

social media **guide**

trust me I'm telling you stories

a guide to the new Live Web

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imagine

Maralyn had just come back from meeting the class working on the project. She was so excited she had to tell her colleagues. After a discussion over coffee, she sat down at her computer and wrote a quick paragraph on her Blog: "... and the best bit was when John said that he hadn't thought of it that way before." She posted her story and went back to work. After a few phone calls finalising details for Saturday, she posted the venue and times on her Blog. As she did so she noticed that someone from another mental health charity, this time in Newcastle, had left a comment asking how she had got the kids so fired up and telling her about a new fund that was opening in the North East. Would she be interested in doing a joint bid?, the correspondent asked. There was also a comment from John saying that he'd posted a link on his Bebo page.

Blogging :: stories with words

Love 'em or hate 'em Blogs are everywhere. Politicians have them. Celebrities have them. Even the bosses of big corporate companies boast about their online journals. For some they are self-indulgent rambles about what you had for tea. For others they are a sign that the power of publishing and media has been taken out of the hands of Big Media and now everyone has a voice. The truth is, they're both.

In simple terms, a Blog is an easily updated webpage which places the most recent content at the top. That's about it really. You can add a calendar so that readers can track back through recent posts, a search box etc but essentially it's a personal page or journal. The real magic though comes in that all the posts on the Blog have a button that readers can click and then comment on the story. Those comments are then added to the posting. Postings can have as many comments as you like. They can all be from different people or they might be a backwards and forwards discussion with someone asking the author a question, getting a response and ending up in a conversation.

Critics are right. Some Blogs are boring accounts of the everyday. Yes, there are some Blogs that we might find very distasteful, even dangerous. But there are many that consist of useful information and links the author has found. Others are more journalistic with news and views from communities. Still others are simply passionate arguments or accounts. And then there are some that are just stories of real life.

There are two ways in which you could begin to engage with the world of Blogs. Firstly you could just read them. Find ones that are relevant to your work, issue, community etc. and then read. To find relevant Blogs, use a search engine like www.technorati.com. When you have found a Blogger that's useful, look at the links she includes on her site. They'll point you towards others. You might find information, news or a new perspective. You might find someone who you can work with. If you find something good, leave a comment. That new relationship might lead somewhere.

Secondly you could launch your own (see Box on setting-up). Don't worry, this is not like setting up a website. Think of it as opening a notebook. At one level, Blogs are a very efficient way of distributing information. If you have some news or information supporters, stakeholders and even the media, post it on your Blog. Your supporters, members and journalists can subscribe to your Blog and get the information as soon as you write it. No need to send out printed press releases or spend ages by the fax machine.

But Blogs are more than newswires. They are story-telling spaces. You can use them to show why you are doing what you are doing and allow others to contact you. Just start writing - short pieces, long pieces whatever. Talk about the family you just met. Tell the story of your office or the last council meeting. Tell your readers why that parkland is important. The key thing is to sound like you're a real person and like the issue you're involved in is important. Don't try and write like a reporter or a spin doctor - write like a human. Don't write a funding proposal or an annual report, tell stories. Don't feel as though you have to write a lot or even every day. Maybe tell your readers that'll you be adding a new story every Friday afternoon. Remember you're talking with people not at them.

Finally think of your Blog as your part of a conversation. If you find an interesting or even annoying posting on someone else's Blog, write a response on your Blog. Link to their entry by copying the web address of their posting into your story. Your Blog will then automatically add your story to theirs as a comment.

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pros & cons

pros:

1. Free and easy to use - no need to know about web programming or get techies involved
2. Easy to subscribe to - keep in constant touch with supporters
3. Interactive - people can start conversations with you
4. Accessible - being mainly text-based, Blogs are very easy for people using screen-readers.

cons:

1. Can be difficult to remember how to write like a real person and not sound like a PR person
 2. Can be addictive - set yourself set times to update
 3. Conversations can be time consuming - set yourself times to answer comments and make sure it's clear on the Blog
 4. Some of your supporters might not have Internet access so keep in contact in other ways.
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get started

1. Go to www.wordpress.com and set up a free account
 2. Give your Blog a name that's relevant and attractive e.g. saveourpond.wordpress.com
 3. Put a link on your existing site to your new Blog. Also add the address to your letterhead and email signature
 4. Write a story about a real experience that sums up what your campaign or service is all about
 5. Visit www.technorati.com and search for your issue or area of work. Read a few of the Blogs and then write a response on your Blog.
 6. Work out and publish a schedule that tells your readers when you will be adding stories and when you will be responding.
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top tips

1. Think small - short and often. Think of it as keeping in contact with friends
 2. Think human - tell stories and talk like a real person who's passionate about what they do
 3. Be honest - admit when you've got it wrong or don't know
 4. Link - point your readers to other interesting Bloggers or sources of information
 5. Tell everyone about your Blog.
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... a story

Simon Blake is the CEO of Brook, the sexual health charity for young people. The Charity already had a successful website (www.brook.org.uk) but Simon decided to launch a Blog so he could talk directly to supporters, partners and anyone interested in issues around sexual health. Called 'Talking of Sex', his Blog at <http://brookcentres.blogspot.com> gives him a space to talk about the organisation, the people he meets as well as his opinions and perspectives on the important issues his organisation is dealing with.

His Blog is more than a platform for Simon to sound off. People leave comments about their experiences or their own ideas. Simon says that sometimes he wonders whether his Blog is making any difference and then he finds people saying: "Oh you're the one that Blogs. It can be quite overwhelming sometimes," he says. "Blogging makes you reflect on your work. It keeps me connected."

Simon had been worried about broaching controversial issues but found that Blogging was an ideal way of establishing his organisation's position: "Blogging helps me be a bit bolder in what I say about our issues. We've found it's completely safe to do it, indeed it's impossible not to."

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imagine

The Council was due to make its decision about the wasteground tomorrow. Councillor Smith sat by his computer and looked at the site. He was used to the group's rhetoric now but there was something different on the site. There was a photo of the ground and a link that said: "more". Councillor Smith clicked on the link and suddenly his screen was filled with pictures. There were ones of children playing, football teams, a group of Scouts building a den from trees. There were picture of kite flyers and dog walkers, old ladies with a flask of tea on a bench, cyclists, walkers. There were pictures by amateur photographers of the wasteground at sunset. There were out-of-focus cameraphone self-portraits. What was more these pictures all shared a common title: 'Save Ambridge Common' and they had attracted comments from well beyond Ambridge. People in surrounding villages left best wishes. People from around the world were asking to be kept in touch on the fate of the wasteground. Councillor Smith turned his attention to the proposal to be voted on tomorrow. He was no longer facing a couple of activists... he was facing a community.

