

COMMUNICATING FOREST INDUSTRIES

Speech to the NAFI Timber and Forestry Conference, by Don Mackay, Director
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Public relations is an integral part of NAFI's Charter.

The organisation was born in 1986, in part from concern about - and I quote directly from the Charter - "a public profile that does not reflect the industry's significant national and local impact, or its concern with good long-term management and regeneration".

To meet its communication objectives, NAFI has to have a carefully planned public affairs program designed to make the very best use of available resources.

In order to implement such a program we need to be able to -

- identify key target audiences
- define the messages we want to deliver to these target audiences
- find the most effective channels to deliver these messages
- implement a range of initiatives and;
- monitor and evaluate performance. (We have to know what works, and just as importantly, what doesn't work)

An essential tool is research.

NAFI commissions regular major studies to measure public attitudes to the environment, forest management and forest industries. In line with "best practice" public relations, this research underpins and helps drive our communication program.

We also undertake smaller research exercises - including periodic focus group testing - to assist in the implementation of specific projects.

Some of the key issue areas covered in our research include -

- the political landscape (where do environment issues currently rank?)
- attitudes towards key players and institutions, including the Green Movement
- a profile of 'green' opinion
- attitudes towards the forest industry and forest management
- attitudes towards woodchipping.
- forest plantations
- wood products
- media usage

This research is invaluable in determining our most important target audiences and key messages. It also guides our decisions on the most appropriate communications vehicles and tools to deliver those messages.

These tools can range from direct advertising, to the publication of facts sheets, brochures and booklets, media liaison and briefings, and as I will discuss later, the Internet, and the education system.

Our research tells us, for example, that Australians are considerably more worried about issues such as crime and education than they are about the environment. Forest issues can be considered to be mid-ranking in community consciousness while woodchipping ranks quite lowly.

We know concerns about forests are more pronounced amongst females, the upper middle class and West Australians.

To gauge the public view on environmental issues, including forestry, the Australian population can be divided into the following segments -

Dark Browns 5%
Light Browns 31%
Light Greens 51%
Dark Greens 14%

Looking at the demographics of these segments, the following word pictures emerge -

Dark Greens

Slightly more female, more likely to be 50 years and over, big consumers of radio and current affairs on TV. Much more likely to be watching and listening to the ABC. More likely to have voted Labor or Democrat at the last Federal election. This segment includes people as diverse young environmental activists through to socially concerned new-age Grandmothers. Strongly pro-environment.

Light Greens

More female based, even age spread, more middle class, higher household income, mostly aged 25 - 49. Again strong users of the ABC. They're socially aware, concerned about the environment but not extreme.

Light Browns

More male, more likely to be under 40 years old, upper middle or working class, low-middle household incomes, and big watchers of evening TV news. Lower uses of the ABC. Have a strongly pragmatic view of the environment. They have strong practical views when it comes to the environment.

Dark Browns

Slightly more male, even age spread, working class, big readers of daily newspapers, especially (tabloids) and very low users the ABC. They support economic development and are concerned about jobs.

We can extract exceedingly useful information by carefully analysing the research findings.

The research tells us, for example, that commercial television advertisements would not be a sensible communications vehicle to deliver messages to Dark Greens. Likewise, a well reasoned interview on ABC Radio National would have little impact on the attitudes of Dark Browns. We know Light Greens are regular cinema goers.

Objective, independent research helps us to define the most effective messages and how to target our audiences.

We cannot say too often that the forests are managed sustainably, scientifically and that they regrow.

Overwhelming, Australians agree on the need for a "viable" forest industry". And they agree it is okay to log native forests "provided that the forest is properly regrown and managed so that it remains for future generations".

Unfortunately, around half of the public remain sceptical that our forests are indeed being responsibly managed. And there lies the challenge.

The forest industry is a great industry. It is part of our heritage and will be an increasingly important part of our future. And we can demonstrate that sound forest management today is going to benefit our children's grandchildren. These are true statements. But who wants to listen?

