

15

Practical Applications of Theory for Strategic Planning

Chapter Contents

- About Sources
 - About Messages
 - About Channels
 - Which Channels Are Best?
 - Media Advocacy (Guerilla Media)
 - Making Media Advocacy Work
 - Making the Most of Unplanned Opportunities
 - Final Thoughts
-

The generalizations acquired from hundreds of studies about how communication programs work lead to some interesting conclusions about the parts of a communication program the manager can control. This chapter summarizes what research has demonstrated about sources, messages, and channels of communication. In general, the research has shown that, despite the complexities of communication program design, managers can follow some general rules to guide their tactical planning. In fact, most successful practitioners appear to take advantage of the lessons derived from formal social science research. The astute practitioner also realizes, however, that no rule applies to every situation, making a reliance on generalizations dangerous. As a result, managers should not consider the generalizations offered in this chapter an alternative to performing original program research. Instead, the principles that guide the use of the following tactics can aid strategic planning preparatory to pretesting.

ABOUT SOURCES

Research has shown that one of the most important attributes of a source is its *credibility*. Some say it takes a long time to build credibility but only a short time to lose it, making credibility an organization's most precious asset. Although various perspectives exist, experts generally agree credibility is made up of two main characteristics: *trustworthiness* and *expertise*. Some add a third characteristic called *bias*. Because credibility of the source exists in the mind of the receiver, credibility can be tricky to determine.

Despite the importance of credibility, some research has suggested that it matters more for short-term attempts at persuasion than for long-term campaigns. The reason for this is that, after a while, people can forget where they heard a bit of information although they still recall the information. For long-term campaigns, research suggests people rely more on aspects of the message than its source, considering factors such as how well the evidence presented in a message supports the viewpoint advocated.

A second characteristic of a source is perceived *similarity*. Both credibility and perceived similarity exist in the mind of the receiver. Similarity matters because people trust (i.e., think more credible) people who seem to be like themselves in a relevant way. Message recipients may judge similarity on the basis of membership or attitudes. This is why presidents will go to work in a factory for a day, or presidential candidates will wear a flannel shirt or a T-shirt instead of a suit. They hope that doing such things will increase their appeal to the average person.

This technique also can help persuade people to do things such as take their medicine, wear their helmets when skating, or obey rules. In an airport, for example, an announcer advises that he has been a baggage handler for years "and I've never lost a bag." He continues on to admonish travelers that they will be more likely to hang on to theirs if they keep them close by and under constant supervision. The message, intended to reinforce airport policy, seems more personal than an anonymous disembodied voice threatening to confiscate unsupervised bags. Another announcer identifies himself as a smoker and tells travelers, in a cheerful voice, where he goes to smoke. In the first case, the announcer identified himself as an expert who can be trusted on matters of baggage; in the second case, the announcer established similarity by identifying himself as a member of the group he is addressing. Another announcer could establish similarity on the basis of attitudes by noting how much he hates long lines, just like other travelers, before encouraging them to have their tickets and identification out and ready before lining up at a security gate.

A third characteristic of the source that can make a difference is *attractiveness*, which can refer to physical or personality traits. Research indicates that visually appealing sources hold more sway over a target public than less attractive sources. Some scholars think that this is because people want

to imagine themselves as attractive, too, thus they establish similarity with an attractive source through wishful thinking. Because they do not want to seem unattractive, they do not want to do or think the same things that an unattractive source does or thinks. As with credibility and perceived similarity, attractiveness exists in the eye of the beholder, making audience-centered research essential for successful communication programs. Cultural differences, for example, can affect what seems attractive, and it is more important for a campaign to use sources that seem attractive to the target public than to use sources that seem attractive to the campaign sponsors (within limits). For example, a source with green hair, a myriad of pierced body parts, and tattoos will appeal to rebellious teenagers more than a dark-suited executive in a tie.

ABOUT MESSAGES

Much research provides managers with guidance regarding the development of messages. Just as the Elaborated Likelihood Model and other dual-process theories assume two possible routes to persuasion within a person's mind, the findings from message research focus on two aspects of meaning: logical aspects and emotional aspects. The basic theme behind these findings is that messages need to be accurate, relevant, and clear. Effective messages include the right mix (determined through research, of course) of evidence and emotion.

The Importance of Evidence

Evidence is important only to the extent that a target public will feel motivated to evaluate the authenticity of the evidence presented, but accuracy is a minimum requirement for any message. Messages with unintended inaccuracies communicate incompetence; messages with intentional inaccuracies are unethical and can be illegal, as well. Beyond accuracy, the most important generalization about evidence is that messages have more influence when they acknowledge and refute viewpoints that contradict the position advocated by a sponsoring organization. Consistent with inoculation theory (see chapter 14), scholars have found that two-sided messages are about 20% more persuasive than one-sided messages, provided the other side is refuted after having been acknowledged. If the message includes no refutational statement, the two-sided message is about 20% less effective than a one-sided message (Allen, 1991).

