



Communicating CCI projects

A manual



NORTHERN DIMENSION
PARTNERSHIP ON CULTURE





TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	5
CULTURAL BRANDING: HOW DOES THE PROJECT CORRESPOND WITH THE CHALLENGES AND TENDENCIES IN SOCIETY – AND THE AGENDAS OF THE MEDIA?	7
STORYTELLING: THE ESSENTIAL TOOL	10
• Writing the storytelling	13
• The purpose of the storytelling	13
DISTRIBUTING THE STORYTELLING: ENSURING COHERENCE	15
• Distribution strategy	16
A RAPIDLY CHANGING MEDIA LANDSCAPE: HOW TO PRIORITIZE	25

INTRODUCTION

Communicating projects within culture and the creative industries is not a simple task. Most such projects are complex by nature, which means they tend to contain an abundance of stories that the surrounding world might take an interest in.

It is not simply a matter of launching a new product whose usefulness is evident to everyone that sees it. Rather, it is a matter of communicating experiences and values; of communicating that which is relatable for the general public or a niche audience, or perhaps both.

Often, it is also a matter of communicating new ideas that can help shape and improve society. CCI projects tend to operate within society's engine room – adjusting, calibrating, or potentially revolutionizing those parameters that drive society forward.

This gives CCI projects a great communications potential, because they focus on issues that the media will take an interest in. However, they also tend to be difficult to quickly decipher, which puts high demands on those who have to communicate them.

The goal of this manual, then, is to assist every CCI project manager in the navigation through an increasingly complex media landscape; in picking and shaping the right stories; and in laying out a fruitful path towards as far-reaching and relevant communication as possible of each given project.

CULTURAL BRANDING:

*HOW DOES THE PROJECT
CORRESPOND WITH THE
CHALLENGES AND TENDENCIES
IN SOCIETY – AND THE
AGENDAS OF THE MEDIA?*

At any given point in time, there will be a set of trends and tendencies that affect the current makeup of society. And there will be issues, challenges, and problems facing that same society.

Together, they make up the topics that are discussed by politicians, businessmen, cultural operators, and the public at large. And they are the topics that determine the on-going agendas of various media platforms.

The methodology that runs through this manual is referred to as *cultural branding*. To put this methodology to practical use means to communicate in a way that makes the given project correspond with these topics. To have the project be part of a current trend or tendency, or – ideally – the solution to a specific problem or challenge that society is facing.

This means that the initial task – one that comes before any actual communication – is to thoroughly analyze the project.

Essentially, this analysis consists of two main tasks:

- Identifying the trends, tendencies, issues, and problems generally affecting the field (or fields) that the project belongs to.
- Identifying the ability of the project to correspond with the topics identified in the first step.

The result of this analysis should give the project manager a clear picture of the communications potential of the project; of its relevance in a societal and/or professional context; of its ability to bring forth something genuinely new.

This process assumes that the analysis does not take place until after the project is more or less fully defined.

Ideally, of course, the project has already been made sure to correspond with relevant societal topics during the phase of conception, ensuring a high communications potential from the get-go.

STORYTELLING:

THE ESSENTIAL TOOL

The communications effort should not feel forced. The motivation to communicate the project should essentially be the same as making the project in the first place.

To help making communicating the project as natural as possible, the project manager should define the project's storytelling.

The storytelling is the central story about the project in its simplest, clearest form. And it is, indeed, a story – and not a compilation of buzzwords and prominent names.

Formulating the storytelling requires a strong insight into the nature of the project. This insight comes, of course, from the initial analysis, but also from knowing the inner workings of the

project: Its core vision, the organization that surrounds it, and its practical implementation.

Key questions to be asked before defining the storytelling include the following:

- *What sets the project apart from all other similar projects?*

Even if the project is quite similar to other projects, the storytelling should always highlight that which makes it unique. The project should never be described as simply “amazing, creative, and innovative,” because that is how most people tend to characterize their CCI projects.

The storytelling should make the project stand out, and ideally in a quite significant way. So be creative. But not so creative that you are not still truthful in everything you say about the project.

- *What issue or problem is the project (part of) an answer to?*

This does not mean that any given project should be trying to save the world – but hopefully it is, in some way, trying to change people’s minds about something.

- *What is the honest communications potential of the project?*

The project manager should exercise strong self-awareness on behalf of the project. The potential and importance of the project should not be purposefully overstated in the storytelling, as this will reduce its credibility – either right away when the storytelling is read, or when it becomes obvious that project cannot fulfill the potential that has been described.

This, of course, does not mean that the project manager should not let his hopefully high ambitions shine through in the storytelling, but the ambitions should be realistic. By all means, be idealistic and visionary, but present a credible vision – and one that is, ideally, already steadily on its way to becoming reality.

In short; sell the project – but do not oversell it.