Flickr.com :: stories with pictures

The leading photo-sharing site is Flickr (www.flickr.com). In short, a free account at Flickr lets you upload your digital photographs, from your computer, by email or direct from your mobile phone. You can add titles, descriptions and keywords or tags. You can arrange them into sets or albums and set the copyright on each image. You can specify that all images are your copyright and people can't use them or you can use what is called a "Creative Commons" licence which means that people are free to use your work for non-commercial purposes as long as they give you a credit.

When your Flickr gallery is up and running, you can then use a simple piece of code to 'embed' the pictures on your site. Visitors to your site will see your images but you don't have to worry about hosting or arranging them. You can have a gallery on your site run for free by Flickr.

So far so good but Flickr is based on sharing - and like all the Live Web sites and services, conversations. You can add keywords or tags to your Flickr photos so that people searching on the site for "Ambridge" will find your pictures and your campaign or organisation. If you include other tags such as "park", "playground" etc, people will find your work who are possibly also interested in play etc. Similarly, you might find them by searching for "play" or "park". A new connection is made and you might be able to work together.

Another key aspect of Flickr is that visitors can leave comments. Someone leaving a comment is someone talking to you, expressing an interest in what you are doing. If you respond, maybe it's the start of a new relationship which might be a fundraising or campaigning relationship. It might be a potential partner... who knows. And of course you can leave comments on other photos and open a dialogue that way too.

Potentially the real power of Flickr comes in groups. In our imaginary example, the Save Ambridge Common group's photos were part of a larger network of images taken by the local rambles, dog walkers, kite flyers and kids. They were all linked together by common tags but they were also part of a Flickr Group. Anyone can start a group and then encourage others to post their photos to that Group. Not only do you get lots of interesting images but you get people feeling as though they are part of a group whether that is a campaign or a fundraising group. They own it. They have a stake in it.

More and more people are taking pictures. The availability of cheap digital cameras and in particular the ubiquity of mobile phone cameras mean that people are documenting their lives like never before. Many of your supporters will be taking photos. They'll be taking them at your events but they may also be taking pictures that are about your issue. Many will be taking their photos on their mobile phones and sharing them with friends and family. If you brought them together on Flickr together with images you've taken, pictures of your fundraising garden party or the lobby of parliament, you have a documentary built (and owned) by the people involved. And to the outsider, your organisation looks as though it is at the heart of a vibrant community of people passionate about an issue or idea.

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pros & cons

pros:

1. Free and easy to use - Flickr gives you free tools to upload and resize your images
2. Easy to set up Groups to link people together
3. Easy to embed images on your site - you can embed one picture or a whole album
4. Reach - your photos will be seen by more people on Flickr than on your site.

cons:

1. You can't control what other photographers do - they might use you tag on images you don't like
 2. Groups can get very big and might drift off the focus you set. Be very clear on the Group page
 3. Although you are only legally responsible for the images that you own, you might have a professional responsibility to ensure that your network of photographers are aware of issues around Internet safety and copyright
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get started

1. Go to www.flickr.com and set up a free account
 2. Think of a name for the Flickr page that's relevant and attractive. It might be your organisation or it might be the issue. Put a link to your homepage on your Flickr profile
 3. Upload, describe and tag some photos. Think of tags that people might search for and include your organisation's name
 4. Create a Flickr 'badge' and embed it on your site
 5. Start a Flickr group around your issue
 6. Encourage supporters to upload relevant photos to the group. Use your Blog as well as offline communications
 7. Search on Flickr for other groups and photographers taking pictures that are relevant. Leave some comments and invitations to join your Group
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top tips

1. Get as many photographers 'covering' your story as possible
 2. Don't look for 'great photographs'. Look for passionate pictures, ones that tell a story even if it is a bit out of focus
 3. Think of a set of tags that every photographer knows to add to any of their pictures
 4. Publicise your album and group. Link to it from all your other Live Web spaces.
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... and a story

Sobell House is an Oxford based hospice (www.sobellhospiceoxford.org). It uses Flickr to host all of its photos [<http://www.flickr.com/people/sobellhospiceoxford/>]. "It's so much easier than the running battles with designers or having to administer them," says fundraiser Kevin Game. Sobell House encourages its supporters to upload their photos and link them into the charity's images. Sobell House has found that people contact the charity after finding images on the site. Some ask if they can use the images and some just want to know more.

Kevin is exploring the possibilities of using the site to make contacts outside the charity world. "Flickr builds a community of photo users," he says. As an example, the local Harley Davidson group attended a fundraising walk and took photos which are part of the Sobell House album of the event. Kevin is adding the tag "Harley Davidson" so that any other bikers looking for picture of their beloved bikes will find his images and his organisation. Maybe those bikers are also looking for a charity to support.

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imagine

Ray had just picked up a text message from Chris on the march. He'd got some film of the group outside Parliament and emailed it to YouTube, should be on the site in a few minutes. If he could he'd get the speeches later too. Greg checked the YouTube page. The site was still formatting the mobile phone video for the site. While he was waiting he saw that Susan in the US had posted a new update to her story about caring for her Dad. While Ray was waiting he copied the embed code from the page and pasted it onto the organisation's video page. When he refreshed the box appeared and the new 'episode' of "Young carers: the American experience" began to play. After watching it and leaving Susan a comment, he found that Chris' video was ready to embed too. Ray turned back to his own site and clicked through to the "Live March" page.

youtube.com :: stories with video

If a few years ago a request for a photo library on your site would have turned your IT person (if you had one) puce. To broach the idea of using online video, would have had them on the floor gasping for air. Even if you could find someone to shoot the stuff there were issues of different formats, storage capacity, bandwidth... No, video was for the big boys. Not now though.

