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THE COMMUNICATOR
The USAID PHN Newsletter for CAs
Volume 3 Number 3
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The Communicator's Goals:

- * To increase the flow of information between USAID's Bureau for Global Health and CAs engaged in communications and public relations work
- * To enhance awareness of the need to disseminate news about our work and to show why it is important

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If you would like back issues of The Communicator, e-mail
lchomiak@usaid.gov.

In this issue, we're looking at ways to boost what we do, calling for improvements in our online communications strategies as well as in our writing skills. As always, there are examples to illustrate these communications ideas and more resources to aid you in your continued communications efforts.

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BLOGGING'S THE THING

And is increasingly being used by nonprofits. Could the international public health community usefully join the fray?

Many nonprofit organizations are now using an e-mail newsletter as the backbone of their online campaigns. But blogs (from "Web logs" -- Web sites posting online journals that are updated frequently and can cover a variety of topics) are gaining in prominence. Blogs are written in a highly personal voice yet are intended for external audiences and include news releases, human interest stories, and any notes of interest.

Nancy Schwartz of Nancy Schwartz & Company, a marketing and communications company (and yes, I follow - and quote! - her a lot) provided the following breakdown of the contents of a blog:

- * Brief entries running one to three paragraphs in length

- * One or more columns on the page, with new content added to the largest column
- * Sidebars linking to other blogs, previous posts, or other comments
- * Updates added at the top of the blog, so that entries read in reverse chronological order, an approach that makes the most recent content easiest to find
- * Links within blog entries to other blogs, Web sites, articles in e-newsletters, and audio and video files (some blog entries also feature photos)
- * Frequent updates, from several times daily to two or three times a week

Here's some initial thinking on how blogs can be used:

- * Overviews of new information going up on Web sites
- * Alerts about staff who will be attending conferences and follow-up on the day of the appearance with a report on the staffer's presentation (with a possible link to the presentation)
- * Promising new findings, programs, research that aren't ready for "prime time," as in a release or a panel discussion, but could be worth sharing
- * Human interest stories that put a "face" on development work
- * Notes from the field

And there's much more. These are just a few thoughts to get you started thinking.

You also can syndicate your blog to facilitate its use. Since I'm not so savvy on technology, I'll have you check out this story from the BBC for more info:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/magazine/3503509.stm>

Share what you think about this. Is it something we can use within the community? Or to link the community and share our thinking with the general public? Is this doable? We would like to hear from you.

THINK E-MAIL IS YOUR FRIEND?

Think again. Steve Ronksley, in SC Magazine for IT Security Professionals, writes that e-mail is falling victim to its own success, and that the threat of viruses could curtail how this technology is used and handled in the future. Check out his thoughts at:

<http://www.scmagazine.com/features/index.cfm?fuseaction=featureDetails&newsUID=a38bdbb2-9c9a-4b80-9822-284cala97f90>

DO SEARCH ENGINES SEARCH OUT YOUR SITE?

The Association for Interactive Marketing has published a technical white paper on search engine marketing (a five-page PDF) that's an introduction to the basics. See what they have to say at:

<http://www.interactivemarketing.org/councils/SEMC/semc-wp.pdf>

TO THINE OWN SELF BE TRUE

Know your audience, and know why you're talking to them.

We've quoted Nick Usborn from his biweekly newsletter about online writing before, but he always provides good reminders about staying focused in your communications goals. In his September 2004 (#064) issue of Excess Voices, he analyzes a newsletter that boasts great copy but is surrounded by dozens of other links and clickable images to other parts of the site. He notes:

"If the purpose of the newsletter is simply to generate as many clickthroughs to the site as possible, regardless of the landing page, then there's no problem.... But ... (if) the purpose is to maximize the number of people who click through the links that are within the central content of the newsletter...then they need to do a little redesigning and remove most of the elements that might distract people from the content they want to read...."

"And this is not found only within newsletters. The same problem can be found on many Web site pages. You'll be on a second- or third-level page, well on your way towards achieving the task you have in mind, and suddenly you'll find your attention being distracted by links, ads and offers unrelated to that task. ... In short, be clear about your purpose and about what you want your visitors to do at any one point on your site. ... Don't allow unrelated elements to create distractions."

Subscribe to Nick's free e-letter at www.excessvoice.com and read his info yourself. Let us know you've done it, and we'll quit quoting him!

DO YOU HAVE AN ONLINE MARKETING STRATEGY?

If so, we'd like to hear from you. Let us know how you developed it, how you sold it, and if it's working. Contact information is at the end of this newsletter.

MAN CANNOT LIVE BY WEB ALONE

You need more than Web sites and press releases in a strategic communications plan. One good way to get attention is through honors and prizes. To get the attention of a wide audience, venture outside your own field. For example, the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation awards an annual prize of \$1 million to an organization making extraordinary contributions toward alleviating human suffering anywhere in the world. Nominations are sought from throughout the international community. Check out their criteria at

<http://www.hiltonfoundation.org/main.asp?id=43>

EVER THINK THAT THE IT FOLKS JUST DON'T TALK TO YOU ENOUGH?