WRITING THE STORYTELLING

The storytelling should be written in a general, inclusive tone of voice, and it should be possible to understand for everyone. An esoteric storytelling might have significant poetic qualities, but it will not do much in terms of communicating the project to people that are not already highly familiar with it.

The argumentation in the storytelling should be self-evident. The goal should be that everyone who reads it will think, “yes, of course,” and immediately acknowledge the legitimacy, relevance, and importance of the project.

In terms of length, the storytelling should be relatively short. As a rule of thumb, half a page is usually fitting. But if the project can truly be summed up in five sentences, that is even better.

THE PURPOSE OF THE STORYTELLING

The storytelling serves two overall purposes.

- Internally, the storytelling will define the goal, the vision, and the purpose of the project for everyone involved.

- Externally, the storytelling will serve as the foundation of all communications efforts.

Maybe the storytelling is a public text – maybe it is not.

In some cases, the entirety of the storytelling will serve well on what is typically placed in the “About” section on a website and in various materials presenting the project.

In other cases, the storytelling will require some level of adaptation for it to be fitting for public use. Usually this is due to the storytelling being all-inclusive, by its very nature, combined with a wish to only place focus on specific aspects of the project.

DISTRIBUTING THE STORYTELLING: ENSURING COHERENCE

In the following, seven overall ways of distributing the storytelling will be presented.

When so much emphasis is placed on the storytelling – rather than just talking about the general communication of the project – this is because the storytelling is what ensures coherence in the communications effort.

Every single initiative should reflect the vision and goals – and often even the specific wording – of the storytelling. Every initiative is, in essence, telling the same story, but in different ways, and through different channels.

DISTRIBUTION STRATEGY

Naturally, the communications effort should be a highly strategic one. It is recommended to develop a comprehensive strategy that outlines both the overall goals of the effort as well as what the individual initiatives should be and accomplish.

To be able to develop the best possible strategy, key questions like the following should be answered:

- Who are the target audiences?
- What pre-understanding do they have of the field that the project is a part of (if any)?
- Whose opinion do you wish to affect?
- Who will benefit from the project (the public and society at large, the given sector, the stakeholders?), and how?
- How visible should the project's stakeholders be in the communications effort?
- How should the general public, peers, investors etc. be addressed differently?
- How should recipients in different countries be addressed differently?
- Which (international) ambassadors are available for assisting the communications effort?

- What are the available resources?
- Which ways of distribution are the most relevant to the project?
- Even if you have resources for more; if you could only pick 2-3 focus areas for your communications effort, which would they be?

As made evident by the last question, it is generally important to focus the communications effort in a way that will ensure a limited number of focus areas with high impact, as opposed to a high number of focus areas with very limited impact.

#1 AS A STAND-ALONE PRESS STORY

This is the typical way of announcing a project. It usually happens through a press release and direct contact with the most important and relevant media outlets.

For it to be effective, the story needs proper news value. This can come in many forms. The most obvious one is a specific occasion – say, a launch date, a happening, a conference etc. – that one wants the press to give coverage. But it can also be through revealing research results or the result of a survey, or, of course, a new product or initiative of some kind.

The goal is to generate news stories, features, interviews etc. about the project.

#2 AS A CASE IN A CURRENT MEDIA FOCUS AREA

From time to time, media outlets will decide to give special attention to a given focus area, e.g. of a societal, business, or cultural matter, running a series of features and interviews that give the recipients a more in-depth understanding of the given area than is typically offered through the day-to-day coverage.

If possible, the project could be presented to the given outlet as a case story. The outlet will be likely to give coverage to the project, if it can exemplify or otherwise contribute to the given focus area.

At the same time, such a focus area makes it possible to present key persons within the project as experts within the given field – thus ensuring further visibility of the project, as the media outlet will most likely mention it in relation to the given story.

#3 AS A DECLARATION OF OPINION

Many media outlets, not least the daily papers, have opinion pages. Many projects will work well as the basis of a contribution to these pages, since they are based on distinct values.

Using the project as a positive example, the opinion piece should make a usually broad argument about society. This is the most direct chance of explaining to the public how the given project is (part of) the answer to a given challenge or problem that society is currently facing.

There are three key factors that an opinion piece can contribute to:

- Decision-makers read the opinion pages, and it is a very direct way of enlightening them and hopefully shape their opinions about the given field.
- Having an opinion piece published in a national newspaper adds significantly to the legitimacy and credibility of the project and the people behind it.
- It is considerably easier to be considered an expert within one's field once an opinion piece has been published, and often it will lead to the media taking contact on their own, thus ensuring further coverage.

#4 ON SOCIAL MEDIA

The obvious force of social media is that it allows you to reach those people that are directly and specifically interested in the given project or field.

