

## Campaign Strategy Newsletter 82, October 2012

### What Difference Is 'Online' Really Making ?

It's often assumed that more 'engagement' or 'mobilisation' is automatically a good thing for campaigns, and that in turn means the more 'online', the better. Yet back in 1979, a handful of staff and 10,000 supporters at Friends of the Earth delivered a million paper signatures to the UK Prime Minister's home in Downing Street, while in 2012 Friends of the Earth (150 staff, 100,000 supporters) plus Avaaz, plus 350 delivered a petition on climate and energy to the same address, also about one million. The pre-social media 'climatevoice.org' delivered 11 million signatures urging action on governments at the Hague COP6 climate talks in 2000, while the post-social-media 200+ NGO alliance GCCA managed 17 million for the 'make or break' Copenhagen COP15 in 2011.

So is online actually bringing 'new audiences' or bigger versions of the old audiences, or is social-media activity is simply re-bottling and re-channelling the same human raw material of campaigning in a different form? And is it making campaigns more effective? I've tried to explore, or at least scratch the surface of these questions in a Campaign Strategy blog [Is 'Online' Increasing the Number of People Engaged in Campaigns ?](#)

Evidence seems scarce (please do respond if you know of some) but one thing does seem to be clear, which is that the so long as real problems and solutions exist offline, the significance of online campaign activity partly depends on the energy and strength of the social bonds that lie behind it.

That social capital can be spent as 'political' capital when it is directed at others but a million people signing onto a tweet or online email petition is not even the same as a million who sign a paper petition and deliver it, and those in turn are not the same as walking 240 miles to make a point, as Ghandi and his followers did on the [Salt March](#).

'Easy' social media actions spend the capital created in prior campaigning activity or donated by other relationships but they do little to build it. If you go on doing that long enough, the 'actions' become less actions and more simply a test of 'opinion'. The more NGOs make the public claim that they should be listened to because of what they can achieve in terms of online 'mobilisation', the more they invite others to judge their case solely in those terms.

The blog [proposes](#) four ways to develop and sustain strong and high-energy social bonds in campaign networks.

Also At The [Campaign Strategy blog](#):

\* [A Heuristic for Values Narratives](#) – above all try to segment your audiences through channels, contexts, messengers and propositions but if you are talking to an audience of mixed Maslow Groups, ‘safety first’ is a good rule of thumb. In other words, if in doubt, make your proposition one that works for Settlers: why it makes us safe and secure. If you’re expanding on that, try some Prospector benefits: why it makes us successful, and show that people doing it, enjoy it. And leave the Pioneer proposition to last, or not at all.

\* [Framing and Why That Debate Was So Bad for Obama, Republicans on Drugs and Still the Best Study Ever ?](#) – three framing examples. How Obama got judged in that first Presidential debate in a ‘boxing match’ frame (and lost on points); the remarkable story of reframing drugs and punishment in Texas; and the Frameworks Institute online tutorial on the [‘runaway food system’](#), still the most convincing online resource on framing research that I know of. Do you know of a better one ?

## **The Rise of Fact Checkers**

An interesting side development in the US Presidential elections is the emergence of [‘Fact checkers’](#) as a ‘voice’ that gets a hearing alongside politicians, the ‘media’ and pundits. The ‘fact checkers’ are not new but what is interesting is their rise to prominence, with some politicians and journalists responding to their pronouncements. Although voters may not seem to pay a lot of [attention](#) to them, the same can be said about the details of what pundits and indeed politicians themselves say. It seems interesting to me, from a campaign point of view, for two reasons. First it is re-establishing the notion of [‘facts’](#) as important in the ‘political discourse’. Second, it’s part of the reshaping of the links between politicians and their machines, the voters or citizenry, the old media, the social media and other actors like NGOs, and marks another turn of the ratchet away from the power of ‘the media’ because they have little control over ‘fact checkers’.

## **Becky Whay’s Pictograms**

I recently gave a talk at a [campaign training seminar](#) attended by a lot (it was crowded !) of people working on animal welfare issues. [Becky Whay](#) from Bristol University showed this [great pictogram](#), which I loved. I’ve seen similar efforts before but I especially liked this one.

The project was designed to encourage horse-owning villagers in Jaipur, India, to get their horses shod. The pictogram helped the team dialogue with illiterate villagers, about their priorities, and required them to discuss which things were priorities over

others. Getting the (working) horse shod, or education, more food, or preparing for religious ceremonies, or better clothes ... etc..

It's a deceptively simple but very rich and relatively quick way to do qualitative research, and of course applicable to almost any group or issue. (Becky noted that one of the few problems she encountered was that her translators were literate and kept trying to explain the questions to the villagers and writing things down, in order to show off ...).

Giving people choices to prioritise, drawn from their life, and encouraging a discussion, is a powerful research tool and far better than asking them to assign notional values such as money. The only methodological question I'd have is whether a group discussion accurately reflects how 'horse shodding or not' decisions are really taken but the project did seem to work – more lame horses got shod.