The Importance of Emotion

Emotion enhances the appeal of a message because it increases the relevance of the message. Through emotions, people can feel something as a

result of a message even if they do not take the trouble to think about the information presented. Fear is probably the emotion most often elicited by campaign designers, but as noted in chapter 14, it also is the emotion most likely to backfire. Although fear appeals are popular for campaigns aimed at adolescents, such as to keep them off of drugs or out of a driver's seat when alcohol impaired, research has shown that fear appeals are more effective with older people than with children or adolescents (Boster & Mongeau, 1984). In addition, research has shown that people only respond favorably to fear appeals when they feel that they have the power to deal effectively with the danger presented (Witte, 1992). As a result, campaigns that do things such as warning adolescents about the dire consequences of becoming infected with HIV without providing realistic ways for avoiding it probably will fail.

Another popular negative emotion among campaign designers is anger. Political ads in particular use anger, much like a variation on a fear appeal, to encourage voters to mobilize against a villainous enemy. Anger can be a powerful motivator because people instinctively desire to protect themselves against danger. As with fear appeals, however, attack strategies can backfire. Political candidates know, for example, that attacks that seem unfair will hurt the sponsoring candidate. Another danger arises from the possibility of cultivating cynicism and distrust in message recipients, which will reflect badly on the sponsoring organization and can dampen the target public's motivations and interests (Pinkleton, Um, & Austin, 2001).

Positive emotions are easier to use effectively than negative emotions, provided people do not already have negative feelings about an issue or product. Positive emotions are particularly helpful when people are unfamiliar with a campaign topic, undecided, or confused. Feel-good messages are less apt to change strongly held negative attitudes. Two kinds of positive emotional appeals can be used by campaign managers. The first, the *emotional benefit appeal*, demonstrates a positive outcome to compliance with a campaign message. Positive emotional benefit appeals can be effective if they grab people's attention, but they are not compelling unless they incorporate tactics such as attractive spokespeople and production features. These tactics, called *heuristics*, are the second kind of positive emotional appeal. They abandon logical reasoning and simply associate positive images or feelings with an attitude, behavior, or product (Monahan, 1995). Heuristic appeals sell a mood or a feeling instead of more rational benefits. Research has shown that positive heuristic appeals are effective attention getters, but they do not encourage deep involvement or thought on the part of the receiver. People tend to remember the good feeling the message produced rather than any information provided. As a result, positive heuristics have only short-lived effects on attitudes and cannot be depended upon for behavioral change. Overall, a combination of positive benefits and positive heuristics garners the most success.

ABOUT CHANNELS

It may seem obvious that different communication vehicles lend themselves most effectively to different purposes. Mass communication vehicles have advantages and disadvantages that make them serve different purposes from interpersonal channels. In addition, managers find that mass communication channels are not interchangeable; similarly, interpersonal sources such as family members have advantages and disadvantages over other interpersonal sources such as teachers or religious leaders. New, interactive technologies are the subject of much recent study and seem to be characterized best as between interpersonal and mass communication, having some characteristics of each.

The Mass Media

The traditional definition of a mass medium is one that reaches many people at once but does not make immediate feedback possible. Increasingly, however, many forms of mass media not only reach many people at once but also allow varying degrees of feedback. Feedback is important because it makes it possible for message recipients to clarify information and for organizations to understand how people are reacting to a message. Organizations must be able to adapt to feedback as well as encourage accommodations from others. Recall that the co-orientation model illustrates that people need to agree and know they agree. To aid this process, radio offers talk shows; the Internet offers e-mail; television offers dial-in polling and purchasing; newspapers include reader editorials along with letters to the editor. Some generalizations based on the differences among traditional media types, however, still apply. For example, print media can carry more complex information than television or radio can, because people can take the time to read the material slowly or repeatedly to make sure they understand it. On the other hand, television can catch the attention of the less interested more effectively than newspapers or magazines can because of the combination of visual and auditory production features that make it entertaining. Radio, meanwhile, is accessible to people in their cars, in their homes, at work, in stores, and even in the wilderness. This makes it possible to reach target audiences quickly, making it a particularly effective medium in crisis situations when news needs frequent updating. The drawback of radio, however, is that messages must be less complex than messages in print media or on television because people depend solely on their hearing to get the message. They cannot see pictures or printed reminders to reinforce or expand on the message, and it goes by quickly.