The Dark Greens certainly don't. They are intractably opposed to the native forest industry and always will be. We've talked to them. They are impervious to our messages. They cannot be a priority target for us.

Similarly, there is no point committing finite resources at the Dark Browns. They are on our side. They support development and jobs. Forestry and the environment don't often feature on their radar.

The Light Browns are also in our ledger. They are more tuned in to the environment than the Dark Browns, but are confident we're "doing a good job".

It's the Light Greens that we must target primarily. They make up half the population. They have soft environmental mindset. They don't instinctively support us. However, their minds are open. They can be persuaded. Not surprisingly, this "green-leaning" segment is now the status quo in society.

The industry will succeed if its communications to these Light Greens is effective and credible.

Importantly, opinion leaders and decision makers fit within this Light Green segment. So we are able to tap into further key audiences including–

- government and politicians
- unions and employees
- the media (especially the ABC - which is a critical information source for the industry's critics)
- business and organisations;
- educators.

Keith Kessell will shortly be talking about the industry's latest advertising campaign in Western Australia.

The campaign was precisely targeted and research driven. It was tightly focused on the key message, "forests regenerate after logging". It was finely tuned to the Light Green audience. And it was presented in the media they consume. The outcomes are being measured and evaluated.

Two national examples of NAFI's comprehensive approach to public communication involves schools and the use of the very latest information technique, the Internet.

NAFI has created its own kid's club, TimberTrek, to reach schools, teachers, students and their Mums and Dads, across Australia.

Two years ago, we sat down and reviewed our education program. As with similar organisations, NAFI had struggled over the years to "crack" the school market. It was frustrating and expensive. NAFI sought the advice of teachers and educators, including a two day national seminar to workshop the issues and refine our strategy.

We took the decision to target the majority of our education resources on Primary Schools, because they have flexible curricular and relative teacher independence within the stipulated key learning areas..

Teachers are inundated with potential resources to use in the classroom. If your product is to catch their attention and succeed, it has to be unique and easily utilised.

We believe, and we already have the figures to prove it, that TimberTrek is all of these things.

In just over a year we have generated more than 15,000 memberships. More importantly, many of these memberships have been raised through schools. Unquestionably, it is hugely popular.

Tumut - a town of only 7000 - 400 kids joined as a result of a single one day promotion. All three Primary Schools in Tumut are 'members' of TimberTrek.

Having bedded down TimberTrek, we proceed to develop '*Our Forest - Australia's Amazing Backyard*', a sparkling 32 page comic-style education resource exploring key forest related issues.

It was written by TimberTrek editor, Meredith Costain, in consultation with forest management and industry professionals, and was launched at the beginning of the 1998 school year.

'*Our Forests*' was designed for both print publication and posting on the education pages of NAFI's Internet site, *Forestry Australia*. The cartoon style and characters depicted in the publication (the Woodrow family) are drawn from TimberTrek, enabling us to cross promote the two resources.

Clearly, '*Our Forests*' is an exciting publication. The reception from schools has been overwhelming. It's editorial quality and attractiveness, as well as NAFI's ability to provide schools with multiple class sets, is already influencing hundreds of teachers to explore Australia's forests within the classroom.

In the last three months more than 60,000 copies of '*Our Forests*' have been requested and distributed to Australian Primary Schools. We received letters and phone calls daily from schools commenting on the quality and usefulness of the publication. Many teachers tell us it is being used for language studies as well as environment and resource projects.

'*Our Forests*' is extremely cost effective. At approximately 35 cents per copy we have the capacity to disseminate multiple class sets into every Primary School in Australia.

With TimberTrek and '*Our Forests*,' the Australian forest industry has an unprecedented opportunity to influence attitudes in schools.

The Internet to, has been another public affairs success story for NAFI.

The Internet is a powerful communications tool. It is enabling NAFI - in a way never before possible - to efficiently and inexpensively promote and distribute information to a national and international audience.

