- Have conversations
- Cultivate relationships before you need them
Cultivate relationships, and...

...don’t go all the way on the first date
Understand social and viral media

Number of contacts?

How contagious?

Incubation period?
Widen your influence

• Understand how policy-making happens

Lobby well
  – Know whom to call. Do you need a broker?
    • Media editors and journos
    • Wonks and mandarins
  – Know their timetable?

• Parliamentary committees

• Integrate media into research?
Being used
Reputational damage
  Personal
  Organisational
Peer disapproval
Waste of time

understand the risks
empathy helps
compelling experiences
Compelling Experiences

- Defined
  - Can you name it? Describe it? Say what it does and what it is?
- Fresh
  - Does it feel new? Is there a twist?
- Accessible
- Immersive
  - Can you lose yourself in it?
- Significant
  - Does it matter? Do you want to tell others? Do you connect with others or develop?
- Transformative
  - Something you’re left with? Have you changed? Would others think you have?
We work with public institutions and charities to develop digital, creative and business strategy.

We offer practical advice and act with the utmost discretion as facilitators and critical friends.

We operate to the highest legal and ethical standards, with people and organisations intent on making the world a better place.
Thank you

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Increase the impact of your research, particularly with non-academic audiences.

We can help you:

- Identify those who will use and value your work and will be most able to amplify your voice or influence, such as politicians, senior civil servants and the media.
- Develop your public and commercial networks and increase your value to them nationally and in your own community.
- Sharpen in-house skills to sustain influence and impact, helping you to stand out.
- Help you approach your research through the lens of delivering and demonstrating impact.
- Suggest early-stage partnerships to increase the likelihood of impact.

What it covers

Widening Research Impact (WRI) will help you communicate the impact of your research beyond purely academic audiences, to become better able to compete for funding, to identify the target groups that matter most and gain their approval for what you do, and to stand above your peers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualitative Assessment</th>
<th>Audience Segmentation &amp; Needs</th>
<th>Strategies for Targeting Audiences</th>
<th>Avoiding Common Mistakes</th>
<th>Social and Viral Media</th>
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- **Qualitative Assessment**
  We begin by drawing on our wide experience to review the present and potential impact of your research. We will identify influential groups, especially non-academic audiences, to whom your research will be of benefit (e.g. politicians, policy makers, the media).

- **Audience Segmentation & Needs**
  We will help you understand the needs of different audiences and their existing prejudices (e.g. media of different kinds, politicians, civil servants, NGOs, commercial companies, investors, teachers, children, charities, other influencers).

- **Strategies for Targeting Audiences**
  We will suggest strategies for targeting audiences in cost effective ways such as ‘virtuous circles of content’ whereby users can employ your content or tools to create materials that themselves attract more people to participate.

- **Avoiding Common Mistakes**
  Having had experience with a lot of research-based institutions we can help you avoid common mistakes, providing examples of where other organisations have succeeded and failed to achieve the full potential impact of their research.

- **Specialist Communication Design**
  We can help you commission specialist materials to broaden your impact by communicating what you do in novel yet clear ways. We can provide bespoke guidance on the effective use of emerging media channels (e.g. social and viral media). We can critique your lay abstracts.
What you get

Most clients need some combination of the following activities. The activities may be followed in sequence (our recommendation) or you can choose those that feel most relevant and useful to your organisation.

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<th>Initial Consultation</th>
<th>Understanding Your Present Capability</th>
<th>Presentation &amp; Workshops</th>
<th>Mentoring &amp; Training</th>
<th>Continued Tracking &amp; Benchmarking</th>
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- **Initial Consultation**
  Our first step is always a meeting with our directors Jonathan Drori and Dominic Tinley. If you have needs that aren't in our area of expertise, we'll be the first to say. We only take on work where we sincerely believe we can make a difference, quickly.

- **Understanding Your Present Capability**
  For small research units we rely primarily on structured interviews and discussion. For larger groups we can augment these with questionnaires to assess existing processes for defining, developing and communicating impact.

- **Presentation & Workshops**
  We will present our findings and recommendations including the key pitfalls and opportunities, strategies for widening influence and getting credit, and an assessment of key risks. Workshops can include exercises such as defining audiences, communicating difficult concepts, and making collaboration work.

- **Mentoring & Training**
  Whether within a single department or across your institution, we can provide mentoring and training to key individuals.

- **Continued Benchmarking & Tracking**
  We can work with you to monitor improvements and indicate comparisons with similar organisations in your field.

Who it is for?

This programme is for any research organisation that needs to increase impact of its research, particularly with non-academic audiences.

Why you need it

The need to justify impact has never been greater. In the UK Higher Education Funding Councils' recent Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2014, for the first time all research-active university departments were assessed on the impact of their research (accounting for 20 per cent of the overall score) as well as on the quality of research outputs. The process for REF2020 has already begun, and if anything impact is expected to have a larger place in the assessment. We hope to give you a greater chance of achieving and collecting evidence for impact.