Additional generalizations can be made about mass media overall. First, they can reach a large audience rapidly, much more quickly than personally

going door to door. As a result, they can spread information and knowledge effectively to those who pay attention. In terms of the hierarchy of effects or domino model, these characteristics make mass media appropriate for gaining exposure and awareness. The mass media also can combine a message with entertainment effectively, which helps message designers get people's attention.

Another benefit of mass media can be the remoteness of the source and situation portrayed from the receiver. Some things, such as scary or embarrassing topics (e.g., drug use) are better broached from a distance. Mass media can safely introduce such topics, which can be helpful to organizations ranging from hospitals to zoos. One experiment showed that people afraid of snakes could overcome their fear by being introduced to snakes through media portrayals, gradually progressing to the real thing in the same room. Meanwhile, hospitals have found that videos that explain surgical techniques to patients before they experience the procedures can reduce anxiety. Something experienced vicariously often becomes less alarming in real life. One reason for this is that the vicarious experience has removed the element of uncertainty from the situation. Research has shown that many of our fears come from uncertainty and from feeling a lack of control. Information, meanwhile, removes uncertainty and can provide more control. The results can be impressive. One study found that children who watched videos that took them through the process of having a tonsillectomy or other elective surgery—including visits to the operating and recovery rooms and some discussion of likely discomforts—actually got better more quickly, had fewer complications, and were more pleasant patients (Melamed & Siegel, 1975).

The mass media suffer from weaknesses, however. Anytime a message reaches a lot of people at once, it risks misinterpretation by some and provides less opportunity for two-way communication. The less feedback in a channel, the more potential there is for unintended effects to occur. In addition, people find it much easier to ignore or refuse a disembodied voice or a stranger who cannot hear their responses than to ignore someone standing in the same room or talking with them on the telephone. The ability to motivate people, therefore, is less strong with mass media than with interpersonal sources.

Interpersonal Sources

Real people can do many things mass media cannot. They can communicate by way of body language and touch, instead of only through sound and pictures. They also can receive questions and even can be interrupted when something seems confusing. As a result, interpersonal sources can help make sure messages are received without misinterpretation. They also can offer to make changes. For example, company presidents speaking with

consumers who are threatening a boycott can eke out a compromise that satisfies both parties, whereas a mass-mediated message could make the consumers angrier.

Personal attention demonstrates that the target public's views have value. In addition, interpersonal sources can provide encouragement in difficult situations and can serve as models of a desired attitude or behavior. These abilities can be crucial for difficult behavior-change campaigns that require skill development and reinforcement. Thus, although interpersonal communication lacks reach, it often makes an excellent support strategy to a mass-mediated campaign, especially when targeting narrow audience segments. In terms of the hierarchy of effects or domino model, interpersonal sources can help with comprehension, skill development, attitude change, motivation, and reinforcement. This makes interpersonal sources especially important for communication programs addressing strongly held attitudes or challenging behaviors.

If communication programs cannot always include interpersonal sources, they can try to approximate them. For example, an antismoking program in Houston gained the cooperation of one television station and two local newspapers for a 3-month campaign. The media followed 10 ethnically diverse role models who quit smoking a few days ahead of schedule to allow for production requirements. They were shown participating in group counseling sessions, trying out various skills at home, going shopping, and relaxing. Viewers were invited to imitate the role models, half of whom succeeded in maintaining their nonsmoking status. Donated newspaper space explained what the role models were doing, included instructions to those trying to imitate the models, provided self-tests, and contained motivational statements. Drug store and grocery store personnel, teachers, large employers, and community groups handed out viewing guides and gave encouragement. Approximately 250,000 viewing guides were distributed by the interpersonal sources, 1.34 million were disseminated via newspapers, and 270,000 via company newsletters. Three months after the designated quit date, almost one third of Houston-area smokers had seen the programs. Over 10% of them had managed to quit for 3 months or more, meaning 3% of all smokers had quit during this period. The organizers estimated that the 20,000 to 40,000 new nonsmokers had gained an average of 1 to 2 years of life apiece, with a savings in medical costs averaging at least \$1,000 apiece. They estimated the total return on investment, therefore, in a campaign that had cost about \$100,000, to be a minimum of \$5 million over 20 years, with associated savings of tens of thousands of years of life (McAlister, Ramirez, Galavotti, & Gallion, 1989).