The growth in cheap video cameras, particularly mobile phone cameras, the availability of free video-editing software and in particular the explosion in sites that allow you to store, share and then embed your videos on other sites, has meant we can all make films. Running alongside this technological shift has been an equally important cultural shift: We're now not frightened of the idea of making films. As we browse through YouTube videos, we're reassured that we can do that too. Videos don't have to be perfect to be powerful. They don't have to be about big things: simple often works best. They don't have to be long: short windows into a world can make all the difference. It's almost as if we've all been given permission.

As with all the Live Web media of course, the real power comes in how that story connects to other stories and therefore connects people. YouTube and its competitor sites is not just a gallery or storage space, it's a place where people leave comments, add videos to their 'favourites' lists and use tags to connect videos, stories and issues together.

When I upload a video from my computer or direct from my phone, give it a title, description and some tags, I am adding it to a global video conversation about 'carers' or 'the environment' or whatever. My video will appear alongside others that are similar. People will find it and leave comments. I will find other films and filmmakers who are as passionate and knowledgeable about the issues as I am.

When I take the piece of code that YouTube gives me that enables me to 'embed' that video on my site, it does more than save bandwidth. Sure, that code means the video plays on my page in a box. As far as the viewer's concerned, it's on my site. I don't pay to stream it or store it but it looks like it's mine. What is more important is that because it remains on YouTube where there are millions of visitors rather than on my site where there are perhaps hundreds, it has a bigger reach. People find it on YouTube, find my issue and then my site and then... me.

The fact that so many supporters and stakeholders have access to video-storytelling equipment means that it is possible to get many different perspectives and ideas buzzing around your cause or issue. You do not need to hire a professional camera crew to make THE single film. You can ask lots of people - particularly young people - to make films about your community, the parkland that's under threat, their playground or their homes. They can upload them to YouTube and as long as they include your tag, you can pull them all together. As with all this open source content idea, what a visitor sees is a vibrant and passionate community telling stories, raising awareness and potentially money. Your organisation just brings it all together and helps it happen.

It is tempting with video to think that once the film or films have been made, that's it. People watch them and that's the end. On the Live Web stories are always beginnings. It is important to remember that viewers of your - or your supporters' - videos will leave comments. They are active and see your film as the start of a conversation. You need to think about how you will respond and make use of those relationships you have set in motion. Even just a simple 'thank you' acknowledgment will do. It will keep the relationship open and who knows, that commenter may end up being one of your best fundraisers or campaigners.

www.theinternationale.org

www.mediatrust.org



theInternationale
content to be different.

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pros & cons

pros

1. Cheap and easy
2. Very powerful and direct
3. Very sexy and popular at the moment
4. Mobile. You can shoot and 'report' from anywhere.

cons

1. Difficult to upload longer videos to YouTube etc without broadband connection
 2. People you interview can be intimidated by idea of video
 3. Can be difficult to keep it short and simple. Try telling your subjects: "You have 30 secs. Tell us about your experience"
 4. As you (and your friends) shoot more, may have to think about way of archiving all the links on your site and thinking how to guide your visitor through all the stories.
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get started

1. Get your phone out and if it has a video camera point it at your colleague and ask them to say what your organisation is and to tell a story about why it's important. Keep it under a minute
 2. Go to YouTube and create an account. Think of a name that is relevant to your organisation and issue
 3. Upload the film. YouTube will give you an address that you can send your video to from your phone (via email or MMS message)
 4. If you have a video camera, try and shoot something a little longer or more complicated. Use free software like iMovie or Windows Movie Maker to edit the film
 5. Contact your local media studies teacher to see if any young people want to become part of your film making community
 6. Think of tags you want everyone to use on their films. Publicise the new film making community.
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top tips

1. Keep it simple. Tell stories and go for the details that people remember
 2. Don't get too hung up on quality. Go for the passion
 3. Remember that videos have sound. Use it to add to the atmosphere and story. You can always add soundtracks later
 4. Encourage others to add to the film show
 5. Favourite other relevant videos on your page.
-

... and a story

The International League for the Protection of Horses (ILPH) has a website which provides supporters and potential supporters with a range of information (<http://www.ilph.org/>). It also has a YouTube channel (<http://www.youtube.com/user/horsecharity>) where it posts videos it has shot. These range from the ceo explaining what the organisation does, to events and reports on horse rescues.

Visitors to the YouTube can subscribe to the channel, rate and leave comments on the videos as well as add them to their own favourites. The channel has attracted a number of 'subscribers' and 'friends' who are now connected to the organisation and its work. The channel also pulls in other relevant videos so linking it to the broader animal welfare and indeed horse communities.

As part of its work, the organisation rehabilitates horses and then loans them to good homes. Many of the people who go on to care for the horses add their own videos of how the horse is progressing. Phil Spiby, Head of Communications says: "It helps people feel part of a club. It gives them a sense of belonging. It's been a fantastic thing to get feedback."

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First coffee of the morning and Jon checked his email. There had been a flurry of activity on the site over night. More people had signed the petition and said they would be attending the march. The group that had sprung up around the event was busy with discussion about how to carry on after the day itself. It all seemed to be progressing well. Sam in Newcastle and Helen in Adelaide seemed to be co-ordinating the activity very well. Jon wondered if he'd ever meet them in the real world, as he posted an encouraging message on their pages. While on the site he noticed a new face, Su was introducing herself. She was a new teacher in Liverpool and was wondering if she could help with the march, but also if she could use it as a theme for her class to work on this term. Jon left her message and told her about Mike... he seemed to have established himself as the first port of call for the teachers who were getting involved.

social networks :: stories with friends

Social Networks are in some ways the most chaotic and difficult to grasp parts of the Live Web... and therein lies their potential. Sites like Facebook, MySpace and Bebo allow users to create their own pages. Some like MySpace and Bebo allow anyone online to see the personal sites, others like Facebook only allow other members to view the pages.

These networks are built around the idea of 'friends'. Your page is a place where your friends (real or virtual) can connect with you and you with them. You can exchange messages, play games, swap music and videos etc. Pages on social networks are part self-expression and part bulletin board for conversations. And that's where they start to get interesting.

Different social networks have different atmospheres and different communities. Bebo tends to be for younger teens, MySpace has a lot of musicians and wannabee artists while Facebook is increasingly popular with young adult professionals. There are even networks such as LinkedIn that cater for the business networking market. What happens when people of similar ages and cultures get together on these networks is that they find common interests and make new 'friends' who share an interest in a particular film director or band or social issue. The social networks encourage their members to form groups around these common interests and often provide tools for them to do so. These can include applications like calendars or alerts to help organise or online polls and recommendation tools to get other people interested.