They probably don't. To start the dialogue, check out Communication-Centered Technology Planning, which is written for people who make IT decisions and helps them take into account communications needs. Sections deal with Communication and Collaboration, Communities and Networks, Knowledge Management, Stakeholders, and Systems Thinking. For more information and to find out how to buy your copy, go to:

<http://news.gilbert.org/pub/cctp>.

WRITING - A COMMUNICATOR'S BEST FRIEND

Sometimes we can get so caught up in the technology we use -- well, see all articles and references above -- we forget that the most important tool in our arsenal is good, solid writing. If you've ever wrestled with "translating" health-speak into English the average person can understand, you know what I mean. So here's a quick reminder that brushing up one's writing skills would be a great way to greet Mother Nature's hints that winter is on the way.

I'm not alone in saying this. Another voice, the European PR company Whiteoaks, admonishes PR people to maintain high standards of written material. Writing on their Web site

http://www.whiteoaks.co.uk/pr_resource/prtips/prtips_back_basics.html

about technology public relations, they give tips that apply to us all:

"Even if a story is newsworthy and correctly targeted, its impact can be lessened by sub-standard copywriting and the over-use of jargon. As with positioning, don't let the internal company/client perspective come into play, resulting in words and phrases that the CEO/marketing head favours but journalists dislike appearing in written copy. Paul Douglas, editor of .net, concludes: "Plain language wins the day every time."

Here are a couple of ways to jump start the process. Go to

<http://www.aci-plus.com/tips>

and check out Tips, Tools and Ideas To Improve Your Writing. It's for students and deals with essays and such, but good strong writing is good strong writing, no matter the format. For a measly \$1.50, you can get access to some great tools, including a three-question quiz to test your writing, active voice versus passive voice, and "less is more" -- striving for simplicity of expression.

Or check out Scribe & Quill, a regular e-zine for writers of all experience levels and genres. Each issue features articles, interviews, fiction, poetry, humor, tips, and more. The July issue has a good article on overcoming writer's block. They also offer writing courses. You can find them at

<http://www.scribequill.com>.

And while we're honing our writing, let's look at improving PowerPoints as well. Check out Showstoppers PR Tips on the Web:

<http://www.showstoppers.com/showstoppers-pr-tips.shtml>.

They have two good articles on PowerPoint presentations. Maybe we can start a revolution in our organizations!

RESOURCES

Public attitudes can guide your communications planning. The Rand Corporation has released the results of its public opinion survey to assess trends in American attitudes toward domestic and international family planning issues. The results, a follow-up of a similar survey conducted in 1998, were published in *Studies in Family Planning*. The bottom-line news is that public support has declined somewhat, but the numbers are still very good. I think it means we need to redouble our efforts to communicate what we're doing, how it's helping, and what this means for U.S. citizens. The article is posted on the East West Center's Web site at

<http://icpd.eastwestcenter.org/health/pdf/USopinion04.pdf>.

Online:

The new Users' Guide to USAID/W Population, HIV/AIDS, Health, and Nutrition Programs is up. Its three sections are:

- * An overview of the Global Health Bureau. This section describes the organizational structure and functions of the Global Health Bureau and offers an annual update on Global Health accomplishments and foci.
- * Listing of all Global Health Bureau projects and partners. It is organized by both project and technical office and provides project descriptions and contacts.
- * An information directory -- this lists USAID Global Health/Washington and Mission staff contacts, partner organizations, country coordinator/teams, technical working groups, relevant acronyms, country support services, and a comprehensive index (including agreement/contract names and numbers, CAs, and CTOs).

An online version of the Users' Guide is available on the Global Health website:

http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/global_health/pdf/phnug.pdf

It enables the user to select and download relevant portions. In a couple of months, the Users' Guide will be converted to an online searchable database with links to CA Web sites and other essential resources found in the print version.

Publication:

Scott Ratzan, editor of the Journal of Health Communication, stopped by to say he encourages your submissions. The Journal of Health Communication is a scholarly, peer-reviewed journal, published bimonthly. It presents the latest developments in the field of health communication including research in risk communication, health literacy, social marketing, communication (from interpersonal to mass media), psychology, government, policymaking, and health education around the world. You can send manuscripts to Wendy Melzer, Managing Editor, GW Center for International Health, The George Washington University, 2175 K Street, NW, Suite 810, Washington, DC 20037. You can get more information from their Web site:

<http://www.gwu.edu/~cih/journal/>

YOUR FEEDBACK

With your participation this newsletter can increase our interaction and participation in getting the word out about what we do. Let us know what you would like to see in this newsletter, what topics you want covered, or what additional items should be included. We also encourage you to become a contributor -- pass along stories about your program, including poignant accounts, major accomplishments, new publications, awards received, or upcoming conferences, to lchomiak@usaid.gov.

Also, if you know people who should get this newsletter, let us know so we can add them to our subscribers list.

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