COMMUNICATING THE TRANSPORT OF RADIOACTIVE MATERIALS USING NEW MEDIA

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ABSTRACT

The recent emergence of new ways of communication grouped under the generic name of "new media" has dramatically changed the access to and sharing of information, as well as the means of individual or collective expression of opinions. It can be witnessed in many instances that traditional text-heavy websites and printed publications are progressively being replaced by image-based documents, videos and bite-size texts on electronic supports. In other instances, social media allowing users to share thoughts and information online are rapidly overtaking the more traditional communication channels, such as newspapers and terrestrial television channels.

While surfing on the web, it is easy to find social networks, posts and blogs from those opposed to radioactive transport, trying to reach a wide and mainly younger audience. It is the responsibility of all those involved in the safe transport of radioactive materials to make available factual, sound and supported information in an accessible form to allow each stakeholder to develop an informed opinion of our sector.

After briefly summarising what constitutes new media, the paper will discuss how new media is affecting communications on the safe transport of radioactive materials. In order to provide a case study for the purpose of this paper, the experience of the World Nuclear Transport Institute (WNTI) will be exposed. The WNTI has developed a communications strategy which integrates the use of new media while adapting and modernising the traditional ways of communication, to propose a comprehensive set of information means aimed at a wide and diffuse audience of industry's stakeholders.

INTRODUCTION

For decades, traditional public relations and marketing techniques have shaped the way businesses communicate. However, in an era wherein digital technology has changed our daily lives dramatically and allowed computers to become ever more user-friendly, the Internet has changed the way we communicate. In the past, our industry public relations services would receive calls from journalists about, say, a new shipment of radioactive materials; and this information most likely would be reflected in some way in a newspaper or TV broadcast. Today it is now many-to-many: every one of us effectively can be a "citizen journalist", a writer, or a publisher. And communications go on now 24 hours a day, every day of the year, all around the world, between journalists, companies, individuals, government officials, and competitors. This new type of communication is often described as "new media".

After reminding ourselves of what the new media are, the implications of new media on communications strategies will be assessed, and I will offer some suggestions for their use in our sector - the transport of radioactive materials.

1. TWITTER WHAT?

For Wikipedia [1], new media promises to be the "democratization" of creation, publishing, distribution and consumption of media content. New media differs from traditional media not in the digital medium used, but in the interactive relationship it establishes. While a broadcast on a flat screen digital TV shall be considered as traditional media, sharing news on Facebook is new media – actually it is not only new media, it is social media, where the interaction take place in communities.

Social media is about dialogue; the sharing of information between social beings. Social media is driven by people who are creating new on-line communities. It is about social science not technology. Technology is the medium which allows the social relationship to take place; such as using a mobile phone or a laptop.

Already in 1962, Marshall McLuhan described how the world could contract into a "global village" by electric technology [2] with immediate exchange of information everywhere around the globe. His was the vision of a place where boundaries lost their meaning; where individuals were able to connect with other far-away individuals and feel part of a very close community. In this place you would not be required to travel the world in search for someone who would think like you; instead, you would post a blog, and invite people to comment on it.

There is, of course, a large variety of ways to connect online:

- **emails**: emails are THE traditional way to communicate online and we, all in this room, have at least one email account, but more likely two or three. We use it every day, on our laptop, or mobile phone, to communicate and exchange online, and our email address is in some instances more valued than our physical address.

- **instant messaging**: such as Skype, allows for quick reaction and video conferencing.

- **website:** a website is one or a series of web pages accessible with a domain name (through a URL address) and dedicated to a particular topic or purpose. It may be personal, commercial, governmental or belonging to a non-profit organisation.

- **blogs:** You most likely are familiar with blogs. You may yourself write a blog regularly, or post comments. A blog is a website regularly maintained and updated by an individual, where entries are commonly displayed in reverse-chronological order.

- **forums**: Doubtless you will have used, or at least referred to, a forum at some point. For instance, for easing the communication with its members, and between its members, the World Nuclear Transport Institute (WNTI) maintains an online members' forum.

- **social networks**: such as Facebook and YouTube, allow individuals to share views, and images, with a selection of "friends" or the wider community.

- **Podcasts and video blogs**: Podcasts and video blogs are a form of audio and video Internet broadcasting.

- **Wikis**: Wikis are a form of websites which facilitate collaboration and team work, and which invite comments.

- **microblogs and flow applications**: such as Twitter represent the modern age of text messaging.

- **livecasting and video casting**: video production once was the exclusivity of TV and a few advertisers. It is now common to have a camera built into a laptop. Many mobile phones take good video, and they are very easy to post.

- **virtual worlds**: Second Life is a well-known example of a virtual world, and some of the companies in our industry have used this platform to reach out to a younger audience. A virtual world is a computer-based simulated environment using avatars and three-dimensional graphics. Virtual power plants can be found on Second Life for instance.

