

Precaution Advocacy Messaging Strategy: The GAAMM Model (Page 1)

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1. Goals.

Start by deciding what you want to accomplish – not what you want to say. Make sure your goals are really the outcomes you want, not some stand-in you’re hoping will lead to the outcomes you want. “Awareness,” for example, is rarely anybody’s actual goal. Most goals are behaviors or policies.

Note: In outrage management, by contrast, you start with the outraged people who are in your face – and their goals. But in precaution advocacy it’s mostly up to you, at least until you succeed in arousing some interest.

2. Audiences.

Audiences are chosen based on your goals: Whom do you need to reach in order to accomplish what you’re trying to accomplish? Once you have identified your audiences, start characterizing them – their attitudes and values, emotions and needs, current behaviors, knowledge of your issue, media use patterns, preferred spokespeople, etc. Study your audiences with methodological rigor if you can; do it more casually and haphazardly if you must. But do it.

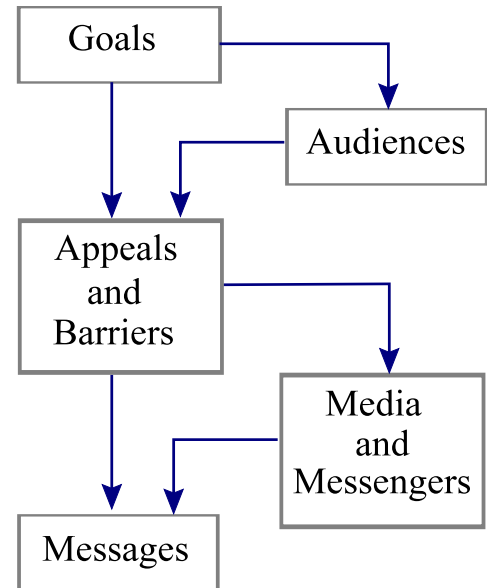
Note: In outrage management we talk about “stakeholders” – people who feel a stake in what you’re doing and entitled to influence how you do it. But in precaution advocacy they’re mostly passive: audiences, not stakeholders. You’re trying to turn them into stakeholders.

3. Appeals and Barriers.

Appeals are everything that predisposes your audiences toward your goals – pre-existing needs, attitudes, emotions, etc. The core of precaution advocacy messaging is to remind your audiences of those appeals and hook them to your goals as emphatically as possible. In other words, your messages won’t be about your topic itself; they’ll be about your audiences’ relationship to your topic.

Barriers are everything that predisposes your audience against your goals. It is always worth knowing what the barriers are; whether you should address them or concentrate on the appeals depends on the situation.

Note: In outrage management barriers usually matter a lot more than appeals; addressing people’s objections (often by acknowledging their validity) is central to outrage management messaging. But in precaution advocacy the appeals rule – at least until you’ve aroused some interest; then the barriers start mattering too.



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4. Media and Messengers.

Your media choice should be based on your audiences and your appeals. You're looking for media that reach your audiences, of course; and you're looking for media that are conducive to your appeals. If the appeals are hotly emotional, for example, a radio talk show will work better than a newspaper article. Messengers, too, should be chosen to fit your audiences and appeals. Who will be credible saying that sort of thing to that particular audience?

Note: Most outrage management is two-way person-to-person dialogue with small numbers of highly involved people. But precaution advocacy is usually one-way communication to large publics via the mass media.

5. Messages.

Now you can develop your messages. They need to embed your appeals, of course, and they need to be appropriate for your media. Draft carefully. Make every word count. Test your messages – and plan on probably needing to revise and test again. (If you lack the resources to test rigorously, test more casually.) Once you have come up with messages that are well-designed to achieve your goals, stay on message.

Note: In outrage management you should stand ever-ready to go “off-message” in order to listen and respond to stakeholder concerns. You’ve got all night. But in precaution advocacy you’ve got maybe 15 seconds and you should stay on message.

For more about my take on this issue, see:

- Medicine and Mass Communication: An Agenda for Physicians (1976) – <http://www.psandman.com/articles/medicine.htm>
- Chapter 11, “Media Campaigns” in *Environmental Education & Communication for a Sustainable World*, edited by Brian A. Day and Martha C. Monroe (2000) – <http://www.psandman.com/articles/chap11.pdf>

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