

Don't Know Your Audience? Your PR and Marketing May Fall Flat

Over the past several months, our nation and world have seen or experienced unfathomable tragedy – ravaging hurricanes, horrific earthquakes, a mass shooting and uncontrollable wildfires. In the midst of such immeasurable heartbreak and trauma, people take comfort in strong leadership, empathy and tangible action plans. Unfortunately, President Donald Trump's public statements, after a number of these incidents, were generally met with criticism and incredulity.

What went wrong?

Arguably, some of Trump's comments missed the mark because he failed to connect with his audiences. Granted, in times of turmoil, it's difficult to even begin to find words of comfort, but if his words had carried greater sensitivity, consideration and knowledge of the audience – their emotions, concerns and priorities – then perhaps they would have been more favorably received.

The primary goal of public relations is to connect with your target audience in a way that provokes positive response and action. Knowing your audience and using exactly the right words is PR 101! My clients are extremely intelligent, articulate and highly trained. They have legal knowledge and insights that benefit business communities and individuals locally and around the globe. However, these insights will fall on deaf ears if the audience is not considered and understood. An article geared toward corporate board members should read far differently from communications with a reporter or a speech to tech-savvy entrepreneurs.

Key Audience Considerations

Here are some key audience considerations that will help you shape and communicate an effective, well-received message.

- **What are their job responsibilities and to whom do they report?** If you want to provide your audience with useful information, you first need to understand their day-to-day objectives and reporting structures. Try to pinpoint what information your target market needs to succeed. Your goal should be to help them meet and exceed their business goals.
- **What are their primary demographics?** Age? (Because, let's face it, the generation gap is real.) Gender? (Newsflash: Men and women are wired very differently.) Political affiliation? (The last thing you want to do is isolate members of your audience by making inappropriate or crude political generalizations.)
- **What industries do they represent?** There are stark contrasts in tone, expectations and slang from industry to industry. Members of the C-suite in manufacturing will respond,



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absorb and react to communication differently from members of the C-suite in financial services organizations. They serve different clients, target different regions and face different obstacles.

- **What are their priorities, goals, concerns and fears?** We all have different concerns and will pay acute attention to (or hire!) those who can alleviate them. Present information that will help your target audience reach goals and conquer fears.
- **What is their level of experience?** An audience with many years of experience needs fewer explanations and background details. Write or speak to their level of knowledge and understanding; otherwise, you will quickly lose their attention.

Answering these questions may require substantial digging and research, but the information will be valuable beyond belief. If you are writing an article or participating in an interview with a media outlet, publications often post readership statistics on their websites. If you are preparing a speech for a conference or other event, you probably can request audience specifics from event planners.

The Importance of Being Relatable

A byproduct of audience awareness is relatability. Think of it as you would any other relationship: The more you know someone, the more relatable and trustworthy you become. Numerous studies show that renowned authors and speakers succeed because they are relatable. The audience feels known and valued. Even if they disagree with some of your points, a rapport still exists. Further, relatability goes a long way from a business development standpoint – people want to do business with those they trust and like. If new clients are the ultimate goal of your PR initiatives, then there is an even greater incentive to conduct thorough due diligence on your target market.

If you're not sure how you rank on the scale of audience awareness, see Jaffe Content Strategist [Keith Ecker's](#) piece "[5 Signs that You Don't Know Your Audience.](#)" As Keith notes, "before you can target your market, you have to know your market. That's why the most critical piece of market intelligence for your content program is the target audience profile."

A strong, successful message requires empathy and knowledge. Before embarking on any type of PR initiative, it's imperative to first identify your audience so you can tailor communications to them effectively. Otherwise, you may very well be wasting your time.

If you would like to discuss your PR efforts and audience awareness, feel free to contact me, [Bethany Early](#), at bearly@jaffepr.com.