People who spend a lot of time on social networks have lots of connections and are involved in lots of online activities. A typical user might be a member of a number of groups, be in messaging contact with real world and virtual friends and be regularly posting words, pictures and links to their social network Blog. Social networks are a little like parties with conversations starting and stopping, relationships created and ideas and stories exchanged. This is potentially very powerful for a campaigner or fundraiser looking to make new contacts or get interest going. These networks are social, their users pride themselves on connections, friends and conversations. Consequently they are particularly useful spaces to spread ideas or generate enthusiasm.

You can of course join any or all of these networks as an individual or an organisation. Be prepared however to invest quite a bit of time. Others on the networks will find you and your interests and invite you to become friends. Of course this is great in terms of making contacts and possibly widening the organisations reach but maintaining active social network presences can be intensive.

The other way in which you can make use of social networks is to make use of the 'power of crowds'. Chances are that someone in your organisation or your family already has a social network page. As part of the community they are in an ideal place to become the ambassador for your organisation and its issue. You could ask them to include a badge on their page that says that they support you. They could write on their Blog about your issue or they could raise a question and ask people to vote on it. If they were really keen they could start (or join) a group. These could be short-lived; maybe leading up to a march or event, or longer-term; raising awareness, discussing or campaigning. Chances are these social networkers will be 'digital natives' and so will also be using YouTube and Flickr etc so they will be able to bring other media together. These ambassadors will also know how to 'speak' and interact in these spaces. They will be able to exploit the network potential to the full.

social media **guide**

pros & cons

pros

1. The biggest party you'll ever be invited to. There MUST be people who can help you out there
2. Passionate and active community of users, many of whom are politically and socially active
3. Can take on a creative life of its own
4. Very high-profile at the moment... lot of potential media coverage.

cons

1. Can be intimidating for first timer
 2. Can be time consuming. If you're playing there, set yourself targets and time limits and let your networks know
 3. Can be fickle. What is fashionable to talk about today may not be tomorrow
 4. Difficult to get tone of voice right
 5. Impossible to control
-

get started

1. Visit sites that don't require registration to view (most except Facebook) and look at the sorts of conversations online. Search for relevant groups and postings
 2. Find out if any of your supporters (or their children!) are already involved. Ask for their advice or enlist as ambassadors. Decide which networks to work with
 3. Set clear aims and timelimits e.g. get signatures for an online petition, recruit for event, get ideas for new schools pack
 4. Create an account on your chosen networks. make sure the name is relevant and attractive
 5. Look for groups on the network you can join before starting a new one
 6. Regularly review what your presence on the networks is achieving.
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top tips

1. Make use of 'digital natives' to be your ambassadors. Be sure to support them
 2. Don't try and be something you're not. Be human and use your real passionate voice
 3. Don't worry if your space is not all about work. People might connect with you because of your love of knitting and then get involved in campaigning on climate change
 4. Find ways to integrate the online and offline worlds. Invite your 'friends' to your events or arrange to meet on the march.
 5. Connect your social network page to your other Live Web work e.g. your photos on Flickr, your favourite videos on YouTube etc.
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... and a story

The Mersey Basin Campaign (www.merseybasin.org.uk) is an environmental organisation based in the North West of England. The Campaign has its own Blog (<http://merseybasin.typepad.co.uk/>) and as a way of getting new material, it came up with the idea of getting some colleagues who were taking part in the Mongol Rally (London - Ulan Bator) in a 'green' car to take a Mersey Basin carved wooden salmon.

The idea at the start was that they'd deliver the fish along with a solar panel and laptop, to a local school in the Gobi desert. But the Live Web took over. The fish ended up being passed to some backpackers, who took it to China. The backpackers then established a Facebook group to chart the fish's journey, and she's now on her third 'guardian', somewhere in Burma - (www.travellingfishy.com).

It hadn't been the Mersey Basin Campaign's idea to use Facebook, there supporters had done it themselves. As Kate Fox, the Campaign's New Media Manager says: "we'd fought shy of 'doing' Facebook, but it happened organically, giving us a chance to post information and get our stories out to a whole new audience."

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imagine

There were always going to be teething problems. It was a simple idea but families who used it would find problems early on. Gina knew that. She also knew that the users would have ideas about how to improve it for the next release. She checked the forum on the site and there were a range of new bugs that people had found as well as some basic "how do I..?" sort of questions. There were one or two questions that hadn't received a response yet and obviously one that only Gina at the organisation could respond to. But overwhelmingly the questions had been answered by the users themselves. The more experienced or frankly the more confident, had waded in and helped the newbies with simple advice on how to set it up so Granny could use it. What Gina noticed was that these helpers were increasingly pointing new questioners through to answers and help that had already been given. No real work to do there, she thought and turned back to working on release 2, the Forum had given her some new ideas she wanted to explore.

Forums :: stories, questions and answers

Forums and their sister technology email lists have been around for a long time. They were there before the first dot-com bubble of the 90s and they're still there as the Venture Capitalists plough money into sexy new technologies now. One of the reasons they've survived is because they're simple, they're accessible and they work. The ideas of asking a question and getting an answer or answering somebody else is an intuitive idea and one that fits with the way humans interact.

The technologies that enabled these interactions were never very complex but they were a bit geeky. To set them up you needed to know a bit about computers and databases. Not now of course. Services like Nabble (www.nabble.com) and Webride (www.webride.org) will host the forum and let you embed it on your site. As far as your visitor is concerned, they're using your service but Nabble or Webride deal with all the techie end.

Similarly if you want to run a mailing list where users can get together and discuss, you can use the free email groups available via Yahoo or Google. Let the big guys look after the technology and just provide a link on your site. Members of the list send questions to a single address and their mail goes to everyone on the list. Both Google and Yahoo archive the list/group on the Web so they act a little like a web-based forum too.

On the positive side when they're working well, forums and lists can be a great time saver. In effect users of the forum become your unpaid help desk. They can't and shouldn't deal with everything but they can be invaluable. They also get a great deal out of feeling as though they are making a difference, a sense of ownership.

