

WHAT'S THE STORY?

COMMUNICATION MASTERCLASS



VistaMilk

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TELLING YOUR STORY

FIRST THINGS FIRST

- Communication is not a dark art
- Communication is – mostly – common sense
- Communication is not rocket science



At the heart of all communication is a story – and stories are what get people interested and listening.

Think of a **good news story** that you have heard or read, and it will almost certainly have achieved some of the following:

- Inform
- Entertain
- Challenge
- Evoke emotion
- Provoke a reaction
- Most of all, a good story will engage people

A good story can be about almost anything, but it normally contains one of the Six Things:

- Conflict/controversy
- Technology
- Celebrity
- Animals (the cuddlier the better)
- Human interest
- Money/investment

Expanding on these:

Technology

This refers to the latest tech developments, or the use of new tech to improve existing processes, or new tech in unexpected places, or how new tech is going to change our lives.

People are fascinated by ‘the rise of the machines’ – from a number of different perspectives. One of which, of course, is what you might call ‘The Terminator Factor’.

Money

‘One billion dollars.’ Large amounts of money make a story – could be investment, or cost, or price – we’re all fascinated by huge amounts of money.

Celebrity

Just two words. 'Love Island'. And they're not even celebrities. But the endorsement of a celebrity, or a celebrity actually involved in what you're doing – that's a story.

Human Interest

Human Interest is simply things that people can relate to, either personally, or on behalf of their friends and family. This will be the cost of living or births, death and taxes, or the environment, or changes to how we live our lives, new ways of doing things, fashion, food and entertainment.

Controversy

Exactly what it says on the tin. Something that sparks a debate, something that isn't in tune with 'popular thinking'.

Controversy doesn't have to be bad – it is, after all, just a disagreement about something involving different points of view.

But, if your story is controversial, then you need to be incredibly well-prepared when you tell it.

Cuddly Kittens

Again, nothing difficult here. Everyone likes something a bit cute and cuddly – which is why so many of us spend so much time looking at pictures of kittens and puppies that other people have re-tweeted, re-posted or forwarded on.

What tools are there to make a story engaging? Consider...

- **Anecdotes:** the truest form of story, talk about your experiences and those of other farmers. (e.g. steps taken to improve efficiency, lower emissions)
- **Analogies:** a comparison which paints a picture for the listener/viewer/reader. (e.g. efficiencies of Irish dairy compared to other countries; 'carbon neutral' methane from grass compared to fossil fuels).
- **Analysis:** Facts and stats based on, for example, official or industry figures and research.
- **Abstract:** Something seemingly unrelated or out of context which nonetheless tells the story, is engaging and offers you the opportunity to talk about the issues which matters (

Key things to consider

Know what your story is: What does it say about you? What do you want your audience to think about you when they hear it? How would you relate your experiences to the story? Stories are about people, and there's a reason why you are telling yours.

Have evidence to back it up: Could be your own statistics, could be anecdotal, could be someone else's story, could be the results of some research.

Make the connection: Make sure the story links clearly, obviously and unavoidably back to the messages you want to deliver. E.g. Your story might be about cuddly calves and cows dating apps, but that's just a stepping off point for you to deliver your messages about the issues which matter most – which could be, for example, the research, the environmental impact, the social impact on 18,000 family farms and 60,000 jobs, the economic benefit to a €5bn industry.

Know your audience: You're telling your story to an audience, not a journalist or interviewer. Important to know who that audience is because different groups of people will want to hear things

told in a different way. Picture in your mind who the audience is. RedFM, for example, will have a different audience than RTE Drivetime. In the middle, encapsulating perhaps the broadest demographic, would be someone like Nora from Nenagh, the embodiment of middle Ireland. How does the story need to be told for Nora to understand it?

WHO ARE YOU TALKING TO?

CONSUMERS
 LEGISLATORS
 INVESTORS
 BUSINESS PARTNERS
 TRADE ASSOCIATIONS

- How do they speak?
- How do they want to be spoken to?
- What words would they use?
- What words do they want to hear?



Be accurate: Know your brief. Leave no room for misinterpretation. Don't let people get your story wrong – it looks like you've dropped the ball.