The Internet

Because the Internet makes it possible for people to seek out the sources that make them most comfortable and also frequently provides opportunities

for interactivity, it can provide a helpful bridge between the mass media and interpersonal channels. Researchers find it challenging to keep up with the changes in technology, thus generalizations seem premature. Nevertheless, managers can rely on other principles and theories such as the information on credibility and accessibility—and use pretesting—to make effective use of the Internet. In the meantime, communication strategists continue to explore possible applications of Internet technology, such as the emerging influence of blogs. According to an election survey sponsored by *PR News/Counselors Academy*, more than one third of the 553 respondents agreed that bloggers “had a significant effect” on the perceptions of voters in 2004 (“Bloggers Blossom,” 2004). “Traditional news media” nevertheless still received agreement from almost 80% of respondents that they had a significant effect. In response to this growing influence, Pennsylvania’s tourism office hired six bloggers to visit key locations around the state and write about their impressions, beginning in June 2005. Each blogger adopted a particular focus, ranging from historical emphasis to outdoor adventures, theme parks, and nightlife.

WHICH CHANNELS ARE BEST?

The information from chapters 13–15 should make it clear communication is a complex process that lends itself to few generalizations applicable to all situations. The search for the best solutions to a communication problem can tempt managers to draw broader conclusions from selected successes than are warranted, leading to risky, one-size-fits-all solutions. According to Chaffee (1982), communication experts sometimes assume that because interpersonal sources are more persuasive than mass media sources, or at least more difficult to rebuff, this means they also are more credible. And credibility is an extremely important attribute for a source. Chaffee, however, pointed out that studies have found interpersonal networks notoriously unreliable, and some studies have found people making up their minds based solely on information from the media, ignoring or rejecting interpersonal sources.

As Chaffee pointed out, it is silly to pit mass communication against interpersonal communication to determine which is more effective. The reality, according to Chaffee, is that *opinion leaders*—the sources from which people seek information or find influential—depend on the context. For information about the quality of local daycares, local parents may be the expert sources. For information about peace negotiations in another country, professional reporters are more likely to be the experts. Nevertheless, Chaffee noted that a few generalizations can be made about communication that can help the program designer.

1. *People seek information from the most accessible source.* Research has shown that if people are highly involved in a topic, meaning deeply

interested, they will go to the trouble to find information from the most credible sources available. In other cases, however, they rarely go out of their way. Some people develop habits of checking multiple sources of information, but others do not have the opportunity, ability, or desire to do so. This means communication programs should endeavor to make information easily accessible to target publics, instead of expecting them to seek out information.

2. *People give opinions more often than they seek opinions.* People like to make their opinions known. They do not like having other people's opinions foisted upon them. As a result, the most effective persuasion is *self-persuasion*, in which people reach their own conclusions, guided by information made available to them. To the extent that communication programs can set the agenda for what people think about and provide the basis on which they evaluate issues, called *framing*, the more likely target publics will be to draw conclusions compatible with those of the sponsoring organization.

3. *People seek information more often than they seek opinions.* People search for information, not opinions. In fact, they often search for information to back up their existing opinions. If they succeed, they may try to convince others to agree with them. To the extent that a communication program can make information available while establishing a common ground of shared values or opinions with a target public, the more likely the public will be to accept the information as credible and make use of it in ways consistent with the sponsoring organization's viewpoint.

4. *Interpersonal social contacts tend to be similar (homophilic).* This has various implications for the communication manager. People tend to associate with people who are like themselves because they share a frame of reference. Establishing similarity with a target public tends to enhance credibility. Credibility and closeness can motivate change, and people who are close can provide reinforcement when change takes place. This makes interpersonal sources critical for motivating and consolidating behavior changes.

5. *Expertise, followed by trustworthiness, are the most persuasive attributes of a source.* Both expertise and trustworthiness are aspects of credibility. Although similarity can help facilitate open communication and can enhance credibility, credibility itself is still more important. The key is to determine on what criteria message recipients will be evaluating a source's expertise and trustworthiness. Remember that interpersonal sources are not necessarily more expert or trustworthy than mass communication sources, meaning that they will not necessarily be more persuasive.

6. *The biggest effect of the mass media is more communication.* The previous generalizations necessarily lead to this conclusion. People receive information from accessible sources, and mass media can make a message highly accessible. People like to receive information instead of opinions, which

means that the media are more likely to spread credible information than to change opinions. People tend to associate with people similar to themselves and often use information received from the mass media to try to convince others to share their opinions. Finally, people can motivate others similar to themselves to act and can provide reinforcement of those actions. The biggest strength of the mass media, therefore, is that they can spread information and spark interpersonal communication that can change opinions and lead to action. Although this means mass media campaigns are unlikely to prove sufficient for a social marketing-style advocacy program, they are definitely good for something. This has inspired the development of media advocacy.

