

Nina Pope and Karen Guthrie

## Private Reveries, Public Spaces: Nina Pope and Karen Guthrie

Brief description of the project:

We propose to develop a project around current Central Office of Information (COI) campaigns looking at ways in which both the content and delivery medium could be changed to break down their traditional role as 'one to many', information providers.

Proposal:

Our proposal has developed out of an ongoing interest in the changing nature of broadcast media and the way that different technical innovations are contributing to changes in content as well as the delivery of media. Many of our past projects have used different types of 'broadcast' media, from email to performance and webcasting to deliver projects which have had both a highly focussed local, content, site and audience as well as a much broader context and audience. During the R&D period for our current project TV swansong we became interested in the work of the public sector Central Office of Information (COI) and this proposal has developed out of ideas that emerged whilst looking at a range of their past and current campaigns. As an organisation COI in many ways seems to epitomise the 'old' model of top-down, 'one to many', information delivery to the masses. The nature of their campaigns has to some extent already changed from their initially cautionary and to a large extent 'preventative', messages (such as the Green Cross Code, Clunk Click every trip, don't play near fire/water etc.). More recent campaigns have included encouraging people to vote in the London Mayoral elections or to take up Family Credit benefits, and these obviously reflect or more 'socially engaged', model of information albeit delivered via fairly traditional means. They have done some web campaigns recently but on the whole they retain a print-based educational campaigning approach and a role as the 'do good', side of government in public perception.

We'd like to propose a mixed approach to both the type of information they might deliver (or be seen to be associated with) and the technology that 'viewers', would use to receive this. If we first of all consider the type of information they may deliver, be associated with or in fact trigger, would it be possible to reverse their current status of a 'one to many', communications organisation?

Could an experimental campaign be delivered whereby information and advice derived from the public (i.e. common sense / old wives tales / tips) is disseminated alongside their more traditional information? Could the line, of information available range from a government, or hierarchical source right through to anecdotal information or accounts from individuals that could perhaps express as effectively information about a situation? To give a simple example of this a recent COI project has been to distribute information about Foot and Mouth effectively - messages regarding the closure of public footpaths etc. could have come from the government or at the other extreme a farmer whose field you may be about to cross.

The second area we'd like to look at is the technology or platform through which the 'viewer', receives this information. Currently most COI messages reach the viewer passively through a public delivery channel such as TV ads. or poster campaigns. The feel of these campaigns could be dynamically shifted if they arrived via a more personal space such as your email inbox or mobile phone. This could of course seem either spooky, or effectively intrusive if messages target individuals in a way that precludes an elective choice as to whether to receive information; or arguably more effective if individuals have in fact signed up, somehow for specific information.

To go back to the Foot and Mouth information example: if, as you approach a closed footpath, you receive an SMS on your phone alerting you to the crisis, you may well decide to turn back. If you as cross the gate 'past' this message and a paper sign, you then receive a message from the farmer whose field you are crossing, you are unlikely to stroll comfortably on through his flock! Conversely as a member of the public watching a TV campaign about the crisis you are unlikely to visit a website or want to receive email updates about it. However as the farmer who wants to SMS visitors to his farm with factual information you may well elect to receive information available via a much more personal platform. In this instance the COI 'blanket', facts may in fact be just a trigger into a much deeper pool of information or anecdotes derived from diverse sources.

We've given these examples simply as a way into thinking about how COI could form the basis for a project. Their past catalogue of campaigns already form a picture of the changing nature of public media space - what we are suggesting is that this could be broken down further to both penetrate previously private spaces and include private reveries as well as public messages in their content.