

Communications channels

Introduction

When deciding which communications channels to invest in, the starting point should be your **audiences**. Which channels are most likely to reach and engage your audiences? Which do they already use and trust?

The second consideration is how much detail they'll require from you in order to engage with your study and findings. If your audience comprises policymakers actively developing policy in your area of research, their appetite for detail will be high, and the communications channels you choose will need to accommodate that. If your findings relate to informing new approaches among time-pressed practitioners, you may need to summarise or break down your insights and communicate with them little and often.

By starting from your audiences' perspectives it is possible to resist the impulse to revert automatically to channels that you have used previously or that you are already familiar with. The following table gives a brief rundown of some of the main communications channels for researchers, their key benefits and some considerations for use.

Journals

Good for	Consider
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• peer review• communicating findings to other researchers/experts in your field• advancing knowledge• building awareness of research• building credibility of your research• career advancement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is the journal's coverage a good match with your study?• Publishing is evolving – explore electronic-only journals and open access publications if they feel right for your work.• Check restrictions (such as word count, open access fees, their position on communicating before journal publication) to avoid problems or disappointment down the line.• Impact factor is important for academic purposes but high impact factor may not mean a wide readership.

Conferences, group meetings, workshops

Good for	Consider
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• listening• brainstorming• relationship building• building and sharing purpose• exchange of complex• learning and information• building trust and loyalty• engaging early adopters.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Time and cost resource: do participants have sufficient time and/or motivation to attend?• Timing and location: make it easy and/or appealing to attend, or piggyback onto existing meetings.• Format: ensure everyone has time to participate and contribute.

1:1 meetings

Good for	Consider
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• engaging influencers or stakeholders• building knowledge and trust• building or maintaining key relationships.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The messages you want to communicate in the meeting and how to follow up to ensure the relationship is maintained.

Social media (eg Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn)

Good for	Consider
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • finding or creating networks with niche specialisation or interests • building a profile • directing to other communications • brief, real-time updates • maintaining relationships • exchange of information/ learning • place for like-minded to interact • reaching early adopters. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content: who will post and regularly update/ respond? Need to allow time to react/respond to others' posts to build relationships. • How you can use this to cross-promote other communications (such as an online blog or journal article).

Media coverage (professional and consumer media)

Good for	Consider
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • credibility (a third-party endorsement) and reputation • internal morale • improving awareness among public/lay audiences • influencing debates and agendas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time and skills required: need to be able to respond to any interest in very short timeframes; less ability to 'control' the message. • Plan any media activity with the knowledge of your institute's media office and consider which kind of media (professional/consumer) is right for your audience and message.

Websites (and/or intranet sites)

Good for	Consider
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • credibility • demonstrating full range of work • attracting new audiences • information exchange • accessibility. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time and cost resource for initial and ongoing development: ability to keep up to date; analytics for evaluating use/impact. • Creating a web page hosted on the website of the sponsor organisation/partners.

Blogs

Good for	Consider
<ul style="list-style-type: none">demonstrating expertise, learning and knowledge transfercontent for social mediacan boost traffic to websiteplace for like-minded to interact.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Content: a catchy title; a subject your audience cares about; a central point, argument or call to action.Promoting the blog through social media channels.

Email

Good for	Consider
<ul style="list-style-type: none">low-cost, regular updatesdriving traffic to website or blog.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Writing style and visuals: emails are easy to delete.Ensure that content and look is audience-focused and stands out from the crowd.

Online networks

Good for	Consider
<ul style="list-style-type: none">facilitating information exchangebuilding a community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Cloud-based and ListServ technology make this possible and affordable.Easy to set up groups through social media (eg LinkedIn), but they need to be actively maintained.

Launch events

Good for	Consider
<ul style="list-style-type: none">internal moralestakeholder awarenesscan provide a hook for media coverage.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Time and cost resource: do target audiences have sufficient time and/or motivation to attend?Timing and location: make it easy and/or appealing to attend.Media coverage: do you have something genuinely newsworthy?

Webinars

Good for	Consider
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• exchange of complex information or learning• maintaining relationships• project management among dispersed teams.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Scheduling: think of a time likely to be convenient to most participants.• Promoting: make sure people know about it and remind them.• Organising: give it some leadership and structure; ensure the content is engaging.

Film and animations

Good for	Consider
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• creating an emotional connection with a cause• telling stories that can illustrate complex issues• engaging people who don't tend to read anything• longevity – post online on YouTube or Vimeo (can be used in different settings – eg insert in presentations, play on screen in waiting areas).	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Resource and budgets: how will you promote, distribute or make it available to ensure return on investment?• Length: online films should be as short as possible (1–3 minutes as a general rule).

Here are some digital and online multimedia tools and channels to consider using in your communications.

Videos

Uses, benefits and considerations
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Good for showing at meetings and events, and provides a legacy for the study.• Brings life to ideas and concepts and, if done well, is an engaging way of telling a story and sharing the perspective of staff or patients.• Increasingly produced by amateurs. If involving a film production company allow at least £1,500 per 'talking head', and at least £4,000 if filming on location (eg in a hospital).• People are increasingly used to watching video online, especially with the rise of mobile and tablet use. Upload films to YouTube, which increases visibility of content in Google searches.

Audio slideshows

Uses, benefits and considerations

- Quick-win content, especially if a presentation has already been prepared for offline use (at a conference).
- Cheap to produce (around £300) and fairly quick to turn around.
- Can help to explain and illustrate ideas at the same time (through voice and visuals).
- Slideshows can also be uploaded to [Slideshare](#) (open source software), which increases visibility of content.

Audio clips

Uses, benefits and considerations

- Cheap to produce (around £300) and quick to turnaround.
- Shouldn't be too long (maximum 5 minutes) unless it's very engaging.
- You can create free audio clips using the [Audioboom app](#).

Animations

Uses, benefits and considerations

- Can be creative with visuals to convey complex ideas, especially when you're referring to and interpreting lots of figures.
- Expensive and resource-intensive to produce. Expect to pay £7,000 and upwards.

Infographics

Uses, benefits and considerations

- Visual way of communicating data rather than using a simple chart or written copy – great for illustrating what data means, quickly.
- Can be flat infographics that are available as sets to download and use, or interactive.
- Good for sharing on social media, especially Facebook where image-led updates get the highest levels of engagement.
- Costs would be around £300 for non-interactive, but increase significantly for interactive versions.

Prezi

Uses, benefits and considerations

- Low-cost tool for creating interactive presentations.
- Good for presenting content that is detailed and joins up in various ways – plays in a linear way but you can explore slides however you like.
- Can simply be a more engaging tool with which to present compared to PowerPoint.
- Can embed videos, links, etc, which you can't do in an audio slideshow.