Forums and lists can also be useful organisational tools. There may be a thread leading up to an event allowing active organisers to keep in touch and work out logistics in a controlled and confined space.

On another side, Forums and to a lesser extent lists, demand management. At one end, because it is YOUR forum, you are responsible, morally and potentially legally for what goes on there. Unlike other people's Blogs or Social Network pages, if someone posts copyrighted material or libelous comments, as the host of that space, you are liable. Most experts agree that if you are seen to take reasonable precautions and swift action, you'll be alright, but that doesn't mean you have less work to do monitoring and managing the public forums. At the other end, there is nothing worse than a dead forum. It says the wrong thing about your organisation and its issues. Successful forums have someone looking after them, adding new stimulus material that gets read even if it doesn't generate debate. They respond and generally act like gardeners. This is a skilled and time-consuming business. Hopefully your community will take on those roles as spaces develop but in the early days you may have to find someone to do it.

As with all Live Web spaces and conversations, forums and lists can spin out of control. This may seem frightening but it needn't be. If you find people start discussing issues that you'd not prompted or thought about, let them. In fact think about how you can address those issues. They're important to your people. Maybe they should be important to your organisation.

Finally, because you are the 'owner' and people have joined the forum/list there are potentially all the hassles of lost passwords and support. Unlike RSS where leaving is easy, just deleting the feed from a reader, people can find it difficult to unsubscribe from a list and get very annoyed that YOU keep sending them the discussions!

social media **guide**

pros & cons

pros.

1. Cheap, simple and accessible
2. Easy to install and embed
3. Low learning curve for users
4. Can be very effective in developing supportive community
5. Can be good way of monitoring what supporters and friends think.

cons.

1. Can be difficult to kick start
 2. Have to be managed
 3. Can be liable for content
 4. If become stagnant can reflect badly on organisation's activity.
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get started

1. Work out what topics you want people to discuss. Make them specific, next conference agenda, how to reach single mums etc
 2. Write a series of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) that can be a topic in the forum
 3. Use Nabble or Webride or similar to set up forum and embed on your site
 4. Post first couple of topics
 5. Set schedule to monitor, garden and tend the forum
 6. Encourage any active users
 7. Have strategy for closing the forum giving any users other ways of discussing and interacting with you.
-

top tips

1. Don't try and add too many topics. Start with one and let people spin off new ones
 2. Contributions don't have to be long. Even short acknowledgments keep the conversation going
 3. Be sure to answer any questions aimed at 'the organisation' as quickly as possible
 4. Have an FAQs section that covers the organisation and another which covers the Forum dealing with issues to do with etiquette, passwords, logins, extent of responsibility etc.
-

... and a story

Epilepsy Action's website (<http://www.epilepsy.org.uk/>) includes the usual material that an organisation needs to provide to supporters and those seeking its help. But the site also includes a Forum (<https://www.forum4e.com/>) allowing people with epilepsy to talk, discuss and support each other.

The Forum is closed. Only people with epilepsy are allowed to use it and they have to apply for a login. This ensures that the Forum remains tightly focused and allows a feeling of security and confidentiality for users. Epilepsy Action has a part-time administrator who moderates the Forum and corrects any factual inaccuracies. The Forum now has 3,000 members with over 400 regularly using the space to talk about living with epilepsy, benefits etc.

Mark Morton, the organisation's Digital Media Manager, believes the site offers a way for people with epilepsy to support each other. "The benefit of the Internet is that we can communicate with people. The benefit of the Forum is that it allows people to communicate with each other," he says. "Invariably someone's been there."

social media **guide**

imagine

Sam had just been told the baby had Down's Syndrome. After the initial shock, Sam had turned to her computer and Googled 'Down's Syndrome' - 1,670,000 results. Where should she begin? The people at the hospital had given her some booklets and the name of the local organisation supporting parents of children with learning difficulties. After 20 minutes getting more confused and overwhelmed, she googled the organisation and went to its site. It wasn't as flashy as some sites but it had the usual navigation including a page called "Information". On that page were other links: "Latest medical research", "Benefits and money" and one that caught Sam's eye: "Just been told your baby has Down's?" She clicked on it and found herself on a page that brought together bookmarks, news, videos, photos and Blog entries all talking about exactly how she was feeling. There was still lots of information, but it was all obviously chosen by people who understood. At the bottom of the page was a request: "If you find any other useful information online, tag it with "Down's Syndrome" and "Ambridge Learning Difficulties Alliance", it'll end up here for the next parent to find."

Tags :: connecting stories

There's a lot of stuff out there. Words and now pictures, video and audio. Google et al do their best to help us find it but at best Google is a clever machine. It can't judge relevancy only how many people link to a page. It can't recommend: people do that. We have the information and stories we've created and we have the one's we've found. Each of us is an expert on something.

Well the Live Web enables Jo's knowledge to work harder. If Jo tags all the pieces she writes for the Blog, all the photos she takes and all the videos she's uploaded to YouTube with the right keywords, they'll all be linked together and people will be able to find them. If she tags all the bookmarks she has with the same tag, that brings them together too. Take our imaginary example. Ambridge Learning Difficulties Alliance adds the keywords "down's syndrome", "learning disabilities", "learning difficulties" and "Ambridge Learning Difficulties Alliance" to all the postings on its Blog. It asks any of its members who post content online to do the same. It also uses the tag "mental handicap". Now it knows that this term is no longer acceptable but it also knows that a lot of people (maybe new parents) still use the term and may search for it. The Alliance goes further though. It tags content others have created. It uses <http://del.icio.us> to tag its bookmarks. Rather than having all the bookmarks (the web addresses the Alliance uses most frequently) on the office computer's browser, they are saved on the del.icio.us site so they can be accessed from anywhere and they are all tagged.

So now all the good information and personally recommended content that Jo and her colleagues have amassed over years in the area is tagged. Anyone using tag search engines like www.technorati.com find that information. Anyone searching on del.icio.us finds the bookmarks around Down's Syndrome recommended by Ambridge Learning Difficulties Alliance as well as those recommended by others who really know the subject.

The final step in the puzzle is to bring all that information together. A site like www.pageflakes.com allows you to set up a single page (that you could link to from your site) which automatically pulls in the latest content with your tags on. You could have a pageflakes page for the organisation's tag that pulls in the latest news - from the mainstream media as well as so-called 'citizen's media. You could have one that pulls in everything that is tagged with "Down's Syndrome medical research". Each page would have Blog stories, photos, videos, bookmarks, news. You, your organisation and your partners become human filters for the best information. You become an authority.