From humble beginnings in late 1996, the our site "Forestry Australia" is now recording more than 70,000 hits a month. In 1997, it recorded more than 550,000 hits and indications are that this figure will be considerably exceeded in 1998.

As well as acting as a library and electronic post box for printed resources, the site is performing a host of other communications functions. Importantly, it enables us to interact with our members, stakeholders and even our critics.

The TimberTrek flagship is a quarterly comic-style magazine which is replicated on the TimberTrek Internet pages.

We set out to develop a resource that was contemporary – “cool” as the kids say – that would deliver forest related information and entertainment to primary aged kids – particularly in the 8 – 12 age group.

We wanted the emphasis on a clean environment and healthy living. It needed to be developed for publication in both print and on the Internet.

The decision was taken to direct mail the publication to members homes. Anyone who has had kids will know the excitement they get out of receiving their own mail.

In terms of schools, however, we wanted a product that would – given receptive teachers - serve as an attractive teaching aid and, later, provide the foundation for the publication of a high-class, stand-alone education resource. (Recently published as *'Our Forests - Australia's Amazing Backyard'*)

Our formal and informal research, indicated that teachers had both an open mind to our activities and shared the general population's hunger for clear, accurate and easily accessible forest related information.

An award winning children's education writer - Meredith Costain from Melbourne - was appointed as editor of the project. Throw in a world class cartoonist and an equally talented designer and Camp TimberTrek and the Woodwork family were born.

As well as regularly delivering positive messages to kids about wood, TimberTrek is performing a host of other education-related functions. TimberTrek sponsors Olympic medal-winning basketballer, Fiona Robinson, who conducts TimberTrek basketball clinics at Australian Primary Schools. Fiona also has her own page in the TimberTrek quarterly magazine and her own “chat room” on the TimberTrek Internet site.

Last year, in association with the Royal Australian Institute of Architects, TimberTrek sponsored the TimberTrek National Design Competition for Primary Schools. Despite being marketed late in the school year, more than 100 schools took the time to become involved. The Institute is keen that this become an annual event. Education Departments too, want to become involved.

TimberTrek is also an excellent “shop front” for the industry. Parents, teachers and kids are interacting with us in a positive, constructive environment. For the first time they are coming to us. Industry supporters, staffing TimberTrek displays, report unprecedented, constructive contact with the public. At the recent Royal Canberra Royal Show 1700 new members were fully signed in just two days. In

I've already referred to the cross promotion with TimberTrek and the "Our Forest " resource. Around 50 kids a week join TimberTrek through the Net. TimberTrek members have their own secret site, where they can chat or enter competitions. Teachers email us on-line to order resources or pass comment.

The "live" TimberTalk, with Harry and Sal (alias Peter Llewellyn from the South Australian Timber Development Association) is heavily accessed. It now contains more than 1000 responses to questions from people from around the globe. It is a treasure-trove of information on forest and timber issues and applications. It even comes equipped with its own dedicated search engine.

A most encouraging feature of Harry and Sal is the increasing number of students accessing the forum for school related information.

I believe simplicity is a major factor in the creation a successful Internet site, along, of course, with the constant posting of interesting, up-to-date and relevant information.

I hope this overview of NAFI's communications strategy, including initiatives like TimberTrek and the Internet presence, gives you some insight into the challenges we face and the actions we are taking to meet those challenges.

The industry has a truly great story to tell and we're doing everything we can to make the best possible use of communications resources available.

As a communication's professional, I could not ask for a more enjoyable and rewarding role than helping to promote the use of the finest renewable resource know to mankind.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my views with you today.

It is now my great pleasure to introduce Tique Bennett, who as NAFI's Adelaide-based Internet Publisher, has been instrumental in making our Internet site such a success. Tique is a Director of Netcraft Australia and looks after a growing stable of company Internet sites including North Ltd, North Forest Products and ERG. When it comes to effective Internet communication - she is one of the best.

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