Be concise: Long stories can be boring and can lose the audience in the telling. Make sure the detail of your story doesn't overshadow what you want to say. The message needs to be clear.

And Remember



A PICTURE TELLS A THOUSAND WORDS

- Pictures with people
- Animals doing amusing things
- Action shots
- Interesting backgrounds
- Attention-grabbing figures
- Colours and shapes

Practice, Practice Practice: Prior preparation prevents poor performance. You've learned the messages and done the prep, so don't let it fall apart at the final step. Practice what you want to say so that it comes easily to you in an interview. Like all things in life, the more you practice, the better you become.

MESSAGING

Messaging is the process of identifying the handful of things that you want your audience to hear. The important things. The things that, if people hear them and understand them, they'll make a difference.

These are things you include in a media release, or take with you to a media interview, or a presentation, or an important meeting – your story is the mechanism through which you bring attention to your messages.



WRITE IT DOWN

- Who
- What
- Where
- When
- Why
- How

- Who are you telling it to – needs of the audience
- Tell them what you're going to tell them
- Tell them it
- Tell them what you've told them

Key messages are:

- True
- Clear and concise
- Easy to say
- Easy to listen to
- Easy to understand
- Limited (to four or five)

Identifying key messages:

- What do you want people to think or do?
- What do they need to know to be able to think it or do it?
- What will make them think it or do it?
- What will change people's minds?
- What have people not thought about?
- What's the most important thing to you?

Developing key messages:

- Make a 'long list'
- Discard repetition and unnecessary detail
- Question your messages – do they stand up to scrutiny? Do they require too much explanation?
- Refine a 'short list'
- Road test your messages – do others understand them?

- Sense check your messages – are they the most important? Are they the things you really need to say?
- Review your messages regularly – are they still relevant? Are they still what people need to know?

LANGUAGE

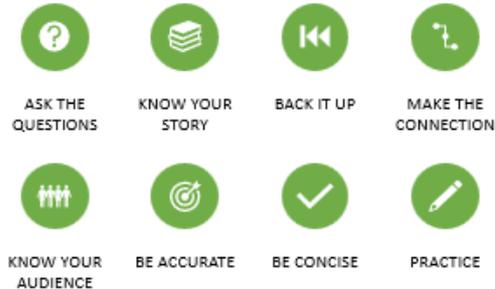
CLEAR, CONCISE, EVERYDAY

- Simple – less is more
- Words of fewer than four syllables
- Short, clear, strong sentences
- Strong active verbs
- No jargon, technical terms or buzz words
- Cut dead wood, repetition and padding
- EVERY WORD MUST EARN ITS PLACE
- Spelling and grammar



INTERVIEW ESSENTIALS

KEY THINGS TO CONSIDER



- Know your story
- Have evidence to back it up
- Link it back to you, your business, your industry
- Know who you're talking to
- Leave no room for misunderstanding or confusion
- Don't let detail take over

Ask the questions: Try to anticipate what questions are likely to be asked – including the difficult ones. Write them and your answers down, go over them in your head

Be prepared: you wouldn't present to your contemporaries without making sure you knew what you were getting into and a plan for how you are going to handle it. Treat a media interview the same way.

Know your facts: you have the information, you are the expert, sprinkle a few facts on your interview to demonstrate this and help tell the story.

Look for the opportunity: If you manage to do so then you'll be able to **recognise the opportunity** to deliver your messages. To tell your story, which is, after all, the whole reason why you're speaking to the media.

Don't panic: If there's something you don't know or which falls outside your area of expertise, then that's ok. It's better to say so and move on to an area you are comfortable with than to get flustered and let it put you off your stride. If you don't know, say so. Don't make it up and don't speculate.

Remain calm: there are several steps between calm and panicked, and you want to take as few of them as possible. There are journalists who like to see blood in the water. They may even try to provoke a reaction – under the guise of a 'devil's advocate' line of questioning. Your job is to stay calm and stay focused.

Don't agree with something you don't agree with. If the interviewer presents you with a statement and asks for reaction, don't start your answer with 'well', or 'yes, but' or 'I take your point'. If you disagree say 'no' or 'that's actually not the case' or 'I disagree with what you've said'.