MEDIA ADVOCACY (GUERILLA MEDIA)

Changing people's minds is no easy task, and just getting their attention can be a challenge. As a result, social marketing campaigns intended to change attitudes or behaviors usually require funds that enable a long-term, gradual adjustment process. Sometimes organizations simply do not have the time or the money to underwrite such a campaign. Instead of giving up, however, they can address the issue from a different theoretical viewpoint, called *media advocacy*.

The media advocacy approach acknowledges the hierarchy of the effects model, but it does so from a different angle than social marketing approaches, often striving more for shock value than for establishing common ground with the target public. Social marketing campaigns make three crucial assumptions that distinguish them from media advocacy campaigns:

1. Campaigns ultimately aim to change individual attitudes and behaviors.
2. Individuals ultimately have control over and are responsible for their own attitudes and behaviors.
3. Campaigns must convince and motivate individuals in order to change attitudes and behaviors.

Media advocacy campaigns, on the other hand, make different assumptions:

1. People's attitudes and behaviors depend on environmental opportunities and constraints.
2. Organizations and governmental institutions control critical environmental factors.
3. Organizations and governmental institutions respond to the public's agenda.

4. The agenda for public opinion can be affected by the mass media.
5. Public opinion needs to force organizations and institutions to alter environmental factors such as public policy in order to change attitudes and behaviors.

Both sets of assumptions have validity because human behavior is complex. The communication manager, however, must decide which theoretical strategy is most appropriate for a given situation. Both social marketing and media advocacy have advantages and disadvantages, and both have strengths and limitations. For example, because social marketing targets individuals, people who do change attitudes or behaviors will feel invested in the changes made. In addition, because social marketing tries to establish common ground with the target public through source and message strategies, social marketing is less likely than media advocacy to backfire (provided sufficient preprogram research and pretesting has been performed). Social marketing campaigns, however, are likely to require more time and funding than media advocacy campaigns because they strive for incremental changes that rarely happen quickly and can require a large investment of funds. People also resist change, particularly if they are made to feel defensive about their own attitudes or behaviors.

Media advocacy campaigns, meanwhile, focus on getting people's attention and motivating them to communicate further in some way, instead of on persuading people to change their own attitudes or behaviors. They encourage people to blame a company, public official, or institution for a problem instead of accepting personal responsibility, which can eliminate a good deal of potential resistance among the target public. Media advocacy campaigns often use shock or anger to grab people's attention and motivate them to turn on a perceived enemy under the assumption that public pressure may force the enemy to make a desired change.

Although media advocacy campaigns focus on mass media coverage, thriving on negative emotions and, therefore, on controversy, this also presents some drawbacks. As with any strategy based on negative emotions, the media advocacy strategy can backfire, with the public blaming the sponsoring organization. In addition, heated public debates rarely continue for long, and the media or target publics soon become bored and turn to another topic for discussion. The shorter time frame and strategy of creating newsworthy controversy can make media advocacy campaigns less expensive to run than social marketing campaigns, but they also mean the campaigns are shorter and changes can lack staying power. In other words, the attack strategy of media advocacy, sometimes called *guerilla media* because of the attack tactics used, makes it lower cost but higher risk.

Media advocacy, therefore, is the strategic use of mass media to advance a social or public policy initiative, applying the strategy of reframing public



CAUTION: CHILDREN NOT AT PLAY.

Once, children spent their time running and playing. Today, they're more likely to be found in front of the TV. And that could mean trouble. Because lack of exercise can lead to weight problems and high blood cholesterol. Encourage your children to be more active. Fighting heart disease may be as simple as child's play. To learn more,

contact the American Heart Association, 7272 Greenville Avenue, Box 36, Dallas, TX 75231-4596.

You can help prevent heart disease and stroke. We can tell you how.

American Heart Association 

This space provided as a public service. ©1992, American Heart Association

FIG. 15.1. Social marketing example. This ad encourages parents to take responsibility for their children's health. Reproduced with permission. *Caution: Children Not At Play*, PSA Magazine Ad Kit Winter/Spring 1992. Copyright American Heart Association.

debate. Social marketing, in contrast, is the strategic use of mass and interpersonal channels to achieve change among individuals, applying strategies directed at individual responsibility and motivations.

For example, contrast the two campaigns illustrated in Figures 15.1 and 15.2, both of which target television as a cause of societal ills. The social marketing version targets parents, encouraging them to take responsibility for having their children watch less television. The second appeals to people's anger and willingness to blame someone else for teenage pregnancy and violence in society. The ad, which appeared in major newspapers such as the *Wall Street Journal*, made news, attracted contributions (which bought more advertising), and helped spark congressional hearings.