### **The Revolution Will Not Be Seen**

In [Campaign Strategy Newsletter 81](#) I appealed to climate campaigners to drop the frame of the 'impending apocalypse', and instead stimulate social responses to the actual impacts of climate change, which is now all around us (ie get angry in an effective way), **and** to be much more positive, upbeat and assertive about the fact that the energy revolution is also underway, and being won. Several groups have told me that they've since come to much the same conclusion.

What works in terms of motivating different audiences about impacts will of course vary according to the audience. We recently held a public meeting in the small town where I live (Wells next the Sea, pop 2,000) and over 80 people actually paid to come (ok they got supper too) and listen to [Emily Shuckburgh](#) from the [threatened](#) British Antarctic Survey talk about climate change research. The most frequently mentioned response I heard was dismay at the fact that Antarctic Krill had reduced 80%, because of melting shelves of sea ice, which they depend upon for food and shelter. This in turn means whales and penguins are deprived of their food. If you're talking to people who care about nature, then starving baby polar bears, whales and penguins, are probably a good starting point that doesn't need a whole lot of researching.

On the renewable energy front, the problem is getting away from the "ought to happen" which equates to "might happen", to the "is happening" and to "we want more now". The best way of doing this is probably to show consequences, for example the scale and distribution of renewable industries, and finance. For instance subscribe to StrategyEye Cleantech [newsletter@strategyeye.com](mailto:newsletter@strategyeye.com) and you'll see the scale of the investments, and who the actors are, in the energy revolution.

Unfortunately for the most part, it's going un-noticed, mainstreaming unseen, and is hugely under-reported in the mainstream media. This is mainly because it's a 'good news story' and so not a story, and because it has become normal. Kelly Rigg [pointed out](#) at Huffington Post:

*'Just this summer Germany set a [day record](#) providing 50 percent of its electricity demand from solar. On one windy night in Spain this year, wind turbines provided [more than 64 percent](#) of the country's demand. Greenpeace spells out a scenario in the 2012 Energy Revolution plan ([PDF](#)) by which we could reach 90 percent renewables for both electricity and heating by 2050.'*

One day later, [Jeremy Leggett](#) at Triple Crunch Log reported [Trio of top scientists calls for a moratorium on new conventional power](#). A letter in [Nature](#) argued 'that renewables could be mobilized far faster than many people realise ...the solar component of an all-renewables energy infrastructure could be in place in the UK as soon as 2020, mobilizing solar PV no faster than Germany already has. They also summarise evidence from Germany showing how peak power prices have been reduced by solar deployments in recent years. Barnham [expands in the Guardian](#)'.

The most useful word in that report is 'infrastructure'. Whoever heard a politician, especially post-recession, argue against more and better infrastructure? 'Improving our renewables infrastructure' is a classic political-economy issue. It's a better frame than a call for a revolution that is already happening.

The campaign task is not so much to make the case for renewables investment but to find ways to create disjunctions and polarities between winners and losers, and demands for "more" or "fair shares" or "the best", or other evidences which signal that this is a good thing, a good reality, for which there is public demand. Without an opportunity for politicians to gain an advantage over rivals, 'politics' won't feel the need to get behind a faster energy transformation: it can be left to the market, as one less thing they need to spend political capital on.

That there should be 'green jobs' is motherhood and apple pie, and that green groups [think this](#) is not surprising but "who gets the green jobs?" and "why is region A getting more than region B?" could be the stuff of politics.

### **How Far We've Come Not How Far To Go**

Speaking of frames that connect, [KSBR](#) did some qualitative work for [1010](#) earlier this year, looking at how people from different values groups perceived propositions around climate and cutting carbon. I'm sure they won't mind me sharing one thing with you, namely that when talking to Prospectors in particular, it is vital to provide the positive. As John Scott of KSBR put it, "talk about how far we've come, not how far we've got to go", if what we're doing, is showing how to take a next step.

Follow #itshappening for 1010's [new project](#) – ‘a story of things going right’. They say ‘We're collecting examples of the shift to a low-carbon world’. Now in my view at least, that is going in the right direction.

## Other Things

That caught my eye ...

<http://vimeo.com/47890552> - a good example of social media campaigning. It relies on understanding your audience and what the problem is (not ‘the issue’): in this case, that those who care don't vote. Admittedly it also required a well of gullibility/literalism amongst literate Americans which UK readers would find remarkable but that's just cultural. A great project that also neatly invoked the ‘grossness’ factor, proposing something so vile that it evoked a gut reaction. And it had a clear decision point, it crystallised the issue, and created an opportunity.

<http://gu.com/p/3apy9/tw> US voters organise climate backlash? The Spartans strategy: <http://tinyurl.com/8g2zv8z> - could it happen in a country like the UK ?

<http://www.mobilisationlab.org/adapting-community-insights-from-the-business-world/#.UG1uOYE5QDM.twitter>. [Tracy Frauzel](#) of Greenpeace surveys the world of commercial social media and searches out seven models for co-creation communities, as already used in business.

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Books By Chris Rose:

*How to Win Campaigns: Communications For Change*,  
(edn 2) Earthscan 2010, from <http://amzn.to/JDWpi7>

*What Makes People Tick: The Three Hidden Worlds of Settlers, Prospectors, and Pioneers*,  
Troubador (2011) from <http://bit.ly/nuNWK8>