

Campaign Strategy Newsletter No 29, 11 November 2006
Mass Movements Issue

- * Build on ideas - encourage people to build on what the previous person said or put up - that's how ideas develop because people have different ways of thinking
- * Make sure everyone understands the brief before you start so there is absolutely no information-giving in the brainstorm
- * Maximum of one hour, preferably 40 minutes or less
- * Lubricate with drink and food
- * Get well away from other work

Good luck.

Counterproductive Factoid of the Month

From the website <http://www.cheapflights.co.uk> and its magnificent ten reasons to keep flying. "Fact eight: Airports use less land than other forms of transport eg Rail uses seven times more land per passenger mile travelled than aviation." I hadn't thought of that. I suppose the same applies to bicycles. Better stop using them and try to fly instead.

Survey of NGO Air Travel

Readers may remember that I've asked groups campaigning on 'climate' a number of questions about their carbon monitoring and air travel policies and practices. I've now had full or holding responses from: I've now got replies from NRDC, FoE (sorry I missed you last time), RSPB, National Trust (UK), Greenpeace (Intl), WWF (Intl), ACF, WRI, CI, IUCN, UNEP, RAN, BUND, SNF, David Suzuki, NFWI (UK), WDM, Clean Air Cool Planet, EDF and Sierra Club.

That leaves Oxfam, Action Aid, Christian Aid, Union of Concerned Scientists and the National Wildlife Federation. If any reader can help encourage them to respond, I'd be grateful. (I'm at chris@campaignstrategy.org)

Thanks to all those who've helped push this survey up busy agendas. The results will be published at this website and reported in a future Newsletter.

Smile

See http://bodyandsoulcharity.org/smile/index_wmv.html for a great online fundraiser for children with HIV. Well it made me smile. (Thanks to Jon Cracknell)

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Useful

<http://www.burson-marsteller.com/pages/insights/povs> - some interesting 'think-pieces' from the brainy folk at Burson-Marsteller, the 'public affairs' company that many campaigners love to hate.

<http://www.compassnetwork.org> 'a global exchange for knowledge and creativity in sustainability communications' run by Futerra for the UK government Environment Department. Some gems amongst the not so gemlike (join up). Links to the excellent (archived) Brighton Council project Nine Lives <http://www.ninelives.tv/home/home.htm>.

'Breaking through to great Smart Strategies for Developing Winning Communications Campaigns' - an intelligent report from Spitfire -
http://www.spitfirestrategies.com/pdfs/spitfire_break_final.pdf

Are You Effective?

Helen Kerridge at the UK NCVO - National Council for Voluntary Organisations - is researching campaign effectiveness.

The 'Campaign effectiveness' programme aims to promote and share campaigning best practice between voluntary organisations through research, capacity, building and advocacy. Funded by the Big Lottery for a three year programme running until 2009. Contact: Helen.Kerridge@ncvo-vol.org.uk

From the States

In response to the news * Blair urges climate change action * Tony Blair warns the world is close to a "catastrophic tipping point" on climate change, ahead of a summit (http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/em/-/1/hi/uk_politics/6068226.stm) John Passacantando writes from Washington DC: "Saw a cartoon recently. Suburban schoolmarmish wife looking out the window saying to her husband, 'It's too bad those awful people were right about global warming.' That's us dude"

Pointless Contributions To Climate Change

Visit <http://www.campaignstrategy.org/index.html> for the latest nominations in the competition. Can anyone beat the Canadian candle warmer submitted by James Sullivan? Please try to be specific about where they come from or who is responsible for them. Ultra violet shoe dryer anyone? Jet Ski, leaf blower.... Win a copy of my book 'How To Win Campaigns'. (I'm at chris@campaignstrategy.org)

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Creating Mass Movements?

I don't know about you but I'm getting increasingly asked to help with 'campaigns' where the main motivation is to increase the number of people "engaged". It is the season for mass movement creation. Not just here in the UK but elsewhere: while 20,000 marched for climate in London on November 4, 120,000 did so in Australia, and in the USA 'mobilisation' initiatives are multiplying.

Last month the cerebral Green Alliance gathered people in London to discuss the proposition:

"From household recycling to organic food, the profile and scale of individual action to reduce environmental impacts is growing fast. But we need a step change in the scale and impact of such action... Government plays a critical role in shaping the framework within which behavioural choices are made. But how can the environmental movement and our supporters in the private sector maximise their contribution to accelerating positive trends in public behaviour?"

