

# KEY TIPS FROM COMMUNICATION STUDIES



## AUDIENCE

Who in particular are you trying to reach out to and connect with? What are they like, what do they know and not know about the topic? What interests them? What excites them and what bores them? What attitudes and beliefs do they hold? What are they likely to be doing when they get your message? Will they be busy and rushed and need a quick, to-the-point message, or will they be relaxed and looking for entertainment or diversion?

Picture your audience as a real person or people with whom you will start a conversation. How can you speak 'their language' (both literally and metaphorically) and show respect for their world? Try to 'walk a mile in their shoes' by imagining what it feels like to be them. Some communication campaigns even make up detailed characters with names, descriptions and an artist's sketch for their audience profile so that they can more easily keep in mind the humanity of the audience.

Also, ask around. Talk to your friends about what they know and their thoughts about smoking and smokefree messages, to get a sense of what

might work. Talk to librarians, teachers and other information experts for tips on where to find more background on your audience. Then compile a profile that describes a typical member of the particular audience you want to reach.

You can find out some background about the NZ youth audience and their attitudes and behaviours towards smoking by looking at research such as:

<http://www.ash.org.nz/research-and-information/ash-research/latest-ash-year-10-survey/>

<http://www.hpa.org.nz/research-library/research-publications>

# SOURCE

**Communication happens in the interactions or relationships between different people.**

Effective communication leads to shared understandings, so that people are 'on the same page' about the meaning of the communication (even if they don't necessarily agree).

How your audience will understand and respond to your message is affected by what they believe about the source it appears to come from.

Audiences are more open to messages from people who are both likeable, and seem to be a lot like them. They also like messages to come from a credible source (perhaps someone with a genuine personal story to tell that shows they have experience on the topic, or an expert).

Last but not least, audiences value trustworthiness. They appreciate consistency and honesty from sources, and to be talked to with respect, not talked down to.

How might these factors about communication source influence your choices of spokespeople or 'voices' for your campaign item?

# MESSAGE DESIGN

All aspects of the message design combine to influence how (and whether) it will be read/watched/reacted to. These include visual design (see the separate tip-sheet on visual design principles), word choice, message length, and even things like background music. Very distracting background music could attract attention or it might mean that nobody will have the mental space to pay attention to your message at all!

## Key things to bear in mind for message design could include:

- start by arousing curiosity (how can you grab attention in a way that your audience will instantly relate to?);
- make sure the credibility of your source is clearly established;
- show in some way your empathy/understanding of your audience's needs and existing views (even if ultimately you hope to change those views);
- show how your message recognises and fulfils a need that your audience has;
- show what change it is that your message is trying to achieve (perhaps model or demonstrate the change, or visualise the audience's future world if the change happened);
- be positive about and towards your audience and their capacity to act on your message (remember the theme of the whole campaign is empowerment);
- invite your audience to be actively involved with your message in some way through feedback, interaction, sharing with others or participation;
- explain clearly what reward or benefit the audience would receive for doing whatever it is you want them to do (in this case quit or resist smoking, or share the smokefree message with others – what's in it for them?)

# COMMUNICATION THEORIES

**Some communication theories that might be relevant to your entry include:**

## **Social judgement theory**

- People only move their attitudes a bit at a time. If you ask for a new attitude that is wildly different from the current attitude of your audience, you might provoke a 'boomerang' response – that is, the opposite attitude shift from your intended one! People will usually only agree with statements that fall within the range of what seems logical and acceptable to them. That range is usually slightly broader than the specific view they hold now, meaning there's room to move a little (but not a lot all at once).

## **Elaboration likelihood model**

- As a generalisation, people create stronger attitudes if they are able to see evidence, and have time to consider and process multiple sides of an issue. But if they are rushed, or tired, or confused, they may prefer to use 'mental shortcuts' (such as a recommendation from a well-known person) that eliminate the need to think deeply. Attitudes or behaviours created this way aren't as strongly held as those created from careful thought, and can more easily be shifted with new information.

## **Social exchange theory**

- People will only change their attitude or behaviour if there's something in it for them. They want a return in exchange for their effort. So what is the benefit people will gain if they do what you want them to do? Make it clear.

## **Innoculation theory**

- Thinking in advance about arguments against an attitude we hold helps us to prepare defences of that attitude. So for example, if you want people to be well-prepared to defend a decision to say 'no' when a cigarette is offered, they need to have thought in advance about what persuasive arguments the person offering the cigarette might say to them to encourage trying the cigarette. This works a little like a vaccination – if we have been exposed to a mild form of persuasion, and had a chance to practise forming (in our own words) a rebuttal, when the real situation arises our defences are ready to go.



**Lots of further information about these theories is available by searching online! Plus, if you would like to talk to a Massey staff member about communication theory that could help your campaign, please feel free to contact Dr Elspeth Tilley on [e.tilley@massey.ac.nz](mailto:e.tilley@massey.ac.nz)**