RESEARCH MEDIA

MAKING RESEARCH RESONATE

How to market your research
HOW TO MARKET YOUR RESEARCH:
Getting in front of the crowd

Here at Research Media, we firmly believe that maximum impact can only be achieved through confident promotion. Yet we still see a reluctance within the research community to employ marketing techniques in order to gain exposure. We seek to design new dialogue in research communication and open the doors to broad engagement and accessibility. In this whitepaper we will explore the untapped opportunities that marketing can provide.

WHY DO WE FEEL SO PASSIONATELY ABOUT PROMOTION?
Well, the need to promote your research is not something we have dreamt up overnight. There are real market factors now driving the need to reach beyond the academy. A primary focus of the REF in the UK in 2014, for example, was to expand the dissemination of knowledge. This can only be achieved by exploring new avenues and seeking alternative and innovative routes to broader understanding. Strategic communication and dissemination also play a major part in securing funding. It is stipulated that this should be targeted, creative and with clear objectives, and we seek to help you determine what that might look like.
To get into the right headspace, we’d like to start by asking you to consider the purchase of a new car. This might seem a little off kilter, but stick with us. You’ve got an idea of the make and model that you would like but you don’t know much else about it. Where would you go to find out more?

In a recent survey, Car Keys revealed that 97% of buyers research their next car online before making a purchase. This includes searching for reviews; comparing prices or optional extras; reading social media commentary; exploring nearby dealers; determining whether the make and the model are right for you; seeking alternatives; the list is endless. But what would happen if the make and model had absolutely no online presence and no marketing activity behind it? What would you do then?

You could try to find a dealer using a printed directory perhaps, then try to catch them on the phone. You could go out and buy a car trade publication. Or you might happen to stumble across a showroom, but all these have enormous knock-on effects on time, cost and knowledge before you make a commitment.

But how does this relate to research?

PERSONAL = PROFESSIONAL

In this, the digital age, we are more than used to seeking out information online and driving decisions based on our own proactive investigations. So, if in our day-to-day lives we are used to turning to the internet for the answers, surely the same should apply in our working environment.

It has been reported by Lokman I. Meho that 90% of papers are not cited and 50% are not read. Biswas and Kircherr stated that on average, a peer-reviewed paper is read by only 10 people. While Rubriq claimed that 15 million hours are spent on unpublished research every year.

While this might be a worrying read, we hope that it serves as a call to action to recognise the huge opportunity for creative outputs and marketing activity that leads to broader engagement. So, let’s go on a journey through some simple marketing techniques and channels that will help to take your research to the targeted masses.
Digital marketing offers a wealth of opportunity for reaching out to an audience and provides the added value of being able to target specific groups. To go back to the ‘new car’ analogy for a second, you wouldn’t, for example, market a Ferrari to pre-teens. You need to know your target audience and approach them in the right way, at the right time and via the right channels.

An understanding of your audience’s behaviours, challenges, fears, dreams and ambitions can help determine how best to approach them. So how do you go about building a persona for your target audience, enabling an understanding and helping to identify the right paths for communication?

The best place to start is to ask questions such as:

- Who are they?
- Do they have an online presence?
- Do they use social media?
- If so, which platforms?
- What do they read and how do they digest information?
- What actions are you trying to invoke in them?
- What language do they speak?
- Are they more likely to understand specialist or layman’s terms?

Once you have an outline of who you are targeting and your goals, you can start to identify the most suitable channels and communicate across them.

Before we get into industry-specific communities and sites, the noise across digital platforms is huge. Even for a large organisation with a dedicated Marketing team, it’s impossible to be ‘omni-channel’. Instead, the focus should be on a unified ‘multi-channel’ approach with the right channels being the most crucial part.

Within the Marketing sector, you often hear of the need to ‘cut through the noise’ and an understanding of your target audience will help you achieve this. You should therefore take the time to identify which of these platforms are relevant and how you can use them to maximise reach and impact.

So, you’ve got a clear picture of your target audience and have identified a handful of suitable communication channels. Now what?
Content is only as valuable as what you’re able to do with it, which is where marketing come in. Marketing offers a wealth of opportunities and channels to ensure that the content you create reaches those you are trying to target. By telling the what, how and why of your research, you begin to craft an engaging story that leaves a lasting impression.

Those directly involved are best placed to be the storytellers. If you’ve heard a story second-, third-, or maybe even fourth-hand, details change and information becomes skewed. The closer the storyteller to the story, the more reliable their telling of it is likely to be.