MAKING MEDIA ADVOCACY WORK

Media advocacy recognizes that the media are a primary forum for challenging policies. As a result, a successful media advocacy campaign depends on the sponsoring organization's ability to make news. An organization may buy advertising space, for example, but the goal often is for the ad to make news rather than for the ad itself to persuade many people. Organizations buying such ads usually have much less to spend than the companies or institutions they attack (Fig. 15.2). For example, Kalle Lasn, president of a group that ran a parody of an Absolut Vodka ad that resulted in prominent coverage in the *New York Times*, has said, "Even though we're little, we take a big, large corporation, and we use these images to slam them on the mat like a judo move." To do this effectively requires several skills.

1. *Research.* It is essential when using swift and risky guerilla tactics to have confidence in their effectiveness. The media advocate needs to know what story angles will interest the media, what messages will motivate the public, and what messages may backfire. Data are needed to demonstrate convincingly the extent of a problem, including whether some people are affected more than others (people respond when something seems unfair). Research can suggest useful solutions such as policy initiatives, regulations, or the elimination of regulations. Research also can guide efforts to build coalitions, which can make a small organization seem more powerful.

2. *Creative epidemiology.* Creative epidemiology is the use of creative strategies to make dry information such as statistics more interesting. Often, policy issues are complex, and statistics demonstrating the extent of a problem or the value of a solution can be boring. Big numbers can be convincing but hard to digest. As a result, media advocates need to make abstract data seem more relevant and interesting through vivid examples and sound bites. For example, antismoking advocates can draw yawns with the statement that some 350,000 people die each year from smoking-related causes. On the other hand, they can create a vivid image in people's

**Shame on movies,
records and TV!**

*Help us get
one million
petitions!*

**A GRASSROOTS PETITION
TO BOARDS OF DIRECTORS
OF ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY**

We Are Outraged!

And We're Not Going To Put Up With It Any Longer!

We're a group of mothers, fathers, grandparents and other citizens who are outraged at how today's movies, TV programs, music videos and records are hurting our children, our families and our country.

We're **DISMAYED** that today 1.1 million girls between the ages of 15 and 19 get pregnant each year.

We're **SHOCKED** when we learn that two thirds of all births to 15 and 19-year-old girls are out of wedlock.

We're **FRIGHTENED** at the way violence and crime are spreading everywhere and threatening our children, our families and our homes.

SHAME on those in charge in Hollywood for an endless stream of films filled with **PROFANITY, NUDITY, SEX, VIOLENCE** and **KILLINGS**. For example, the recent giant movie hit features murders during sex, setting a new standard of perversion even for today's movies.

SHAME on TV directors for allowing the average child to see more than **200,000 ACTS OF VIOLENCE** and **33,000 MURDERS** by the age of 16 . . . even though directors **KNOW** that TV violence is implicated in **22% OF ALL JUVENILE CRIME AND HALF THE HOMICIDES** in America.

SHAME on the directors in the film industry which long ago stopped reflecting the values of most families and has now abolished the "X" rating, replacing it with "NC-17," so sex-filled, erotic, bloody films will no longer be barred from community movie houses.

We say the tragic price our children, families and country are paying demands something be done to end what's going on. Alone we can't stop it. But together we think we can.

The **REASON** for all the sex, violence, filth and profanity is with the writers, directors, producers, singers, actors, etc. But **THEY** can be controlled. All it takes is for the Boards of Directors of their companies to order them to stop! Remember when movies were wholesome family entertainment? We're going to insist that happen again.

Together We Can Make It Happen

We're asking every reader of this ad to help us run it all over America ... **AND** send in the petition on the right. Every 2 months we're going to send every member of the Boards of Directors of the entertainment companies a copy of the ad and tell them the total number of petitions received. They're going to **KNOW** American families are outraged.

Spare us the censorship lecture — you in the entertainment industry. And this is not an appeal for prudery. All we want is to get the movie, TV and record industries to act responsibly. Our children, our families and our country are being hurt too much for us to remain silent.

Right now mail the petition below. Please enclose a tax-deductible contribution to help pay for another ad like this. We'll do the rest.

A PETITION To The Members of The Boards of Directors of Every Major TV Network, Film, Music and Record Company

Mail To:

American Family Association, Dept. J70, P O. Drawer 2440/107 Parkgate Drive, Tupelo MS 38803

I want to be part of this Grass Roots petition drive and help run this ad all over America. You agree to notify the Directors of the entertainment companies every 2 months of the progress of this effort, and you agree all funds will be used for running additional ads. With this understanding I am enclosing a tax-deductible contribution of \$ _____ to help pay for another ad and get those in charge to **SET STANDARDS** and **ENFORCE THEM**.

Please return this petition today!

It is the total number of petitions which come in that is important. This project is so important that even if you can't send a contribution please mail in this petition to add to the total number we receive. Thanks.

