

Communicating complex information

Let's face it. Some communication jobs are easier than others. Describing how your employees made this year's United Way campaign the most successful ever? No sweat. Explaining the carbon sequestration provisions of your new agricultural land use policy to dairy farmers? Now that's a little more challenging. When you need to translate specialized material to a broader audience, keep the following principles in mind.

1. Make it relevant

As we've said elsewhere, [it's all about audience](#). Give your readers a reason to pay attention. How will the research results, policy proposals or legal ruling affect their lives? Keep asking yourself "so what?" until you arrive at a message with real impact.

2. Sift. Filter. Separate the wheat from the chaff.

The details in that 120-page report may be fascinating to a specialist in the field. For a broader audience, however, you need to be choosy. Think about what you're trying to achieve. Inspire donations? Influence political decisions? Make a sale? Focus on the key information that will convince your audience to take that action.

3. Use metaphors, analogies and concrete examples

When Robert Farmer wants to help non-economists understand how the stock market influences the economy and vice versa, he describes them as two staggering drunks connected by a long rope: loosely linked and prone to erratic movement. The right metaphor can create a powerful *aha!* moment, as well as a mental picture your readers won't forget any time soon.

4. Minimize jargon

There's no better way to lose your audience than burying them in an avalanche of buzzwords and acronyms. If you're speaking to a meeting of cardiologists, by all means throw around terms like cerebrovascular occlusion. Otherwise, talk about a blockage in the vessels that supply the brain with blood.

5. Think visually

Words may be our livelihood at Cadmium Red, but we're the first to acknowledge that strong visuals pack a punch. If you want to show connections, track trends or compare data, a well-designed infographic can save you one heck of a lot of copy. Meanwhile, if you're aiming for emotional impact, images are hard to beat. When Michelin wanted to promote the safety benefits of their tires, for example, they didn't tout their tread design, rubber composition or stopping distances. Instead, they used a photo of baby with simple tagline: Because so much is riding on your tires. Bingo. Message received.

For more communications tips, visit www.cadmiumred.ca/resources. Need help creating messages that hit home? Call or email us to discuss your next project.