

CharityComms

Inspiring Communications at the Heart of Charities

CharityComms seminar: Managing Case Studies and Portraying Beneficiaries

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How should charities portray their beneficiaries and users? Towards best practice.....

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The story so far....

- CharityComms exist to try put inspiring communications at the heart of charities and non-profits
- One of the ways we do this is to help comms people learn from each other
- So we want to create a series of 'Best Practice Guidelines'
- Of which this is the first.....
- So we want to know what approach is the best
- And if this particular approach will help you do your work better, easier, quicker
- Our approach so far is to focus on four stages in creating your own guidelines

How should charities portray their clients, beneficiaries and users

So this includes

- People who use services
- People who don't use services but who are affected by the issue – both individual and generically

And the key areas are:

- How do photos and images portray beneficiaries?
- What words and phrases are or aren't appropriate to use about beneficiaries?
- How should you use your case studies of your beneficiaries?

So what are the stages in creating your own guidelines?

The four phases

1. Identify your problems and your sensitivities
2. Agree your principles
3. Make the key decisions
4. Sort out the mechanics

Phase 1: agree your problems and sensitivities

Problems and sensitivities

- Use of pictures that people aren't comfortable with
- Descriptive words that are over-used or cliché or patronising eg 'proud, independent and resourceful'
- Case studies that are ten years old
- Case studies that are really composites
- Case studies that users hate
- Fundraising, communications and services all using a different approach
- And a few more that your organisation specialises in
- Brainstorm them and then document them.

And sensitivities....

- Charities often have issues that they don't like to talk about
- But they aren't always very open or clear about these issues
- However it is much easier if these are identified up front – so your portrayal of case studies reflects your broader ethos
- For example, if you are a development charity you may not want people to think that people in developing countries always have too many children..... in which case your photos and case studies shouldn't show people with lots of children!

Phase 2: Agree your principles (both overt and covert) of portrayal

What are your principles. For example

- The person you are talking about would always be happy with the way they are described
- Portraying with dignity doesn't mean portraying an absence of need
- Portraying with dignity doesn't mean portraying without emotion
- Every user has reasons why they are there and solutions out of their situation
- Focus on the individual and tell their story as simply as possible
- Case studies are the best way we can tell people about our work

Phase 3: Make your decisions

The key areas

- Photos and images
- Words
- Case studies

Photos and images: key decisions

- Who can take photos?
- How will they be stored?
- What photos are the most applicable?
- What photos are not appropriate?
- How long can a photo be used for?
- Does the person in the photo need to give their agreement (for each use or for any use)?
- What makes a good photo?
- What makes a poor photo?

Words, phrases and languages: key decisions

- What words and phrases describe your clients powerfully and accurately?
- What words and phrases describe your clients badly or inaccurately or misleadingly?
- The challenge is to use powerful yet accurate language – guidelines shouldn't find a solution by simply being bland

Case studies: key decisions

- What kind of case studies do you want?
- Who looks after your case studies? (nurturing, relationships, welfare, storage)
- Will you use photographic models and if so when?
- Will you use composites case studies and if so what do you declare?
- How often will you use a case study?
- How long will you use a case study for?
- Will you pay case studies to do media work?
- Do you train case studies to do media work?

Phase 4: Sort out your mechanics

The mechanics

- Do you have a user group to advise and be critical friends
- Do you have a staff group to steer and review your guidelines
- Do you have all the necessary paperwork for gathering and monitoring case studies
 - Case study consent form
 - Photographer agreement form
 - Case study details form
- Do you have a database to store all your images and their use?
- Do you have a database to store all your case studies and their use?

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About CharityComms

CharityComms is the professional membership body for charity communicators, led by the sector for the sector. We aim to improve the standard of communications and champion its role in the sector. We seek to represent, support, inspire, connect and inform our members and the wider charity communications community.

Find out more

You can find out more about our events here: www.charitycomms.org.uk/events

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