Please print legibly.

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

A Project of American Family Association
Dr. Donald E. Wildmon, President
Approved by The I.R.S. as a 501-c-3
not for profit organization



1-800-3BE-WISE

FIG. 15.2. Media advocacy example. This ad encourages the public to blame the media for a variety of health problems in society. According to Allen Wildmon, public relations director for the American Family Association, Inc., the ad generated almost 900,000 responses.

Ad courtesy of the American Family Association, Inc.

minds if they say instead that “1,000 people quit smoking every day—by dying. That is equivalent to two fully loaded jumbo jets crashing every day, with no survivors,” or 920 crashes per year.

Techniques for creating such vivid imagery abound. Media advocates can turn the abstract into the concrete by *localizing* information (e.g., indicating how many in a community have died from smoking, or AIDS, or drunk-driving accidents); using *relativity techniques* by recharacterizing numbers into a more meaningful form (e.g., saying the alcohol industry spends approximately \$225,000 every hour of every day to advertise, instead of saying they spend more than \$2 billion per year); and *showing effects of public policy* by highlighting individuals who have been affected. The Texas Transportation Institute, for example, “drove home” the point that traffic delays have a real cost by noting that the time people spent in traffic delays in 2003 added up to 3.7 billion hours, a number that is big but has no context until the Institute reveals that this equals 400,000 years. The information really grabs the reader’s attention when the Institute explain that this time span would stretch back to the era when Homo sapiens were just beginning to appear—way before anyone had a car. The Institute helpfully added that the fuel sacrificed to traffic jams could run every car in the country for six days (“Commutes Just,” 2005).

3. *Issue framing.* Usually, media advocacy campaigns challenge the public’s complacency on an issue. To jar people into listening to a perspective they have not heard before requires finding an angle that will attract attention. For this reason, media advocates often focus on industry practices instead of on individual behavior, or attempt to delegitimize the enemy by exposing their supposedly exploitative and unethical practices.

This requires using familiar symbols to create an advantage. Industries and organizations targeted by media advocates often have carved out a comfortable niche in society through the skilled use of symbols to associate themselves with values shared by the public. For example, tobacco companies often appeal to the public’s desire for freedom by claiming censorship or an assault on the First Amendment. Increasingly, media advocates have found it more productive to co-opt the enemy’s symbols than to use their often-meager resources to try to carve out their own. For example, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) co-opted the “what becomes a legend most” catch phrase of fur advertisers to turn it into “what disgraces a legend most” to push their “Fur Is Dead” campaign. Similarly, Adbusters created a take-off on Kool cigarettes to create an ad that showed a smoker as an “Utter FOOL.” A group called Infact, which changed its name to Corporate Accountability International in 2004, created a Marlboro man imitation whose face was half turned into a skeleton. The image helped propel their campaign to create a global anti-tobacco treaty, approved in 2003 as the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control and ratified in 2005 by 40 countries.

4. *Gaining access to media outlets.* According to Wallack, Dorfman, Jernigan, and Themba (1993), reporters need a compelling story to tell that has something newsworthy. Newsworthiness “pegs” or “news hooks” can include associating the issue with an anniversary, a season, or a milestone; localizing the story in some way; demonstrating irony, injustice, or a breakthrough of some sort; attaching a celebrity to the story; or creating controversy.

Media advocacy usually requires guerilla-style tactics. It requires more creativity to gain attention, make news, and mobilize public opinion without going negative. The trend toward negativity makes media advocacy a powerful but dangerous tool. The media advocate must bear in mind that once news has been created it can take on momentum in directions damaging to the sponsoring organization. The media advocate must be able to anticipate counterarguments from targeted organizations and be ready to handle a crisis situation should guerilla tactics go awry.

MAKING THE MOST OF UNPLANNED OPPORTUNITIES

Even more traditional practitioners should be ready to jump on media advocacy opportunities that present themselves unexpectedly. The United Church of Christ (UCC), for example, had planned a fairly modest advertising campaign beginning in December 2004 to encourage people from all backgrounds to feel welcome in its church. A series of focus groups nationwide had established that many people felt alienated from churches, although the reasons varied widely. After months of “very typical” negotiations to purchase air time, according to Barb Powell, the church’s director of production, the broadcast television networks suddenly refused to air the ads on the eve of the campaign launch. The reason: One of the ads included homosexuals among those being “bounced” from a church and then welcomed into the UCC.

Within less than 2 days, the church had prepared for the media firestorm that followed by training spokespeople on the issues, producing fact sheets, and honing talking points. Bloggers, the first to cover the controversy, wrote about the story for 2 weeks, leading most major news outlets. Said Powell, “We could never have paid for that kind of PR and message dissemination. We didn’t expect or anticipate what happened” (Powell, personal communication, 2005).