But the real power comes when that authority is shared. To continue our example, there are other Jo's around the world. If they agree on a common set of tags the information can work harder. Sam can get the expertise of a worldwide collection of experts and Jo can possibly find things that she would never have come across as well as sharing her own finds with similar hard-pressed professionals.

And one other thing, using tags and 'social bookmarking' services helps you work more effectively. You no longer have to worry about filing something in just one place. That bookmarked site may have useful information about medical research but also about benefits. You don't have to decide which 'folder' to put it in. Give it two tags: 'medical research' and 'benefits' and it's filed under both. It's not only your clients who can find things, you can too. By tagging information you make it more findable and usable.

social media **guide**

pros & cons

pros:

1. Makes information manageable
2. More people can find your information
3. Makes it portable. You can access your bookmarks and even your database from anywhere
4. Connects your information and you to other experts.

cons:

1. Can be difficult to agree on tags. You may have to focus on what people would search for rather than what you're like them to search for
 2. You can't stop people tagging content, even stuff you don't want associated with your brand or issue
 3. Bookmarks can go out of date
-

get started

1. Agree on set of tags relevant to your organisation and issue. Look online for what others in your area use and match that so you're connected (yes you may have to use americanisms!)
 2. Tell everyone across your organisation (and friends outside) to add tags to their Blog postings, Flickr photos, YouTube videos etc.
 3. Set up an account at <http://del.icio.us> and import and tag your bookmarks. You can specify which bookmarks are public and which private. Place link on your site to your del.icio.us page
 4. Create page at www.pageflakes.com. Link to it from your site.
 5. Search at www.technorati.com for your tags and right click on the 'subscribe' link. Copy link and add the 'RSS feed' to your pageflakes page.
 6. Add the RSS feeds for the searches, your del.icio.us bookmarks and other tagged content to your info page.
-

top tips

1. Encourage visitors to your site to add your pages to their del.icio.us and other bookmarking services. You can put a 'widget' on your page that allows users to bookmark the story
 2. Publicise your tags. The more people that know them, the more content will be tagged
 3. Use a site like www.bloglines.com to subscribe to searches so that you can see what other people are tagging
 4. Make sure everyone in the organisation is doing it. If someone is still guarding their own filing cabinet or bookmarks, you and your clients are missing out
 5. When you're tagging, try and be specific i.e. not just 'environment' but 'canal, environment, Newcastle'
-

... and a story

There are a lot of techies and geeks helping charities, organisations, or - as the Americans call them 'non-profits' make use of ICT. There is a lot of expertise and ideas around. The problem has been that that information has been on countless different websites and people's Blogs and in their bookmarks etc.

Back in December 2004, a new tag began to appear on del.icio.us: 'nptech'. It's difficult to know who started it but it soon took off and the community began to add it to their bookmarks, their Blog entries etc. It wasn't the only tag they used - they used other relevant ones such as 'content management systems' or 'open source' but all of the content they had around ICT for 'non profits' was pulled together by the tag.

The tag spread beyond del.icio.us to include PowerPoint slides upload to SlideShare, Blog postings, videos... in fact all manner of useful content, pulling the community of like-minded people together.

Chris Blow, an activist in the area says: "I think that the development of this tag is arguably the single largest reason for the current (thriving I think) state of what is commonly called the 'nptech community'." The specially developed tag has now spawned other np tags including: npblog, npflickr, npnl (nonprofit second life), nptag (nonprofit tagging), npyoutube and others helping the geeks and the organisations they help find the best content.

social media **guide**

imagine

The vicar had just phoned. He was going to have to ask them to move the meeting, something about a leak in the hall, would Su be able to move the meeting to the old building down the road. Su knew there was no choice but she had to contact the organising committee, the speakers and the 6 groups who were coming... oh and the local journalist who'd promised to cover the event. She picked up her mobile. She typed: "Save Our Hospital meet moved. Now Old church hall, High Street. Pass the word." She sent the single message. Within minutes Su's phoned buzzed. A message from the MP's secretary. Another from George who was organising the catering. A third from someone in Ireland who was involved in the campaign there, just wishing her luck. A little later she sent another message asking whether the group thought they should lay on some wine. Within a minute, Jo replied from Sainsbury's he'd pick up a few bottles. Su looked at her watch and thought she'd better phone the journalist. He hadn't got the hang of Twitter yet. better just check.

Mobile :: stories wherever/whenever you like

There are currently 1.244 billion internet users worldwide, on about a billion PCs. There are 3 billion mobile phones in use. In the UK, 63.8% of the population are Internet users while 79% have mobile phones. The mobile phone is the most widespread and potentially powerful IT tool we have and it crosses the age, class and gender lines. Kids obviously have them, but so do Grannies.

Of course it's possible to make sure your website is mobile-ready so that people can access your site via the new generation of mobile phones. An easy way to set up a mobile-version of your site is to use a services like www.winksite.com. Winksite allows you to easily create a site that people can see on their small screen. You can create a very simple site with contact details and a page or two that explains what you do but winksite offers lots of scope to add news (that can be pulled in from your main site) and even chat rooms and forums, all for free.

As phones become more sophisticated and people expect to be able to get their information on their phone, it will become more important that organisations can be easily reached wherever and whenever people want.

Mobile sites are one thing but there are potentially more powerful ways of using the network people carry in their pocket, ways that reach way beyond the early adopters who want to surf the web in the palm of their hand.

Twitter is a site that brings together 'micro-Blogging' and 'messaging'. At its most basic you can use Twitter as a way to create a mobile micro Blog. When you sign up for a free account at www.twitter.com you are given a UK phone number. Any text message you send to that number will appear on your Twitter page. Even if Twitter only did this, it would be good. It means anyone can set up a Blog really easily and update it from anywhere, anytime. The runners you have in the Marathon could micro-Blog as they're going round: "London bridge and it's starting to hurt. Still, £3k for the hospice". The kids you are working with could tell stories of their communities and play in short stories (under 140 characters): "10 o'clock. The playground gate's locked. Back to the carpark I guess."