Storytelling fosters learning and understanding. It encourages the reader or listener to become absorbed and involved rather than assuming the obvious. By contextualising the research, highlighting the impacts, applications and next steps, you begin to build a vivid picture that promotes accessibility. Exploring the what, how and why in a language your audience understands will broaden engagement.

It goes without saying that the story of your research will be told through traditional routes of scholarly communication, but there are a range of complementary channels that could be employed to broaden the reach, drive engagement and achieve impact.

Academic language can be a barrier when targeting a non-specialist audience, so how can you ensure that your research project reaches key stakeholders without alienating them?

A great place to start is looking at the enormous opportunity that creative design offers. No matter what the industry area or niche focus, images play a crucial part in – and are vital to – online success.

- Tweets that include images receive 150% more retweets than those without
- Online articles that include images are read 94% more than those without
- Video and images drive 13% more traffic than traditional content
- 40% of people will respond better to visual information than plain text

So let’s explore some highly visual options for research outputs that go beyond traditional routes.

TELL YOUR STORY
A visual lay summary can act as the perfect complement to a journal article, providing an accessible, abridged version that engages a broad audience of stakeholders.

Through an innovative new pilot service launched in partnership with Kudos, we at Research Media have successfully made use of this opportunity. Aimed at helping the research community extend the visibility and impact of published articles, we work with Kudos’ publisher partners to create visually compelling professional lay summaries.

By summarising the key points – and highlighting the achievements of a particular study – we can enhance the immediacy and broaden the appeal of a researcher’s endeavours. Extending the visibility of a published article naturally makes it more impactful. And the results speak for themselves – as the first publisher to employ this service, Emerald Publishing reports a 20% increase in article downloads.
The immediacy and accessibility of video content can also prove invaluable when it comes to scholarly communications. A short video can distil the key elements of a research project, thereby aiding discoverability beyond an academic audience. Think about it. Throughout the course of a busy working day, what would you be more inclined to do – read a journal paper for a number of hours, or watch a video that encapsulates the key points in a matter of minutes? And which would be more likely to inspire and influence a non-specialist audience?

MOVING PICTURES

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STATISTICALLY STUNNING

It is often said that people remember visuals six times more than text and that 65% of us are visual learners. We therefore need to ensure that any communication holds the audience’s attention from a visual perspective, and thus remains memorable.

Infographics serve as an attractive alternative to traditional methods of sharing statistics or describing a process. Through clever use of striking graphics, the viewer is drawn into the design and given information that sticks.

GETTING SOCIAL

Social media can boost your profile as a thought leader. It can help you build your network and keep up with trends. It provides an enormous opportunity to surface your research and spark debate, while also providing a quick and easy channel to clarify any misinformation. And, of course, with tools such as Altmetric, those points of engagement can be tracked and acted upon.

In a 2014 report ‘What does Whitehall want from academics?’, Talbot and Talbot found that academic research was accessed through social media 27% of the time – the same percentage as accessed through academic submissions to Parliament.

Times are changing, and they’re changing fast!

It can seem a daunting task to condense a complex paper into a couple of lines on social media but it needn’t be. Drawing out key points for conversation, asking questions, or even joining conversations already underway all serve to build awareness. It’s as much about building a profile for yourself as it is for your work. Simple solutions can often drive significant change.
PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

To wrap up, we’d like to leave you with five key takeaways you can immediately put into practice:

1. **HUMAN = HUMAN WHETHER PERSONAL OR PROFESSIONAL**
   There is rarely a distinction in the routes taken to find information and learn. In this digital age, we need to acknowledge that the way we operate in our personal lives is often mirrored in our professional lives. Information, no matter what form it might take, should be accessible and easy to find.

2. **FIND THE RIGHT TOOLS FOR THE JOB**
   With so many platforms, channels and outputs on offer, always ensure that whatever content you are creating, or action you are taking, adds value to your overall goal.

3. **ALWAYS KEEP YOUR TARGET IN MIND**
   Ensure you have identified who you are trying to reach and why. Take the time to get to know them and understand their behaviours before determining your plan of action.

4. **BUILD A COMMUNITY**
   In both the real and the digital world! Social media can serve as a powerful tool for building your profile and that of your work. Join conversations, demonstrate your expertise and ask questions.

5. **TELL YOUR STORY**
   Everyone has a story to tell. The projects you are working on are exciting, fascinating, challenging and rewarding – and you and your collaborators are the protagonists.

   *Tell your story and make it great – the world wants to hear!*

For further information on how Research Media could help you tell the story of your research through bespoke, personal and creative outputs contact:

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