



Opportunities and threats presented to campaigning organisations by the fragmentation of media.

In 1992, a Bruce Springsteen lyric bemoaned the fragmentation of the media; '57 channels and nothing on'. In 2004 it was estimated that America had over 16,000 television stations, 13,000 radio stations and 18,000 magazines – and there's still nothing on!

Whilst somewhat behind the United States, Britain has experienced a huge growth in the plurality and diversity of communication channels. The driving force behind this proliferation has been the digital revolution – digital TV, digital radio, the internet, mobile telephony. The BBC estimates that by 2015 the majority of homes will have a broadband connection and Personal Video Recorders (PVR) will be the norm. Research has shown that in houses owning Sky+ or TiVo boxes up to 90% of advertisements are 'fast-forwarded'. Whether your goal is editorial or advertising, media fragmentation is a major challenge.

Media fragmentation begets audience fragmentation which offers campaigning organisations the opportunity to target clearly defined niches. Taken to its extreme, the combination of digital and database technology allows 'mass customisation' of a message direct to an individual's phone or PC; witness Amazon's text and email messages. Niche segmentation, tailored messages – it's a marketing man's dream. It's just so simple, isn't it?

There are significant flies in the ointment. As the media has fragmented, the consumer or recipient has in turn evolved: Less respect for institutions, fewer shared points of reference, the disappearance of habitual deference, and a marked move away from traditional politics to single-issue agendas. Cynical and sceptical, the consumer also suffers from 'message fatigue'. The average individual is subjected to almost 1,500 advertising messages each day and has become adept at ignoring most of them. It is estimated that over 60% of direct mail is never read.

The challenge for the campaigning organisation is to frame its message in such a way that it is relevant to both its target audience and to the communication channel. An ongoing campaign by Everyman – a charity aiming to 'cross out' male cancer – uses a mildly salacious video featuring Rachel Stevens to encourage young men to check their testicles. The video clip has its own internet site – www.rachelgetsfruity.com – which actively encourages viral transmission of the message via an email attachment. The video – and therefore the important health message – has received considerable coverage in the press and on radio, stimulated by traditional PR activity. This is a campaign that is both literally, and metaphorically, 'on the ball'.

In one of its own internal documents the BBC recognises that reliable and impartial information is at a premium. NGO and campaigning organisations have important messages that demand a clear, objective and reasoned voice tempered with humility. The goal is to be instantly recognised as the expert in one's field. Once this has been established, the 'consumer' will listen and media fragmentation will provide the tools to ensure that the message is heard. To paraphrase Bill Clinton, 'Communication - It's the future of your organisation, stupid!'

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