

The Big Gap Issue

My apologies that it's taken so long for me to produce a *Newsletter*. I can only plead being busy trying to do business which seems to be harder than it used to be. So apologies for the long gap.

Gaps are important in campaigns. Gaps are frames for filling. Politicians often *invent* gaps when they want to fill them e.g. the Arms Gap or Missile Gap to justify the Arms Race, parodied in Kubrick's *Dr Strangelove* as the 'Doomsday Gap'. It's always worth checking to see if your campaign can fill a gap in a political appetite.

Emotionally Charged Facts

For those who love Britain's woods it came as sad news that [Oliver Rackham](#), the landscape historian who coined the evocative term 'wildwood' for our primeval woodland and proved by meticulous fieldwork that Ancient Woodlands, direct descendants of that wildwood still exist down English lanes, died this month. He was [Britain's greatest living Ent](#).

What's this got to do with campaigns? A campaign needs 'facts' but the facts that work, that engage support, that make people see things just like you do (alignment), and impel them to act, need to be emotionally charged.

Oliver Rackham did three important things that made a difference to the cause of conservation in the UK and especially England. He provided facts that showed these Ancient Woodlands existed and, because they contain 'natural' soil structures and communities of plants and animals, are irreplaceable. He then gave the prehistoric British forest a name, the 'wildwood', which resonated with an existing popular story (Kenneth Grahame's the [Wind in the Willows](#)) which featured 'The Wild Wood'. This in turn connected to a huge emotional reservoir of unrequited yearnings on the part of the modern British, to connect with their origins: the 'Dark Ages', the world of Celts, Anglo Saxons, Vikings and older times, also invoked by [Tolkien](#) in *Lords of the Rings*, and called [The Real Middle Earth](#) by Brian Bates. This charged the otherwise interesting but arcane 'facts' about the existence of Ancient Woods with emotional power. It made the facts much more important.

Lastly, he explained how anyone who learnt to spot the signs of these woods (old banks, 'indicator' plants, large old pollarded or coppiced trees etc) could discover them for themselves. All you needed was an Ordnance Survey map and to go for a walk: something the British like doing anyway. So he made engagement easy and 'engaging'. Or to put it in a politically correct way, he 'empowered' people.

Rackham published his small, easy to read book [Trees and Woodlands in the British Landscape](#) in 1976. Without it, I very much doubt that subsequent campaigns – such as the Woodland Trust's [campaign](#) against the impact of HS2 (a High Speed Rail line), or the successful opposition to the government's proposed sell-off of public woods in 2010 (e.g. [38 Degrees](#)) would have enjoyed the traction that they have had.

Scientists, economists and lawyers in particular often misunderstand this and see any hint of emotional significance as making facts 'inaccurate'. Rackham the academic deliberately distanced himself from the fictitious 'Wild Wood'. Now he has died we perhaps won't ever know if he realised the potential of the term. For campaigners, as a rule it's best to present or 'make available' both things; the 'straight facts' and the 'emotional gearing', and let audiences join them up for themselves.

Advertisers have no such qualms or need to do so. When people want to believe something badly enough, the flimsiest of facts will serve to help rationalise the behaviour.

Take this advert which states '83%* of women agree they get denser looking hair with Serioxyl'. The '*' is based on just 124 women in 'self assessment'. This is so accepted for cosmetics that sometimes the % derives from a sample of less than 100. Enough to drive 98% of statisticians to drink.

Or, '82 percent of women agree that they are more attracted to men who like animals'. One can imagine all sorts of uses for that information. When such facts become useful enough in confirming what people want to believe, they are repeated as 'factoids' or, as Richard Dawkins coined, 'memes'. Campaigns may benefit from this only the origination needs to be watertight because they are subject to more scrutiny than ads.

Making Polls Interesting to the 'Media'

I saw an ECF post about this and asked the author Eben Marks (news and media relations officer at Action for Children, [@ebenmarks](#)) to write something. Here it is:

'If you are planning on using polling to support your campaign, think ahead to the type of headlines you want your poll results to create. Like with any message these should be things people can grasp very quickly. One way of doing this is by stating the results in absolute terms, rather than the specifics of the numbers.

For example, say you ask a sample of parents what their biggest worry for children is, and the results are:

42% say health
33% say education
18% say safety
6% say loneliness
1% don't know/don't want to answer"

Rather than making your headline "42% of parents are worried about children's health", say "Children's health is parent's biggest worry". You can always go into the actual figures in the body of your press release or article, but by writing the headline this way it is put into context so that anyone looking at glance will understand the importance of it. This will help catch the attention of journalists who are scanning through subject lines in their inbox, and will do the same for their audience who are flicking through a paper or half-listening to the radio. This style won't always be the best way of doing polling stories, but should always go into the mix when you are planning."