Don't apologise or express concern instead, talk about the positives and do display empathy. Empathy is different to concern. Empathy is about understanding and being a part of an issue, without accepting responsibility or blame. You can relate to issues like climate change because "we

all have families and we share this planet” and so “are concerned about the climate change too”. Follow this up with your messages about how what you are doing is improving the sustainability of Irish agriculture and will ensure its viability for generations to come.

And there are physical things you can do prepare for an interview or call with a journalist:

If want to sound like you’re smiling on the radio, then smile!

Before you do your interview (on the telephone), get up and walk around. Breathe deeply and shake out your shoulders.

Even if you’re in the comfort of your own home – limit your distractions, sit properly in your chair

That being said, if it feels right, walk around – whatever makes you feel comfortable and clears your mind!

SOCIAL MEDIA

Questions you need to ask:

- Why am I using this platform?
- Who will I reach on this platform?
- What post types work best on this platform?
- How are my posts unique to this platform?

If we're serious about building a social media presence and engaging with various audiences, then the three social media we should be concerned with are Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram. Twitter (predominantly) and Instagram are **image-led**. You need to know how often do you plan to post to each social media platform – how much time can you give to the process of finding content, preparing commentary, and actually posting your content? It requires time, effort, thought and commitment and once you've 'switched it on' you'll find it difficult to 'switch it off' again. Social media is about finding things that reflect your story and your messages or are connected to them. It's about finding things that illustrate the points that you want to make.

Establish what engages people:

- Tech
- Investment
- Celebrity
- Controversy
- Human interest
- 'Cuddly kittens' – in this case, cows

Think about a **communication strategy** which is about getting consumers engaged with your story and your research – what's your Unique Selling Point?.

WHAT'S YOUR CONTENT?

- Your stories, things you're doing
- Research in progress
- Results in action
- All told in pictures and video
- Re-tweeting and re-posting



Your stories: All told in short text, pictures and video – but remember what makes a story and how to tell a story (impactful, engaging, attention-grabbing) – you've one chance to make an impression and you need to do it quickly.

Research in progress: What's your research telling you? How are you conducting it? Who's involved? What does it look like? You don't have to give away trade secrets, the content doesn't have to even be directly identifiable – as long as it links back to your story and what you want people to know about what you're doing.

Results in action: Is your research delivering actionable results? Is it delivering solutions that are being put into practice? Has it been written about? Have you presented the results to an audience? All of these things provide content for you to use.

Remember - all your content should be have strong pictures or video to back it up. Social media are, generally speaking, incredibly visual and a great picture – which we discussed earlier - or a piece of video will deliver you far more likes and shares than just some words.

Re-tweeting and re-posting: Engaging with conversations and trends that align with, or reflect, your messaging helps you build profile and, in turn helps build your follower base. Whether it's the opinions, thoughts and content of others, or whether it's mainstream media content that is relevant to what your story is and the messages you're trying to get across will work.

Hashtags are used to find stuff that interests and engages – there's a few used by dairy associations and the dairy industry as a whole:

#climateactionbill #dairy #dairyfarming #dairyeconomy #emissiontargets #carbonbudgets
#sustainabledairy #farmlandbiodiversity #irishfamilyfarm #grasstomilk #lovecows #teamdairy
#standupforfarming

What might your hashtags be – what might you look for. Always keep it to two or three hashtags – more dilutes whatever impact they might have.

Negative comment:

NEGATIVE COMMENTS

- Incoherent and unthinking
 - No response necessary
- Ill-informed
 - Reason for responding?
 - Is there any point in responding?
- Opposing point of view
 - Who's doing the posting?
 - Why are they doing it?
 - Is there any point in responding? (will it change anything?)



Responding:

- Timing – *if you are considering responding, need to act fast*
- Think/analyse – *do you really need to respond?*
- Evaluate – *what are the issues being raised?*
- Google – *if you're not sure who's posting, Google them*
- Evidence – *do you have evidence to counter what's being said?*
- Write it down – *write your response down. Write it down again*
- Third party – *get someone impartial to read it*
- Think/analyse again – *are you sure you need to respond?*
- Post?

Aim to shut it down - respond once – do not get involved in a 'to and fro'.