The Internet is not only a medium for boundary-less communications; it also is a place both to gather information and to display information. And websites still are largely used as hubs, where net surfers can get information, learn, and provide information, for example. Search engines are the first websites in terms of traffic.

2. INTERACTIVE PUBLIC RELATIONS VS. TRADITIONAL MEDIA?

It would be mistaken to put interactive media against traditional media. They should be seen as complementary, as they each bring their own benefits, and in any event, trends are not completely settled.

First of all, we have not yet reached the stage where every one around the world has access to the Internet. While penetration growth rates can make you dizzy, as they are incredibly high, the spread is uneven around the world as shown in table 1 [3].

WORLD INTERNET USAGE AND POPULATION STATISTICS				
World Regions	Population (2009 Est.)	Internet Users Latest Data	Penetration (% Population)	Growth 2000-2009
Africa	991,002,342	86,217,900	8.7 %	1,809.8 %
Asia	3,808,070,503	764,435,900	20.1 %	568.8 %
Europe	803,850,858	425,773,571	53.0 %	305.1 %
Middle East	202,687,005	58,309,546	28.8 %	1,675.1 %
North America	340,831,831	259,561,000	76.2 %	140.1 %
Latin America/Caribbean	586,662,468	186,922,050	31.9 %	934.5 %
Oceania / Australia	34,700,201	21,110,490	60.8 %	177.0 %
WORLD TOTAL	6,767,805,208	1,802,330,457	26.6 %	399.3 %

Table 1- Spread of Internet usage around the world

And then, the important question: how old are you?

As shown in the diagram [4] below, almost all 18-24-year olds think that newspapers are unimportant, but more than 21% couldn't do without a wireless phone with an Internet

service. On the other hand, almost 30% of those older than 50 cannot do without a TV or a book.

Media they can't live without, by age
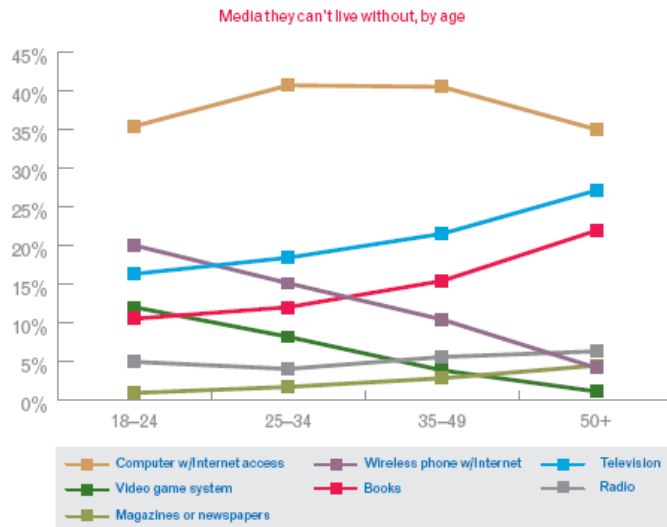
Source: Experian Simmons Spring 2009 New Media study

And the way we communicate electronically also is affected by our age [4]:

Sent or received in the last 30 days, by age
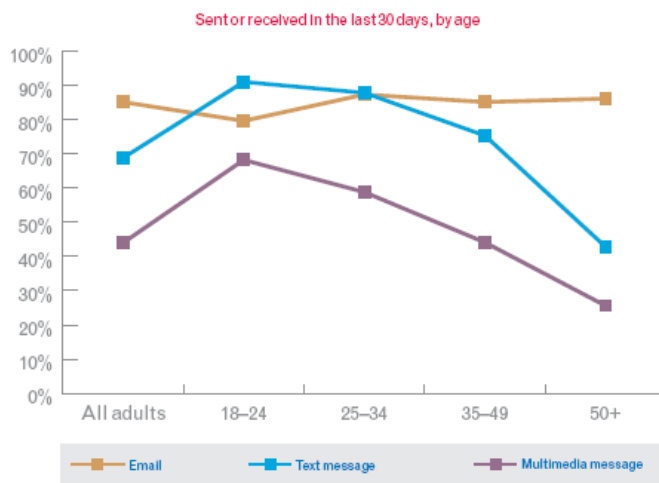
Source: Experian Simmons Spring 2009 New Media study

While almost everyone uses an email address, multimedia and text messages are favoured by the youngest adults.

However, trends are changing rapidly and the global village is becoming a global mega-city. Our communications will have to adapt. However, it is not necessarily about developing new ways for communications: it is more about re-inventing old ones, however this may be harder to achieve. Communication is the transfer of information packaged in a certain way from a sender to a recipient via a particular medium. As the message remains the same whatever the medium used, the communication principles are still valid, it is about integrating the new and

traditional media to achieve more efficient communications; and this includes reviewing old communication practices with a new eye on them.