But Twitter does more. Other Twitter users can choose to 'follow' you. When you post something, the message or story gets sent to their mobile phone as a text message. If you have 20 followers, it goes to everyone. You only pay for the one text message you sent to the site. This is obviously a great (and cheap) way of keeping people up-to-date. But it's also a way of asking for information from your network: "About to go into meeting. Anyone got any new facts we can present?". It's also a way of sharing ideas or asking questions: "Can you ask around and see if people like the idea of joining forces." Essentially Twitter takes the power of networks and conversations mobile.

Using it with your own group or existing network is one thing but Twitter is worldwide. You could expand your followers (or the people you follow) to include others in your area. maybe they'll have information about the latest developments or a fresh perspective. Maybe they'll have some ideas. Maybe they'll just be able to offer support.

A key thing about Twitter and similar services such as www.tumblr.com and www.jaiku.com is that because they are based on mobile phones, the learning curve is really easy. Users don't have to have computers or even know about the Internet. They don't have to worry about the protocols or technologies that are behind it. All they need to know is that the Twitter entry in their address book sends a message to everyone in the organisation and that the message they receive has similarly gone around everyone.

social media **guide**

pros & cons

pros:

1. Cheap multiple SMS messaging
2. Easy to set up and use. Perfect for the computer-phobic
3. Simple and direct idea. Can use it for simple controlled things like information delivery or freer idea-sharing and brainstorming
4. Accessible anywhere and anytime.

cons:

1. Can be difficult to stop being verbose and telling stories in 140 characters (can be seen as a positive thing!)
 2. Can be difficult to integrate into your site. There are ways of embedding your 'Tweets' but they might need a bit of contextualising
 3. Can be overwhelming in terms of responses. You can set Twitter to notify your phone or just your Twitter page when those you are following say something
 4. If you are part of a worldwide network, their Tweets might arrive in the middle of the night! You can set Twitter to only notify you at set times.
-

get started

1. Go to www.twitter.com and set up a free account
 2. Give your Twitter stream a name that's relevant and attractive
 3. Put a link on your existing site to your new Twitter stream and encourage people to "follow" you. Twitter will help you send an email to people encouraging them to sign up
 4. Do a short and simple training session at your next meeting to show colleagues and supporters how easy it is
 5. As well as general small story-telling, try to plan using Twitter to help with specific event e.g. conference or lobby
 5. When you have some followers, look at who they are following and see if it might be worth introducing yourself.
-

top tips

1. As well as using Twitter to get and share information, use it to tell short stories
 2. Twitter in the moment. Tell that story of the family you met as soon as you leave them, when the picture's still in your mind
 3. Use Twitter to alert people to things you find online. Include the address
 4. Twitter questions as well as answers. Make use of your network
 5. Be creative. See the 140 character limit as a creative challenge not a shortcoming.
-

... and a story

YoMo provides practical training for schools, youth & community groups in young peoples participation [<http://www.yomo.co.uk/>]. It used Twitter at a recent conference to enable attendees to play a full part.

Tim Davies set up a conference Twitter page and asked people attending the conference to "follow" the new account. Conference organisers were able to send messages to all attendees throughout the event and in turn they could Twitter their own contributions which would be added to the conference page which was projected in the main room, and on tickers running along the top of each powerpoint presentation being given.

The young people attending the conference took up the offer immediately and even the adult participants used it. Tim believes it added an interactive element to gaining feedback and could be used more to help create networks, particularly of young people.

"It cost us nothing to set up. And it provided some really insightful gut-reaction instant feedback throughout the event," Tim says.

social media **guide**

imagine

Simon had to have the new strategy paper ready for the Trustees meeting by a week on Tuesday. He could write it himself of course but with the delicate political situation within the organisation he didn't want to go it alone. He hated the word 'stakeholders' but unless the whole organisation felt ownership, the Trustees would never buy it. He looked on the Wiki. His initial page of themes had sprung off in all directions. The fundraiser had linked from his discussion of 'single parents' to another page of ideas about marginalised groups and a new EU fund. The school-teacher they'd worked with last year had edited the page on education correcting a misunderstanding and linking to a Guardian article. Most interestingly, the intern had bounced off one of the campaigns pages and written a thoughtful piece about her own experience. Simon never knew she had been through it to. He added a link back to the main report structure page and left a note asking her to have a coffee next time she was in. She really had something to add.

Wikis :: stories told with other people

When we think of Wikis we tend to think of wikipedia - the collaborative encyclopedia built with the 'wisdom of crowds'. At wikipedia, anyone can begin a new article or edit an existing one and make it better. There is of course a lot of debate about whether wikipedia is as accurate and reliable as encyclopedia's built by the great and the good from the top-down, but one thing is sure, the wikipedia is built with passion, enthusiasm and involvement. Everyone who adds to it or makes it better is doing so out of their interest in the issue or subject. They have a stake in the ownership of their encyclopedia. It is those issues of passion, enthusiasm, involvement and ownership which are at the heart of the wiki way. And it is those that offer great potential for teams and organisations.

To install or use a wiki within an organisation is at one level to offer a giant whiteboard where anyone can write documents together, collect together information or just brainstorm and connect ideas. The ability to easily add 'pages' and connect them together means not only that lots of material can be amassed, connected and made searchable - a bit like an organisational encyclopedia - but that everyone can get involved. Enabling everyone across an organisation to contribute their knowledge, information and experience means an organisation is making the best use of the information and knowledge that is spread across people's desks and inside their heads.

But wikis offer more than that. Because they are more informal than traditional knowledge management systems, people can feel able to add ideas, notes and thoughts to the mix. Your team has a wealth of experience and ideas as well as codified knowledge. Because creating a wiki page and linking it to others is so easy and informal, people can feel happy to add informal notes or asides to the mix. These may spur others into making connections, adding and bouncing idea round. In effect we have an encyclopedia and brainstorm space in one.

Wikis, whether you use software on your own server (like the free mediawiki software that runs wikipedia) or on a free host like wikispaces, pbwiki or wetpaint all work on the same principle. Every page has an 'edit' button. When you click on it you can change any text and add links either to another or new page on the wiki, or to another website. That's about it.

The most important thing to remember is that wikis are a radical thing for most people, particularly people in organisations. We are not used to being asked to contribute on equal terms, to being given permission to join in and add our thoughts and ideas. We are not used to be told to just get involved, pitch in and help build something. We are not used to having informal thoughts and notes valued alongside polished, finished documents. As such any organisation looking to develop a wikispace needs to look at training and supporting its staff so that they can play a full part and the potential network effects can work their wonders.