Some cynicism is justified about government-inspired claims that NGOs need to create political space before they can act but in a world of shifting values and professionalised politics which follows media currents, there is no doubt that NGOs need to incite, mould, catalyse and trigger cultural change as much as to articulate 'political demands' and expect politicians to pick them up.

Certainly 'climate change' enjoys a new feeling of imminence in this country. Speaking at the Green Alliance event, the Opinion Leader Research pollster Deborah Mattinson reported a "common sense of jeopardy", and spontaneous mentions of 'environment' as a concern, not seen in her weekly public focus groups since the late eighties and early nineties.

For my part I argued that to get a step change in the scale of action, 'environmental' interventions needed to intrude into new areas of every day life, groups need to be more rigorous about strategy and deploy far better marketing for campaign action mechanisms as opposed to for getting supporters, and resource campaigns more seriously.

Environmental groups also need to signal that they are serious - for example if they want others to treat climate change as if it's an emergency, and to take actions such as flying less, they need to lead by example. (See article at

<http://www.campaignstrategy.org/resources>

'How do we secure a step change in public environmental action?')

Shared Planet, Breathing Places and iCount

More recently about 1000 students and attended 'Shared Planet', a weekend of training in issues and activism convened by student group People and Planet

(<http://www.peopleandplanet.org>) in London. They took part in the iCount rally (see <http://www.icount.org.uk/>) which attracted 22,000 people to march about in London calling for action on climate change on 4 November [1]

Meanwhile the BBC's sedate 'Breathing Places' campaign aims to engage a million people in doing things about wildlife conservation, armed with £5m of public Lottery funds (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/breathingplaces/>) [2].

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Despite its resourcing, 'Breathing Places' isn't identifiable as a 'campaign'. It's not very clear what it's for, or what difference anyone would make if they joined up. Rather it's for a lot of different things, and seeks to facilitate or catalyse a lot of local action (mainly on nature conservation). There's no unifying method, no common timing, and no common objective. So it's unlikely to create that sense of common action with a common purpose, which is essential to overcome the feeling that "alone I can't make a difference to big problems". This is a shame as it has the potential to make a real difference, not least because of the potential reach of the BBC.

The climate marches are of course very different: the purpose is abundantly clear. They are also something of a testament to the persistence of people like Phil Thornhill who started a one man vigil outside the London US Embassy when G W Bush rejected the Kyoto climate Protocol back in 2001. Last week he was joined by 19,999 others.

Green Wave 2?

So is this the 'green wave' back? Then, the discovery of the ozone hole (announced 1985) was followed within three years by the announcement of human-induced global warming (1988). 'Green issues' shot up the news agenda (following the conversion of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher to become a self declared "Friend of the earth") and NGO recruitment boomed. For the first time Cultural Dynamic's 'Prospectors' (esteem driven - see previous newsletters and <http://www.cultdyn.co.uk>) were engaging with 'environment', and we got 'green consumers'. Then after 1992's 'Earth Summit' the news agenda flagged and politics with news in tow, returned to business more or less as usual. Not quite as usual because business in particular continued to change and now, with harbingers of catastrophe knocking more loudly on the door of public consciousness, there's another wave of sentiment that it's time something big is done.

This time round there are vastly more potential actions to take. 'Green' products have multiplied and green services have joined them so whole greener 'lifestyles' are possible. Most of the offers are still obviously 'ethical' but green stuff is creeping across the fashion threshold [3], so Prospectors may stay more engaged.

All this helps feed the public conversation and keep it alive. Because the issue is 'normed' however, it's easy to generate what Pat Dade calls the 'logjam of violent agreement' - different psychological groups agreeing 'something must be done' and strongly disputing who should lead and how it should be done. The only answer to this is to segment action offers and opportunities so that - in Dade's terms - Settlers get Settler-friendly action (led by authority, learning from the past and so on), Prospectors get 'must have' stuff to buy and do (bringing esteem), while inner directed Pioneers can experiment and get into 'issues'.

Which brings us back to building mass movements. I got asked to join a panel with Ashok Sinha from Stop Climate Chaos and Joss Garman from Plane Stupid debating 'how to build a mass movement' at the student 'Shared Planet' gathering at the LSE. Most of the proposed action (eg iCount) is clearly the sort of thing that only the Pioneers will be attracted to: challenging authority around a global political proposition (influence the international climate talks - this time in Nairobi).