The coverage led to increased attendance (attendance estimates from individual congregations ranged from +10% to +50%), heavy use of the church’s website (up almost 1,000% in December 2004), and a flood of donations that enabled the church to buy more advertising (including on cable channels and the conservative Fox News) than it originally would have been able to on the networks. Then, when *SpongeBob Squarepants* became a topic of controversy soon afterward for appearing in a video



FIG. 15.3. Seizing the unexpected media advocacy opportunity. The United Church of Christ welcomed SpongeBob Squarepants into its executive offices when the character received criticism from conservative religious groups for promoting tolerance in a PBS video. The news story dovetailed with the UCC's campaign to appeal to individuals who had felt alienated from church. Photo courtesy of the United Church of Christ.

promoting tolerance, the church seized the opportunity to keep its campaign in the news by releasing a statement that SpongeBob can feel welcome in the UCC, complete with photos of SpongeBob visiting church headquarters, shown in Figure 15.3. The church later purchased advertising space for its controversial “bouncer” ad on liberal, moderate, and conservative blogs, gaining even more exposure for the campaign.

The way the UCC transformed “a controversy not of our choosing” into “a gift” (United Church of Christ, 2005, p. 12) shows how strategic planning and informed flexibility can enable communication managers to deal with the unexpected. Strategists considering the media advocacy approach nevertheless must weigh its risks against the potential payoffs. According to Wallack et al. (1993), an advocacy campaign will probably make enemies because by drawing attention to a controversy “it points a finger, names names, and starts a fight” (p. 40). This means the communication manager must consider the likelihood of victory against the costliness of failure and must remember that, above all, an organization needs to maintain its credibility in any communication program. If a guerilla-style campaign costs an organization its credibility, even a short-term victory will not merit the cost. Advocacy campaigns still must operate in ways consistent with an organization’s long-term mission.

Communication managers also must be prepared to defend their organizations against media advocacy campaigns waged by other groups. Media advocates target institutions that have power in a community. If an organization becomes a target of an advocacy campaign, it must fight back with its own guerilla tactics or somehow demonstrate that the campaign has no merit. For example, American Forests found itself under attack for a promotion that used Dr. Seuss's environmentalist Lorax character, which cautions against cutting down Truffula trees. According to the Heritage Forests Campaign in Portland, which aims to preserve roadless wilderness areas, American Forests advocated clearcutting, which made its campaign disingenuous. Focusing on the contradiction between the Lorax character and the company's policies provided an easy way for the anti-clearcutting group to gain media attention on what would have been the 95th birthday of Theodore Geisel, also known as Dr. Seuss. Deborah Gangloff of American Forests responded in Seuss-like language: "Shame on you. Shame. Shame. You think publicity by deceit is a feat!" and then provided evidence that the group's congressional testimony on the subject had been misinterpreted, that it is not an advocate of clearcutting, and that the organization often disagrees with timber companies (Hughes, 1999). In doing so, American Forests managed to turn the attack into positive publicity. The ability to launch a credible defense in such crisis situations depends on an organization's relationship with media personnel and past performance. A history of honesty, openness, and accessibility makes reporters more amenable to an organization's side of a story. As both the UCC and American Forests experiences show, good humor seems to help, too.

With this in mind, remember that even though media advocacy can make enemies, successful media advocacy nevertheless requires the cultivation of relationships. Key publics include gatekeepers such as reporters and bloggers, as well as potential collaborators or program co-sponsors. Wallack et al. (1993) wrote that the best media advocacy campaigns build a sense of community and of community-based power. Media advocacy campaigns aim to enact change at the community level instead of at the individual level. This, in turn, can help individuals in the community. By shaping the public agenda, shaping the way the agenda is debated, and advancing a policy-oriented solution, media advocacy can help improve the environment in which an organization and its key publics operate.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Communication research can contribute much to the professional's understanding of how people look for and make use of information. Decades of study have led to helpful generalizations about sources, messages, and communication channels that can help practitioners develop effective program strategies. The principles can help managers identify when a situation

calls for an accommodation- or social marketing-oriented strategy and when a situation calls for an advocacy-oriented or even guerilla-style strategy. Many of the generalizations presented in this chapter come intuitively to the seasoned communication professional, but one lesson may seem less obvious. The effectiveness of each tactic—characteristics of source, channel, and message—ultimately depends on how it will be perceived by intended and unintended audiences. This lesson, therefore, comprises the overarching rule of how communication works: *It depends*. No message, strategy, channel, or source has the same effect in every situation or for every person. This is why preliminary research and pretesting represent such vital parts of effective program planning.