It is the power of wikis to make information work harder and becoming knowledge that offers huge potential for organisations willing to open up and enable their teams and stakeholders and clients become involved.

As well as acting as archives or encyclopedias, wikis can help organisations and movements plan. Wikis can enable the sharing of information prior to events. But they can also be used as a creative thinking space for more general brainstorming. Many corporates including Sony, Nokia and investment bank Dresdner Kleinwort Wasserstein are now using them as a means of team building and also as a way of planning.

social media **guide**

pros & cons

pros

1. Limitless space to brainstorm ideas while keeping them all connected and searchable
2. Effectively gives permission for everyone to contribute easily and on equal terms
3. Very effective at cutting out emails and sending documents backwards and forwards
4. Can create organic archive that matches the way people work and think. People create their own links, categories and taxonomies

cons

1. Can be difficult to get people involved. As well as training, offer some simple, direct challenges e.g. "can you add a paragraph about X"
 2. Can be difficult to manage, particularly if you make it open. You can set membership options and always roll back any changes
 3. Can have cultural implications. Once you have opened up the organisation and its thinking, it's hard to go back.
-

get started

1. Go to www.wikispaces.com and create a free account
 2. Decide what your wiki will be about. Planning an event, producing a report, building a resource
 3. Decide whether it will be members only or open. If open work out how you will manage it.
 4. Run a training session with any users explaining the technology but more importantly, the principles and philosophy
 5. Set a timescale and evaluate results.
-

top tips

1. Be clear about your aim and your timescale. Make sure everyone knows.
 2. Get everyone on board from senior managers to stakeholders, clients and friends. Harness the wisdom of crowds.
 3. Set up some initial themes or areas so that people aren't faced with a blank slate
 5. Make the wiki part of the work process. Can work be done on the wiki that would normally have been done by email or passing documents around?
 6. Incentivise use. Publicise creative use internally and externally
 7. Look for some quick wins. Maybe an article in the staff newsletter written on the wiki or a project that's been easier because it was co-ordinated on the wiki
 8. Enable people to access the wiki from home. Sometimes creativity doesn't work 9-5
-

... and a story

Penny Wilson, a playworker and trainer with the Play Association of Tower Hamlets had long thought that playworkers were not sharing their knowledge and experiences not only so they could learn from each other, but also so that stories could be collected together for research and development.

She set up a wiki (www.theinternationale.net/playstories) where frontline playworkers could simply add stories from their playgrounds. The wiki made it easy and informal. She found that playworkers did not have to worry about the technology or even how they wrote. They could just leave notes and experiences for others to read, connect with and share.

Penny says: "We were looking for a simple and direct way of sharing stories and building an archive. The Wiki made it easy, even for playworkers who hate computers."

social media **guide**



the Internationale content to be different.

the Internationale is a Live Web content consultancy run by Paul Caplan, a journalist, teacher and coach. the Internationale specialises in helping clients rediscover the lost art of conversation.

blog monitoring

the Internationale offers a Live Web audit looking at how an organisation is talking and being talked about on social networks and in the Blogosphere

qualitative & quantitative

content to be different
where the Internationale is different is in its approach. the Internationale's audit provides quantitative statistics on mentions, links, comments etc. But it also offers an in-depth discourse analysis of those conversations. Using tools from literary and narrative analysis, the internationale looks at the language used to tell and respond to a business' stories.

web2.0 training

the Internationale offers training in Live Web communication for individuals and teams, both face-to-face and through e-learning.

communicating with VISION

content to be different
where the Internationale is different is in its focus. the Internationale helps communicators tell stories on Blogs, Wikis and social networks using the principles of VISION - voice, i with a small i, simple, improvise, open source and narrative. the Internationale helps communicators rediscover the power of talking like a human being and having conversations.

paul caplan

Paul has written for national magazines including Marketing Week, the Lawyer and New Media Age and his illustrations and photographs have appeared in magazines including the Royal Institute of British Architects Journal and Finance Week. He is a qualified English Language teacher and has taught in schools, colleges and universities.

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contact

people
Those stories you're reading were written by real people. We're not demographics or targets. Look me in the eyes.

irreverant
Live Web readers have an overabundance of media, ours, yours and everyone else's.

They don't respect 'leaders' or 'experts'. We don't care about boundaries or categories.

There isn't an 'audience' or target groups. We are small niches of local interest and passion. Just dont don't think you can sell into my niche. It's mine.

Supply

niches

Passion content to be different

active
Those storytellers are doing things. We're making movies, songs and mashing up other people's media. Now we have the tools and the power we're not going to stop.

Smart
They're smart. As individuals we have real experience and information. As a crowd we know more than you.

This new Web is mine. Old media was 'theirs'. We're in charge of production and consumption. The content is ours.

ownership

voice
You're a human being, talk like one. Talk to me. I'm not a demographic or a market niche or a target. I'm a person.

Don't try and be clever. You don't have to fill every gap or silence. Look for what you can leave out as well as what you can put in.

open source
Crowdsource your communications. Start something off and let others improve it. Don't keep the source code close to your chest, get it out there where it can develop, grow and improve.

Simple

VISION content to be different

i with a small i
Be willing to be less arrogant. If you meet the Buddha on the road kill him. You have something to add but it's not the whole story.

Let the conversation develop. This is not a solo, it's a group where everyone bounces off everyone else and together build a unique conversation.

narrative
Tell your stories. Find memorable details that resonate. Paint pictures and let your listener see and your viewer hear the people, the ideas and the passion.

improvise

clients & comments



"To have over a third of respondents giving the very top score is remarkable. It's usually very difficult to get people to give the maximum." independent evaluator

"Inspiring and motivating stuff: I think by the end of his presentation, Paul had motivated the entire audience - myself included."

"The seminar has helped plant the seed in the minds of comms people about how we can begin to use some of this technology to improve and enhance the reputation of the NHS amongst key stakeholders."

"Marvellously erudite and engaging" "Excellent- He can have a job with us anytime! Great communicator"

"Superb Speaker" "Lots of passion, real life examples, infectious enthusiasm" "Paul Caplan is unique"