This is good advice from Eben. The reason it is likely to work is that it appeals to the widespread human desire to simplify life and make it manageable. We usually approach any one opportunity to think about, read about, ask about or hear about 'information' with a prior judgement about how much of this particular thing we want to process right now. Setting aside 'none' (which is challenged with the 'must-read' attempted eg with [Upworthy](#) 'curiosity-gap' formats – or see this [video](#) briefly featuring Duane Raymond), these appetites range from 'the one most important thing' through to 'everything and more'.

Third party media journalists generally have to work on the basis that their piece, if they are to make one, will have to work for the maximum number of people. So the single most

compelling fact is the one to put upfront. A professional audience of course, is supposedly going to want you to be more 'objective'. Eg the scientific ideal, not lived up to by Science Journals, which is that you report "no effect found".

TTIP: A Graveyard for SMEs?

My blog [‘TTIP and SMEs: Bad News for White Van Man’](#) looks at a TTIP campaign trying to raise awareness of the threat posed by the 'Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership' to Europe's small businesses, and thus to Europe's way of life. From a purely small-island-British point of view, it is interesting that these days the archetype of small business is [‘White Van Man’](#), the van-driving micro-entrepreneurs and suppliers (electricians, builders, bakers, plumbers, marketers of local and regional foods, delivery folk, suppliers to Local Authorities etc etc). These 'strivers' and other employees of small businesses, even those without white vans, are likely to be the key battleground in the forthcoming (May) General Election. So far they seem blissfully unaware of TTIP.

SMEs or 'small businesses' make up the bedrock of the European economy, and these businesses have tuned their products and services to fit the numerous rules and regulations which give Europe its distinctive quality of life, and make it a very different and higher-cost place than the United States. TTIP is a 'trade agreement' with a difference in that it has an agenda (much criticised by NGOs) of encouraging more trade by removing such quality of life rules and regulations. Health, environment, consumer food protections all come into view as 'barriers' to be removed, once you don the TTIP Goggles.

It's a 'Never Mind the Quality, Feel the Width' agenda, if not a Faustian bargain. [‘In short, the promise of TTIP is more trade through less quality. That may look ok on a Brussels spreadsheet. It may not feel so good in real life’](#).

"If it goes through", [said Lindsey Kennedy from SMEinsider](#) recently, "TTIP will have the most far-ranging impact on UK companies since the creation of the European Union. But, while the benefits to big business are clear, SMEs seem set to lose out ...

If you're a small business in Europe that creates products adhering to long-running EU rules, your products are probably going to be more expensive to produce than their US equivalents, which can make greater use of cheap labour as well as, potentially, questionable chemicals and practices. If many of the EU's regulations are scrapped, many of these cheap US products that were previously banned on the continent are likely to flood in, undercutting your prices.

Meanwhile, in the UK, many local councils have implemented schemes that aim to strengthen communities and support small businesses by prioritising relationships with local suppliers. The UK government recently pledged support to smaller businesses by setting a target for [25% of its supplier contracts to be fulfilled by SMEs](#) by May 2015. From the information available at present, it seems that both of these arrangements would be deemed illegal under TTIP, which would prevent organisations from adopting a prejudicial stance against global corporations".

So if you make - or like to consume - distinctive regional foods, or think that local sourcing and supply is a good idea, or simply work in a small business anywhere in Europe, TTIP ought to have you asking questions. Here are some posted by Richard Elsner from the Germany-based **Movement for Responsibility in Trade Agreements** (MORE):

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- 1: Overall, will the impact of TTIP be favourable to the European economy?
- 2: Will the impact of TTIP be favourable to Europe's SMEs?
- 3: Will TTIP advantage big business's interests over SMEs'?
- 4: Will the lowering of European regulations be a good for European SMEs?
- 5: Will TTIP reduce SMEs' influence over the regulatory process?

In a nutshell the answers are roughly: 1 – dubious and marginal at very best, could be negative; 2 – not likely; 3 – yes; 4 – no; 5 – yes. Have a look at his blog <https://moreforsmesthanttip.wordpress.com/> for references and detail, and also at <http://threeworlds.campaignstrategy.org>

Schhh An Image That Was Too Successful?

What can happen when your campaign starts with a stupendous communications success ... it can have good sides and less good sides. An exploration of what happened the iconic Friends of the Earth bottle dump back in 1971 and why 'returnable bottles' almost completely disappeared in England afterwards. (But could now possibly make a comeback). [Read my blog](#) on this case study.

One Story to Rule Them All?

Next time: why storytelling is not campaigning, and why campaigners should be story-makers, and that's a very different thing from story-telling.

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Books By Chris Rose:

[How to Win Campaigns: Communications For Change](#) (edn 2) Earthscan/Taylor and Francis 2010

What Makes People Tick: The Three Hidden Worlds of Settlers, Prospectors, and Pioneers, Troubador (2011) at <http://www.campaignstrategy.org/threeworlds/> post and packaging free in the UK ([contact me](#) for costs outside the UK), or [UK Amazon](#) or in [Kindle,iTunes](#) or from the [publisher](#)

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