This is not just true in terms of gaining and addressing followers on the various platforms, but also in terms of the increasingly advanced possibilities when it comes to marketing and directing stories. With the ability to target stories to people of specific ages and genders, with specific interests, in specific locations, it has become both easy and relatively cheap to reach highly specific target groups.

A story, of course, is not just a piece of text. It can just as well be a photo, a video, or an illustration that communicates the project in a way that text alone would never be able to.

Ideally, social media should be used for more than just publishing stories about the project. There is a wide array of possibilities when it comes to creative social media campaigns.

Here are three overall ideas:

- **Competitions:**

A popular way of generating attention about a project. These come in many different forms, such as quizzes, and ones where the participants have to be creative themselves, e.g. by submitting photos or text.

- **Crowdsourcing:**

Include the followers in the project by asking them relevant questions about it, i.e. to generate ideas and valuable input that might help shape the project or specific aspects of it.

- **Shops:**

Followers can be rewarded for publishing updates and content about the project, typically by using a hash tag (on Instagram or Twitter) and/or sharing content published by the profile – thus creating a shop system, in which the currency is activity, and where the reward is something of value to the follower, perhaps a mention, a free download, or – if possible – something physical, such as a gift card, a product sample, or something edible.

#5 THROUGH PROFESSIONAL NETWORKS

Sometimes affecting the opinions of a select few professionals is more important than affecting that of the general public. In such a case, one should focus the attention towards communicating directly to the relevant professionals.

This can happen through direct contact to individuals, of course, but also through relevant professional networks. Perhaps it will be possible to get a chance to speak at a network meeting and thus presenting the project in that way. Maybe the given network – or the overall field – has specialist journals and trade magazines that it will be possible to gain coverage in.

#6 THROUGH EVENTS

Any event that takes place for the sake of communicating the project to the public should be media-friendly. This means that the event should have something to offer the media.

Of course, a clear storytelling is on the top of the list of priorities. Next is the news value, whether it is in the form of

announcements, launches, or perhaps the presentation of academic findings.

There are various ways of attracting the attention of the media (and potential attendees), and the typical ones include appearances and performances by relevant celebrities, bands, troupes etc. Another option is to establish an award and present it at the event.

A different and more substantial way of garnering media attention is to hold a symposium or conference in which professionals within the given field deliver presentations, hopefully revealing something new and fascinating that the press will want to cover.

Naturally, it is possible to combine some or all of these – into a launch event with celebrity appearances, substantial presentations and an award to be handed out. The most important thing, however, is that the project – and its storytelling – comes first. The event itself comes second; every aspect of it should be there to serve the project.

#7 MARKETING

Lastly, various traditional marketing efforts should be considered. These are often fairly expensive, and they do not build up the story in the same way as the six other approaches.

They do, however, generate visibility for the project, and potentially – if the budget allows it – in a quite significant way. There is a wide variety of possibilities when it comes to marketing and advertising – outdoor, print, digital, tv ads, etc. – and the ideal mix naturally varies for each project.

The questions one should ask when putting together this mix are quite straightforward:

- Who do we want to target, and how can we target them as directly and accurately as possible?
- Which types of marketing can be combined to reach as many people as possible?
- How big is the available budget for marketing, and how do we get the most out of it?

A RAPIDLY CHANGING MEDIA LANDSCAPE: HOW TO PRIORITIZE

Never before has the media landscape changed as rapidly as it currently does. This means one thing above all: The usage of social and digital media is on the rise, while the use of analogue media is steadily declining.

This typically leads to thinking that one's communications efforts should generally be placed on the new media rather than the old. But that is a misconception. The truth is that while fewer people than previously consume the analogue media, they are still the ones that generally manage to set the agenda.

In Denmark, for instance, the old media produces 83 percent of news stories. And two-thirds of online news consist of recycled stories.

This, of course, does not mean that the new media should not be prioritized highly, too. But it is important to understand the strengths of the two overall categories of media: The old media's overall strength lies in generating the stories, while the new media's overall strength lies in distributing them.

When it comes to prioritizing the various aspects of the communications effort, the most important skill is to put together the right communications mix. To have the effort cover both old and new media, and to figure out which platforms – within the two overall categories – are most effective for communicating the project.

Some projects do truly work well as regular news stories, while others will reach further if an opinion piece about it is printed in a national newspaper. Some are destined to have great success through creative social media campaigns, while yet others are best communicated through a media-friendly event.

There is, indeed, not a one-size-fits-all approach when it comes to communicating CCI projects. But there is a toolbox that one can pick from, and by picking the right tools and using them wisely, one has the potential to gain both relevant and far-reaching coverage of the given project. Most likely, you will not have the resources to put every tool to use. You will have to pick – so pick carefully.

The trick, if you will, is to know your project and the world in which it should be communicated as well as possible. The better you know it, the easier it is for you to communicate it, and the easier it will be for everyone else to understand it.

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