3. WHAT IS IN IT FOR OUR INDUSTRY?

This new era is bringing a large selection of tools our industry communicators either already have adopted or are in the process of doing so. There is a lot our industry can use.

Traditionally, communication strategies in our industry have been targeted at those involved in some way in the safe transport of radioactive materials, including government officials and international organisations, using direct communication. I believe we should not consider the audience has changed because the tools have evolved. And targeted communication should still be at the centre of our strategy; what would change may be the means used to reach these diffuse audiences. Social media communication should be integrated into the communication strategy of our organisations; they should complement traditional means of communication, modernize them, but not replace them. Each new media tool should be assessed before being implemented, to arrive at a sound understanding of its impact. Most new media tools encourage conversation- not one-way communication, but a two-way communication; it is about inter-action and sharing of points of view. To be better at answering, it is important to listen first: the best communicators are the best listeners.

One common way to achieve effective "listening" is the monitoring of the net; monitoring both of one's own website and online presence as well as that of others. Monitoring pages viewed, queries prompted by website information, links and connections and success of strategies can be measured. For instance, the largest single group of queries related to the World Nuclear Transport Institute website currently is focused on back-end transport for the nuclear fuel cycle. The transport of uranium concentrates also prompts a substantial number of queries.

Monitoring also invloves looking at what is happening elsewhere on the web. This is an efficient way to find out about journal articles, blogs in relation to selected key words, gathering information about current trends in thinking. Tracking key words allows understanding how "hot" a topic is. Communicating on the safe transport of radioactive materials is competing against a myriad of other subjects which are discussed every day in the news. It is rare when a single piece of news stays online for any length of time.

Organisations and companies increasingly are realising that listening and engaging is becoming more and more necessary in order to compete with a short and highly diffuse attention span. Therefore, to get attention in the crowded, constantly changing environment of the web, the message must be powerful, and it must be targeted to reach the absolutely key stakeholders, supported with reliable, easy-to understand facts and visual materials. It is the age of the sound-bite, and bite-size information, fast-consumed and scarcely digested news. A survey carried out in 2009 [5] has shown that nearly 70 % of the journalists interviewed use social networking sites, a 28% increase from the year before; 48% are using Twitter, 66% use blogs and 48% use online video. 80% saw greater accuracy in new media and 80% saw bloggers as important opinion shapers.

In recognition of this fast changing communications environment, we at the World Nuclear Transport Institute (WNTI) have reformatted our factsheets to provide the best on-screen views, while also allowing for downloading them in a printer-friendly format. We have recently developed a new media centre which provides several formats for facts and information; which may include still pictures, quick facts, videos, factsheets, more detailed information papers or links to other relevant sites.

It is important to always bear in mind that everything shared online can become public information at a click. This is very important as organisations are made of individuals and it has exacerbated the importance of internal communications. In the event of a communication crisis, journalists may be likely to seek for views through their own channels – which include the social networks, where employees of your company will have personal accounts.

So, do you need to have a Facebook page? I am afraid there is no definite answer and probably the best I can suggest is: "It depends". In fact, as long as the reasons for a Facebook page for the organisation you represent are sustainable, and the implications of such a tool fully understood, a Facebook page can be a valuable element of your communication strategy. You will, however need to evaluate carefully the resources needed to manage all these tools as, remember, interactivity is key, and communication is 24/7. So the decision should not be based on the trendy aspect of a new media tool, but on the assessed contribution of this medium in your communication strategy.

While listening is a major element, online conversations cannot be controlled. A communication guru once said: "In social media, we earn the relationships and the reputation we deserve" [6]. At the time the WNTI video was launched, a mailing campaign informed our stakeholders of this new tool freely available online to visualise the various packaging and transport options used for the different stages of the nuclear fuel cycle. Soon after, and, I hasten to say, after work hours, I was surfing Facebook, searching for old school friends…and after a few hours, jumping from one old friend to his connections, and from there to various pages and groups, I ended up on a page for a group of North American Young Nuclear Professionals who were recommending the use of the WNTI video. I could not have done better for the promotion of this factual animated video!

CONCLUSION
In conclusion, new media can bring added value to a communication strategy for the public acceptance of the transport of radioactive materials, allowing factual information to be made available directly to interested parties.

Communicating the safe transport of radioactive materials is best achieved through a well-developed communication strategy which involves both traditional and new media tools. Social media represent an opportunity to demonstrate and build a strong relationship with our industry stakeholders.

Whatever the medium, a communication can only develop into a long-lasting, trustworthy relationship when the content of the message is factual, easy to understand, and is tailored to the recipient, taking into account his or her attitudes, feelings and beliefs. US President Kennedy once said: "If we are strong, our strength will speak for itself. If we are weak, words will be of no help."

REFERENCES

[1] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_media

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