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This leaves around 60% of the UK population (or more in the USA) 'out of the picture'. So if you really want broad mass participation, the brands, products services and local agendas need to be brought into play as well, but on a big scale. If NGOs are to play in this game, rather than just leaving it to entrepreneurs and corporates, they need very different strategies from the ones apparently being pursued by the large UK NGOs in the Stop Climate Chaos coalition. Campaigns to force product development or marketing of products not yet on markets for example, rather than only petitions for political action.

All is not lost however. For one thing, effective campaign strategies, where they exist, often don't need 'mass' mobilisation, just sufficient mobilisation. For another, if something looks successful enough, and if the engagement mechanisms are friendly enough, the Prospectors will join in. Wearing the wrist band, or doing something hopefully with more impact, if it's established as 'the right thing to be seen with'.

Students are in a particularly interesting position as they can easily influence other young people and trends for new behaviours. Will the media-savvy Joss Garman (he floated through an encounter with the BBC's Newsnight rottweiler Jeremy Paxman) and his friends in Plane Stupid simply be pigeon-holed as runway-occupying protestors, or will they succeed in making it fashionable to oppose domestic or short haul flights and other egregious air mile pollution?

Lessons

Plane Stupid says it draws inspiration from the 1990s 'Roads Movement'. It could draw lessons too: that movement helped stop a massive roads programme under the Conservative government only to see it quietly reinstated in a more stealthy fashion by the current Blair government. But by then it was broken. It had relied almost completely on non-violent direct action, and changes in the law, and relentless policing, eventually forced its core activists into jail, into exhausted retirement or into jobs. The roads movement lacked any means for the aligned - sympathetic - public to join in, and so the 'movement' never acquired the strategic resilience that comes from a wider supporter base. It had no political supply line behind the front-line. For a 'movement' to persist it needs such an organised base.

In contrast, the bigger less adventurous NGOs behind Stop Climate Chaos have engagement mechanisms in plenty. The hole they need to avoid is weak strategy. Benedict Southworth of the World Development Movement has acknowledged [4] that the mass mobilisation of 'Make Poverty History' [5] didn't yield the political results hoped for. While 225,000 white clad supporters ringed Edinburgh, the world's media focused on 200,000 gathered in London's Hyde Park to see Live8's rock bands. In effect the event was hijacked by Tony Blair and Gordon Brown both to align themselves with a popular cause, and to provide a televisual background to support London's Olympic bid, which was being decided at the time. Youth and internationalism were key elements of London's bid against Paris, and the Hyde Park images showed both. A BBC documentary 'Nine Days That Shook London' [6] details this adroit political use of events to create a communications context (see CAMPCAT in 'How To Win Campaigns').

In effect politicians stole the MPH brand - white wrist band included - and could do so because the proposition of 'ending poverty' was an unqualified aspiration. All it said was "we're against poverty". Compare it with 'no taxation without representation', which is a conditional position, while 'less taxation' would have been easy to agree to and then not

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act on. Of course MPH had policy demands but because they were not part of the headline offer, politicians could share the platform and leave without adopting them.

The world certainly needs massive change. Whether that means that campaigners should pursue mass movements, is another question. The answer depends largely on what they are for, and that should depend on strategy. Once you know what they are for, then they can be designed to have the desired effect.

[1] organised by the Climate Change Campaign (www.campaigncc.org) as part of Stop Climate Chaos. Some 120,000 gathered in protests in Australia, with more in Seoul and elsewhere (www.globalclimatecampaign.org).

[2] Its associated programmes such as Autumn Watch are getting audiences around 2m which nowadays is not bad in the UK - the biggest audience is just under 12m for the soap 'Coronation Street'

[3] See for instance the green advice of The Sun mass market newspaper "what's sexier than a wind turbine, the supermodel of machines? Tall and lithe, they are power stations without the harmful side-effects – the real green goddesses" and www.eco-boudoir.com .

[4] Speaking at the Communicate 06 Conference, Bristol October 2006

[5] <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4642053.stm>

[6] Shown late at night, the story of 'who manipulated who' was told in detail in the documentary Nine Days That Shook London (BBC Two 11.20pm on 7 July 2006). Although dominated by the dramatic tragedy of the terror attacks on the London tube that followed shortly after Live8, the programme nevertheless tells a remarkable story of how politicians harnessed the power of tv images to spin Live8 into a validation of the 'London Olympics' brand. "Across nine days last summer, the capital played host to an unforgettable series of events. Through powerful personal testimony from those who were there, this film tells the story of the unforgettable highs of Live 8 and the Olympic bid, through to the tragic low of the London bombings" - BBC. See also <http://www.villagemagazine.ie/article.asp?sid=2&sud=54&aid=2119>.

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